

Course Description

*"Humor is laughing at what you haven't got
when you ought to have it."
—Langston Hughes*

*"The duty of comedy is to correct men
by amusing them."
— Molière*

In this experiential writing and performance workshop course, students will explore and develop their own comedic viewpoints through the medium of sketch — comedic explorations of concepts, characters and situations — through the entire process, from idea generation, to writing, revision, rehearsal, and finally production and performance of a fully realized live sketch comedy show, with an emphasis on creative collaboration and ensemble building.

Students will generate a high volume of comedic concepts and written material to serve their own creative exploration, and their own work ethic and writing practice. Students will also serve the needs of the group, and work toward building a true comedy ensemble — a mainstay of comedy success.

Although we will be working toward a final workshop presentation, this course is focused on process over product — you are not expected to be funny 100% of the time, or even 10% of the time. You are expected to be brave, be openminded, and stretch out of your comfort zone to explore and strengthen your own unique comedic voice.

*"When you laugh, it like massages all of your organs, and it's just like lighting you up
and I think it's so dope. Even if I don't want you to laugh and you laugh,
I'm like, 'Well, at least they laughing, I'm healing them!'" — Tiffany Haddish*

Learning Objectives

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

1. Apply successful ensemble/partnership techniques
2. Develop written and performed material with emphasis on personal comedic voice
3. Construct original specific characters
4. Identify sketch types, sketch formats, and comedy forms
5. Generate consistent/high volumes of creative material
6. Create every aspect of an original live sketch comedy show.

Course Notes

Classes must be attended live and in-person (medical status withstanding), due to the collaborative, experiential, and performative nature of comedy.

You are also expected to work, write and rehearse with your fellow sketch comedians outside of class.

Communication

Please email me at kqeggers@usc.edu any time with questions or concerns. Emails will generally be returned within 48 hours on weekdays. I can also meet with you via my Zoom personal meeting room, or at an on-campus location as schedules allow.

I also ask that the class as a whole have a communication group, platform of your choice, so you can easily get in touch with each other.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required

Blackboard will be updated regularly with announcements, readings, etc. Please check often. Blackboard help for students is at studentblackboardhelp.usc.edu.

In writing sketches at the “pitch” level (fully written sketches), a scriptwriting program is recommended for your ease, but it is not necessary. Final Draft is the industry standard, and available for purchase, but Celtx also does the job and is a free download (among many others). WriterDuet is also recommended for co-writing.

It is highly likely you will need to print sketches at times — please be prepared with printing capability.

*“When I first started doing sketch comedy, I promised myself
that if I were ever to have any success in this business, I wouldn’t hold back.
Why get there and play it safe?” — Will Ferrell*

Required Reading

Students may be given pdfs and/or links throughout the semester which they are expected to read and retain for discussion. All readings will be posted on Blackboard.

Required Viewing

You will watch and analyze existing produced sketches, and you are encouraged to watch as many as possible. Current/recent television sketch shows include *Saturday Night Live*, *A Black Lady Sketch Show*, *I Think You Should Leave with Tim Robinson*, *Astronomy Club*, *The Iliza Shlesinger Sketch Show*, *Baroness Von Sketch Show*, *Alternatino*, *Goatface*, *Netflix Presents: The Characters*, *Key & Peele*, *Inside Amy Schumer*, *Portlandia*, *Kroll Show*, etc. Historical sketch shows include *The Carol Burnett Show*, *Chappelle’s Show*, *The Kids In The Hall*, *Mr. Show*, *MADtv*, various Tracey Ullman, *In Living Color*, *Monty Python’s Flying Circus*, etc.

Supplemental Reading

- *Bossypants* by Tina Fey
- *Live from New York: An Uncensored History of SNL* by Shales & Miller
- *Why Not Me* by Mindy Kaling
- *Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy* by Judd Apatow
- *The Misadventures of Awkward Black Girl* by Issa Rae
- *Poking A Dead Frog* by Mike Sacks

Supplemental Viewing/Watching/Listening

- Attend a live sketch comedy show
- Listen to *The History of Sketch Comedy* podcast with Keegan Michael Key
- Watch internet-based sketches — sites include College Humor and Funny or Die, among others. Instagram and TikTok are also great sources of modern comedic character work.
- Comedy-centered podcasts such as *WTF with Marc Maron*, *2 Dope Queens*, *Comedy Bang Bang*, etc.

*“Wait, couldn’t it be possible that other people
find this just as funny as I do?”
— Bowen Yang*

Description and Assessment of Assignments

Below is a general overview of the assignments. A detailed assignment description will be posted on Blackboard with ample time for each assignment.

