

THTR 474 Intro to Standup Comedy

Spring 2021—Wednesdays (63173)—2pm to 4:50pm

Location: ONLINE

Units: 2

Instructor: Judith Shelton

Office: Online via Zoom

Office Hours: By appointment, Wednesdays-Fridays only

Contact Info: You may contact me Tuesday-Friday, 9am-5pm

Slack preferred or email judiths@usc.edu

On Fridays, in an emergency only, text 626.390.3678

Course Description and Overview

This course will offer a specific look at the art of Standup Comedy and serve as a laboratory for creating original standup material: jokes, bits, chunks, sets, while discovering your truth and your voice. Students will practice bringing themselves to the stage with complete abandon and unashamed commitment to their own, unique sense of humor. We will explore the “rules” that facilitate a healthy standup dynamic and delight in the human connection through comedy. Students will draw on anything and everything to prepare and perform a three to four minute set in front of a worldwide Zoom audience.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Implement the comic’s tools: notebook, mic, stand, “the light”, and recording device
- List the elements of a joke and numerous joke styles
- Execute the stages of standup: write, “get up”, record, evaluate, re-write, get back up
- Identify style, structure, point of view, and persona in the work we admire
- Demonstrate their own point of view and comedy persona (or character)
- Differentiate audience feedback (including heckling) using sight and sound
- Use improvisation, crowd work, and editing as needed
- Demonstrate being an active listener, offering “pitches” and support
- Participate in constant, constructive evaluation of their work
- Create a three to four minute standup act

Required Reading

I Can’t Make This Up: Life Lessons by Kevin Hart (Audiobook encouraged)

Born Standing Up: A Comic’s Life by Steve Martin (Audiobook encouraged)

The Comedians: Drunks, Thieves, Scoundrels and the History of American Comedy by Kliph Nesteroff (Audiobook available)

Recommended Reading

Dear Girls: Intimate Tales, Untold Secrets & Advice for Living Your Best life by Ali Wong (Audiobook encouraged)

Daily Rituals: How Artists Work by Mason Currey

Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy by Judd Apatow

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Crying by Carol Leifer

Funny on Purpose: The Definitive Guide to an Unpredictable Career in Comedy: Standup + Improv + Sketch + TV + Writing + Directing + YouTube By Joe Randazzo

Recommended Preparation

STAY HEALTHY. Come to each class, prepared. Be on time. Turn your camera on.

Ideally, find a small space where you feel free to express yourself and play.

Come willing to take risks, be silly, honest, inquisitive, and supportive.

Except for water, no food or drinks are allowed during Zoom class at any time.

Absolutely no distractions. No social media, visiting with roommates, family members, or side chats with classmates while in class, especially when a comic is “on stage”.

We will take a 10-minute break midway through the class so you can eat, chat, etc.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment:

Grades are not dictated by the success of comedy presentations or the instructor’s subjective opinion of talent or sense of humor.

Grades are dictated by:

Points. Each aspect of class has a point value: participation, in-class exercises and assignments, Midterm, Show, and Final. I provide options to make up 15 points total per semester. More details listed under “Make-Up Options”.

Be advised: auditing students observe but do not participate.

Participation (14% of total grade):

- In-class active student analysis of presented materials such as text and video clips
- Constructive feedback on classmates’ comedy presentations
- Willingness to experiment and apply the constructive feedback of instructor and other students to one’s own work
- If a student is late or leaves early, they will lose their participation point for that day

Exercises and Assignments (46% of total grade):

- Due to the live performance aspect of standup comedy, exercises and homework assignments will be presented in class, no video submissions accepted
- If you cannot commit to being in this class, on time, please wait for another semester
- Student invests fully, striving to make a connection with the crowd and improve over time
- If a student misses an exercise or assignment, student accepts that they have missed their opportunity to perform (stage time) and will lose points which will impact their grade

Midterm (15% of total grade):

- The Midterm presentation is worth 15 points, presented in class w/no paper component
- No video submission of presentation accepted, except example video requirement
- If you miss the Midterm, you lose 15 points, which will greatly impact your grade
- The policy for tardiness/leaving early (pg. 4) applies to the Midterm, as well
- No phones or papers, but you may hold 3x5 or 5x7 index cards

Show (15% of total grade):

- You must perform in the Zoom Show, it is worth 15 points
- You may sub into another class’ show, provided there is room in that show
- You may choose to do less time, but let’s talk about it before you decide

Final (10% of total grade):

- The Final is a paper worth 10 points, due at the beginning of the 2-hour Final period, and must be at least 500 words
- The Final will be submitted electronically, via Blackboard
- Tech problems happen during Finals week, please plan ahead. No late papers accepted
- Not handing in a paper will result in a loss of 10 points, which will impact your grade

Make-up options:

- If you miss an in-class exercise or assignment, you may make up 15 points, total, by Thursday, May 29th at 11:59pm. No submissions accepted after this day and time.
- You may make up **8 points** by doing a **non-USC** open mic or booked show.
- You may make up **6 points** by doing a **USC** open mic or booked show.
- You must send a Zoom screengrab and a clip of your set.
- You must post both items AND a paragraph (at least 5 sentences) on the experience to the entire class, and me, via the specific discussion board on Blackboard.
- Technical/posting issues will result in a loss of points, leave time to figure it out.
- You may make up **2 points** by switching sections, if there is room available that day.
- You may make up **3 points** by watching a live stand up show and sending a picture and paragraph (at least 5 sentences) to the entire class via the Blackboard discussion board.
- Make-up points cannot take you over 100 points, 100 points is the maximum
- Make-up points do not count toward the Show, you must do the show

Exercises and Assignments	Points	% of Grade
Week 1, in-class improvised exercise	1	1
Week 2, in-class improvised exercise	1	1
Week 3, in-class write/get up exercise	2	2
Week 4, 1 st assignment: Joke Styles	6	6
Week 5, 2 nd assignment: 10 Jokes	10	10
Week 6, 3 rd assignment: First Set	5	5
MIDTERM Presentation: Critical Analysis, Established Comedian	15	15
Week 8, in-class exercise, Crowd Work	4	4
Week 9, 4 th assignment: Second Set	6	6
Week 10, in-class exercise, Heckling	4	4
Week 11, 5 th assignment, Clean Set	7	7
Week 12, 6 th assignment: Polished Set, 1 st Show Rehearsal	7	7
Week 13, 7 th assignment: Final Set, 2 nd Show Rehearsal	7	7
Week 14, SHOW	15	15
FINAL: Paper Due: Critical Analysis, Self	10	10
Total	100	100

Grading Scale:

Excellent: A (4) = 100-96; A- (3.7) = 95-90

Good: B+ (3.3) = 89-86; B (3) = 85-84; B- (2.7) = 83-80

Average: C+ (2.3) = 79-76; C (2) = 75-74; C- (1.7) = 73-70

Poor: D (.7-1.3) = 60's

Fail: F (0) = 59 and below

Further Grading Notes:

- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a "W", April 9th. I will discuss your work at any time.
- Auditing students attend class strictly as an observer and will not participate.

Assignment Submission Policy

This is a live performance class, no video submissions of presentations or exercises.

ATTENDANCE

Absences:

Developing stand up material and style depends on consistent writing (usually as homework) and “getting up” (performing in class). Each class helps you build and refine material over time. **Be advised: if you miss a class, points awarded that day for performing your stand up material in class and being an active, supportive audience member will be lost.** I provide make-up options should you need to miss a class, or two. But things happen, save missing class for emergencies.

Tardiness/leaving early:

Everyone gets up each class. Names are picked “lottery” style. When you are late or leave early it is unprofessional, disruptive, and unsupportive. Committing to this class means being here from 2pm to 4:50pm. **If you arrive after 2:05pm you will lose your participation point for the day.** Students arriving late are put at the end of the lottery and may not get up, depending on time. I take the late people last, in the order they arrived. Students choosing to leave early lose their participation point and risk not getting picked before they have to leave. If you do not get up before you leave, you lose all the points for the day. I do, however, try my best to get you all up. I realize things happen and will try to make time for you. Be mindful of days that have more points. I end class at 4:40pm to give homework. Everyone who comes to class on time and stays the duration will get up. Anyone who is late/leaving early may or may not get up, depending on time and running order. If you are not in class for the homework refer to this syllabus or contact another student before contacting me. Make the choice to be in class on time, and stay.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Text in **bold** indicates **assignment requiring preparation**.

(This timeline is subject to change depending on the dynamics, pace and unpredictability of the creative process of any given class. Being in class ensures you are aware of any changes.)

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings and Homework	Deliverable/ Due Dates
Week 1	Warm-up, introductions, discussion of syllabus (our contract) Introduction to the tools of our trade: Video A guide to the writing phases: Write, “get up”, record, evaluate, rewrite, get back up In-class improvised exercise and stage time	<i>Begin reading/listening to: Born Standing Up or I Can’t Make This Up</i>	Re-write your jokes and compile them to build your show set.
Week 2	Pain in Standup: Comedy as sword, shield or balm Class conversation and clips In-class improvised exercise and stage time How to write for stand up	<i>Continue reading: Born Standing Up or I Can’t Make This Up</i>	Re-write your jokes and compile them to build your show set.
Week 3	Anger in Standup: Bend it, don’t break it Class conversation and clips In-class writing exercise and stage time	<i>Homework: Research assigned joke style</i>	Due week 4 Feb. 10, 2021

Week 4	First assignment* - Joke Styles Present assigned joke style given in class 3 minutes, max. I will give specifics in class	Homework: <i>Deliver 10 original jokes, in any joke style</i>	Due week 5 Feb. 17, 2021
Week 5	Second assignment* - 10 Jokes Students perform 10 original jokes, any style 3 minutes, max.	Homework: <i>Work on first set</i>	Due week 6 Feb. 24, 2021
Week 6	Third assignment* - First Set Students bring in 2 minutes max, of best "bits" from weeks 1-5, creating a "set" Point of View and Stage Persona Clips and discussion on the use of rhythm, timing, wit, physicality and themes	Homework: <i>Receive comic and prepare Midterm presentation</i>	MIDTERM week 7 Mar. 3, 2021
Week 7 MIDTERM	MIDTERM* Presentation Critical Analysis of Established Comic No phones, papers allowed "on stage" during presentation, 3x5 or 5x7 notecards OK Presentation of assigned comedian, analyzing and critiquing their material, influences, POV, persona, work habits, career, legacy, etc.	Homework: <i>study examples of crowd work for discussion</i>	Discussion and exercise week 8 Mar. 10, 2021
Week 8	Performance technique: Crowd Work and Improvising Survival skills that lead to confidence and flexibility In-class discussion, exercise and stage time	Homework: <i>work on 2nd set 2-3 minutes</i>	Due week 9 Mar. 17, 2021
Week 9	Fourth assignment* - Second Set Students present second set, 2-3 minutes May include new material Assessment of each student's POV and stage persona	Homework: <i>study examples of heckling for discussion</i>	Discussion and exercise week 10 Mar. 24, 2021
Week 10	Performance technique: Heckling Survival skills that lead to confidence and flexibility In-class discussion, exercise and stage time	Homework: <i>Research – What the heck is clean comedy, then rewrite an existing set as a clean set.</i>	Due week 11 Mar. 31, 2021
Week 11	Fifth assignment* - Clean Set Students take their existing material and make it "TV Clean". Doing clean comedy takes skill and commitment. If you want to do comedy on television, you must have a clean set. Many live shows and benefits require clean comedy. Many of our heroes were clean comics. Strive for greatness!	Homework: <i>Work on 3-minute polished set for rehearsal during class time</i>	Due week 12 April 14, 2021

Week 12	Sixth assignment* “Polished” Set, First Rehearsal with Hosts Students debut their first attempt at a 3-minute polished comedy set Must choose from material presented in classes 1-10 Receive student for “switch set”	Homework: <i>rewrite polished set for 3-minute final set rehearsal during class time</i>	Due week 13 April 21, 2021
Week 13	Seventh assignment* “Final” Set, Second Rehearsal with Hosts The act returns in an advanced, playful form, Emphasis on beginning and ending, handling “mistakes”, nerves, boredom, etc.	Homework: <i>rewrite 3-minute set for THE SHOW during class time</i>	Due week 14 April 28, 2021 (Make up work is due April 29 at 11:59 pm)
Week 14	THE SHOW* Plus, show notes and celebrations!	Homework: <i>Write Final paper, prepare student “switch up” to present at our Final</i>	Due by the beginning of your Final Period- Monday May 10, 2021 2-4pm
FINAL	Final* Critical Analysis, Self – Paper Due Written paper due, self-assessing the student’s overall progress through the class; including personal challenges, strengths, weaknesses, discoveries, and victories. 500 words minimum Submitted via Blackboard Plus, student switch up farewell exercise		YOU DID IT! YOU MADE IT! YOU LIVED THROUGH IT! CELEBRATE, RELAX, REST, ENJOY YOURSELF!

Class Show Dates

USC Stand Up Comedy Showcases are online via Zoom, during your class period on April 28th

You must be at one of the two rehearsals (class 12 and 13) to **participate** in the show

You must be at both rehearsals (class 12 and 13) to **host** the show

Rules for missing either class rehearsals still apply

You may sub into a different class show, provided there is room in that show

KEY DATES:

Friday, Jan. 15: Spring semester classes begin

Friday, Feb. 5: Last day to add this class or drop this class without a “W” and receive a refund

Friday, March 5: Last day to drop this class without a “W” on transcript

Last day to change “P/NP” to letter grade

Friday, April 9: Last day to drop this class with a mark of “W”

Friday, April 30: Spring semester classes end

Saturday – Monday, May 1-4: Study days

Wednesday – Wednesday, May 5-12: Final exams

Thursday, May 13: Spring semester ends

Friday, May 14: Commencement

PLEASE NOTE: Spring Wellness Days are: 3/12, 3/23, 4/7, 4/22, 4/30.

A Wellness Day is a day on which there will be no classes and no classwork expected of students. Students are encouraged to use this time to rest, exercise, and connect with friends and family.

Welcome to Introduction to Standup Comedy, dear students! It is my joy and privilege to get to know each of you through our collaborative and creative exploration and especially, your jokes. Let's do good work, endeavor to know ourselves better, risk a little, support each other, make lasting, sincere friendships, and laugh through it all!

Judith Shelton (Jude)

EXTRA-CURRICULAR COMMITMENTS AND ISPS

Should you choose to participate in any extra-curricular project, such as an Independent Student Production, the SDA administration and faculty will not make allowances or exceptions for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, home work that is required as preparation for class, or lack of participation in class resulting from your extra-curricular involvement.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Conduct:

Plagiarism – presenting someone else's ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, "Behavior Violating University Standards" policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/counseling

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline - 1 (800) 273-8255 – 24/7 on call
suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL), press "0" after hours – 24/7 on call
studenthealth.usc.edu/sexual-assault

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender-based harm.

Office of Equity and Diversity (OED) - (213) 740-5086 | Title IX – (213) 821-8298
equity.usc.edu, titleix.usc.edu

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

usc-advocate.symplicity.com/care_report

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office of Equity and Diversity | Title IX for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Disability Services and Programs - (213) 740-0776

dsp.usc.edu

Support and accommodations for students with disabilities. Services include assistance in providing readers/notetakers/interpreters, special accommodations for test taking needs, assistance with architectural barriers, assistive technology, and support for individual needs.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 821-4710

campussupport.usc.edu

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity at USC - (213) 740-2101

diversity.usc.edu

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-120 – 24/7 on call

dps.usc.edu

Non-emergency assistance or information.