- Ensemble In-Class Activities — Class attendance and participation is crucial for your success in this class. In addition to in-person writing, improvising, and performing during class meetings, and group viewing, analyzing and studying of sketches, you will also serve as the actors and writers FOR your teammates, so your presence is vital. Essentially, we are building a comedy troupe and every member is key.
- Character Monologues — You will write, rehearse, and perform a one minute monologue of a family member you know VERY WELL. Think of their catchphrases, physical and vocal qualities, how they carry themselves — how they walk, sit, stand, move. Your monologue should be very specific. Challenge yourself to be heightened but truthful. You will also write, rehearse, and perform two 30-second bit monologues of strangers and/or famous people. Think of their catchphrases, physical and vocal qualities, how they carry themselves — how they walk, sit, stand, move. Challenge yourself to be heightened but truthful.
- Sketch Analysis — You will present two filmed sketches (existing material, usually from television) that speak to you in some way. You will tell us why (helping to identify comedic voice), as well as analyze the sketch type, and format breakdown. A write-up of your work will be due the day you present.
- Comedy Notebook — You will keep a Comedy Notebook (format of your choice) throughout the course. This will be your personal notebook in which you record observations and ideas, but will be reviewed periodically to confirm participation. Specific notebook assignments will be announced in class. You should have daily interaction with your notebook, and it should attend every class with you.
- Midterm Franchise Character Sketch Co-Write and Presentation— You will write a character-based sketch for and with a co-creator, and present it in a practice show or film festival. This may be pre-filmed. You may also be called upon to perform in others' sketches.
- Pitch Presence — Pitch implies the submission/presentation of fully written sketches as we work toward our workshop show, for notes and rewrites. The volume of pitched sketches will be graded on a curve, based on the total number of sketches created by the class. Consistent interaction with Pitch is necessary for your success in this class.
- Final Workshop Show — Wholehearted participation in the final workshop presentation, and corresponding rehearsals, is mandatory. The final workshop presentation is scheduled for Thursday, December 2. You must be present and participating from 6-10pm (at a minimum). The final tech/dress rehearsal will be Wednesday, December 1. You must be present and participating from 6-10pm (at a minimum).

These dates and times are locked with no exceptions. There will also be additional outside rehearsal, with some flexibility to individual schedules. You are also expected to take on additional production duties, such as tech coordination, music compilation, costuming and prop mastery, publicity, set-up and strike, etc. Specific production assignments will be determined later in the semester.

Grading Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade
Ensemble In-class Activities (presence, focus, attitude, willingness)	15
Character Monologues (Family, Stranger, Famous) — written and performed	10
Sketch Analysis Share	5
Comedy Notebook Completion (inc. ideas)	10

Midterm (Franchise character co-write and presentation)	15
Pitch Presence	25
Final Workshop Show (Professionalism, attitude, competence, readiness, involvement)	20
TOTAL	100

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

A = 95-100 pts B+ = 87-89 pts C+ = 77-79 pts D+ = 67-69 pts F = 59 or below
A- = 90-94 pts B = 83-86 pts C = 73-76 pts D = 63-66 pts
B- = 80-82 pts C- = 70-72 pts D- = 60-62 pts

Assignment Submission Policy

Written sketches or performance assignments do not need to be posted on Blackboard unless otherwise specified, but you must be ready to share the writing in class (if applicable).

Grades will generally be posted to Blackboard within a week. If you fail to complete an assignment, it will show on Blackboard Grade Center — I cannot follow up with you to ask about missing assignments.

Sharing of Course Materials Outside of the Learning Environment

USC policy prohibits sharing of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

SCampus Section 11.12(B): Distribution or use of notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study is a violation of the USC Student Conduct Code. This includes, but is not limited to, providing materials for distribution by services publishing class notes. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the Internet or via any other media. (See Section C.1 Class Notes Policy).

What happens in class, stays in class!

Learning Experience Evaluation

Learning Experience Evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. You should expect to receive an email update once the system has launched to provide your feedback on this course. In addition, you are always welcome to connect with with me as the instructor to offer any feedback on the course.

SDA Student Support & Reporting Form

To facilitate a supportive environment of accountability, SDA has created an internal system of reporting for students to address issues/concerns and to offer feedback or suggestions for improvement. This mechanism provides a pathway for reporting and offering feedback without fear of retaliation or judgment. Any submission filed through this form will be reviewed and processed accordingly through SDA Office of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion. To file a report, please visit: <https://bit.ly/SDAstudentreporting>

SDA Productions, ISPs, and Extra-Curricular Commitments

SDA productions, ISPs and extracurricular activities* do not excuse you from any class work. There will be no exceptions made for absences in class, missed or delayed assignments, homework or lack of class participation resulting from your involvement in any of the above. Your grade will reflect your work in this class, independent from work in any other class or activity.

**Activities that have been officially sanctioned by the larger university are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.*

Attendance

Being absent, late, or leaving early disturbs the important ensemble nature of this class. You will miss in-class activity points for any missed class (medical status withstanding), and miss out on writing pairings, and castings. Give yourself extra time to complete TrojanCheck to ensure an early arrival.

However, your health and the health of our community eclipses all! If your Covid-19 status precludes you from attending class in-person, I will attempt to conduct class as hybrid, and request you attend class LIVE (via Zoom) instead of watching a recording.

Classroom Norms

Devices — Cell phones and other electronic devices should be left on silent in your backpack/bag, away from your work in class. This is to encourage your focus, mindfulness, and respect to your peers. For in-class writing, you may use your laptop, although I encourage you to experiment with both typed and handwritten work.

Attire — Sketch comedy is physical and can get sweaty; dress accordingly. Your clothing and shoes should allow you to move freely and comfortably. Shoes should be closed-toed and stay on your feet — no flip-flops. If hair gets in your face, secure it back. Hats are generally discouraged.

Eating — Food and drink is not permitted during any class. Absolutely no gum.

Break — We may take a “mask break” outside at the halfway point of class, depending on the day’s flow. Other than that, please be prepared to stay in the room and actively participating. In the event of an emergency for which you must leave the room, observe theatre rules of being discrete and respectful to your fellow actors.

Strike — You are expected to restore the classroom to neutral at the end of each class.

Health and Participation in Class

Students must complete the Trojan Check screener daily and you may be asked to show your daily screening in class. The health and safety of everyone in class is the top priority. If you are experiencing any symptoms of COVID-19, or if you discover that you have been in close contact with others who have symptoms or who have tested positive, you must follow the instructions on Trojan Check. If you are feeling ill or if you have been exposed to someone with the virus, you must stay home to protect others. I will ensure that you can continue to participate in class remotely so that your education is not disrupted.

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, USC requires that face coverings (masks) be worn indoors including in classrooms. Face coverings must cover your nose and mouth and be worn throughout the class session. A mask with a valve is not considered an adequate face covering and should not be used. Eating or drinking during class is prohibited because of the risk posed by removing your mask for these activities. Failure to comply with these requirements will result in your being asked to leave the classroom immediately. Requests for accommodations related to the face covering and eating/drinking policies should be directed to the Office for Student Accessibility Services (<https://osas.usc.edu/>).

“To make comedy, maybe you just have to work hard and be funny.” — Tina Fey

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

Please note: due to the fluid and creative nature of this course, weekly structure will change to accommodate the needs of individuals and the ensemble. You will be informed of any changes as much as possible.

Classes may begin with warm-ups, depending on the nature of the day’s work.

	Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
1	Mon Aug 23	Welcome/introductions/ syllabus review. Intro to sketch via improv. Intro to Comedy Notebook. Discussion: comedy boundaries and modern comedy.		DUE WEDNESDAY: Write a 1 minute monologue of a family member you know VERY WELL. Think of how they walk, sit, stand, move, talk — specificity is key. Comedy Notebook Assignment.
	Wed Aug 25	Family monologues performed and explored.	Write and perform a 1 minute monologue of a family member you know VERY WELL.	DUE MONDAY: Observe two strangers or two famous people (or mix & match). Write a 30 second monologue playing each — what is happening to them that day? Be specific. The funny is in the details. Comedy Notebook Assignment.
2	Mon Aug 30	Stranger/famous monologues performed and explored.	Write and perform two 30 second monologues (bits) playing a stranger or famous person.	Comedy Notebook Assignment.
	Wed Sep 1	In-class writing/ improvising.		Begin to select two existing sketches that speak to you, for Sketch Share. Comedy Notebook Assignment.
3	Mon Sep 6	LABOR DAY — NO CLASS		
	Wed Sep 8	In-class monologue writing. Begin sketch types.		Comedy Notebook Assignment — sketch type ideas.
4	Mon Sep 13	In class writing/ improvising. Sketch types, cont'd.		Comedy Notebook Assignment — sketch type ideas.
	Wed Sept 15	EDI @ SDA: Professional Development/Mandatory EDI Training <i>As part of our EDI initiatives and call to action, workshops will be offered to faculty, staff, and students. More details will follow.</i> <i>All SDA classes will be cancelled to support involvement in this effort.</i>		
5	Mon Sep 20	In-class writing/ improvising. Sketch Structure.		Select and analyze two existing sketches that speak to you, to share in class. Turn in written analysis on Blackboard before class.
	Wed Sep 22	Sketch Analysis Share.	Sketch Analysis Share. (Share 2 sketches that speak to you, why they do, type, structure.) Written analysis turned in on Blackboard before class.	

	Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
6	Mon Sep 27	Sketch idea speed dating. Paired writing practice.	30+ sketch ideas, as expressed in Comedy Notebook.	Write a practice sketch! Paired. Franchise character ideas.
	Wed Sep 29	See sketch first drafts. Franchise characters writers' room. Begin supported co-writes for franchise characters.	Present first draft of practice sketches. Franchise character idea and presentation — favorite and a back-up.	First drafts of franchise character sketch/monologue co-writes (your own character AND head writer).
7	Mon Oct 4	Midterm character sketch PITCH.	Full written first drafts of franchise character sketch/ monologue co- write (your own character AND head writer).	Rewrite midterm sketches from notes.
	Wed Oct 6	Rehearse midterm character sketches.	Final draft of character sketches.	Rehearse midterm character sketches.
8	Mon Oct 11	MIDTERM Part 1: presentation of franchise character sketches, written/rehearsed outside of class. Notes.	DUE TODAY: Midterm "practice show" or "film festival." All sketches rehearsed and performed / shown (as scheduled).	Rehearse midterm character sketches.
	Wed Oct 13	MIDTERM Part 2: presentation of franchise character sketches, written/rehearsed outside of class. Notes.	DUE TODAY: Midterm "practice show" or "film festival." All sketches rehearsed and performed / shown (as scheduled).	Begin sketch writing for pitch!
9	Mon Oct 18	Midterm reflection. Review pitch formatting. Begin pitch.	Sketches written, copies printed and given to cast, presented for feedback/ rewriting.	Sketch writing for pitch!
9-12	Wed Oct 20 - Mon Nov 8	Pitch.	Sketches written, copies printed and given to cast, presented for feedback/ rewriting.	Sketch writing for pitch!
12	Wed Nov 10	Pitch/rewrite/rehearse for show. Assign auxiliary roles. Narrow down for show.		Rewrites as needed.
13-14	Mon Nov 15 - Mon Nov 22	Rewrite/rehearse for show.		Rewrites as needed.
14	Wed Nov 24	THANKSGIVING BREAK — NO CLASS		
15	Mon Nov 29	Rehearse for show. All tech final collection.		Prep for show.
	Tue Nov 30	Possible additional rehearsal.		

	Date	Topics/Daily Activities	Due Today	Homework
	Wed Dec 1	12pm REHEARSE 6pm TECH/DRESS REHEARSAL	All sketches off-book and rehearsed. All costumes/props secured and approved. All tech aspects ready.	Prep for show.
	Thu Dec 2	SHOW! 7:30pm (calltime TBA)	Show ready!	
Final	FRIDAY DECEMBER 10 — 11am-1pm	Post-mortem!		Happy Winter Break!

*"Comedy is here to bring joy to the world,
whether you want to hear the curse words or not."
— Kenan Thompson*

Statement on 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, <http://policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct>.

Statement for Students Needing Accessibility Services

Any student requesting academic accommodations based on a disability is required to register with Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) each semester. A letter of verification for approved accommodations can be obtained from OSAS. Please be sure the letter is delivered to your instructor as early in the semester as possible. OSAS is located in GFS 120 and is open 8:30 a.m.–5:00 p.m., Monday through Friday. Website for OSAS and contact information: (213) 740-0776 (Phone), (213) 814-4618 (Video Phone), (213) 740-8216 (FAX), osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Statement on Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency or if travel to campus is not feasible, USC executive leadership will announce an electronic way for instructors to teach students in their residence halls or homes using a combination of Blackboard, teleconferencing, and other technologies. See the university's site on Campus Safety and Emergency Preparedness, emergency.usc.edu.

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 & 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 equity.usc.edu
Title IX – 213-821-8298 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.

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 / Dept. of Public Safety

Emergency: 213-740-4321 – 24/7 on call
Non-emergency: 213-740-6000 – 24/7 on-call
dps.usc.edu, emergency.usc.edu
Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime.