

THTR 355-Acting in Sitcom
Term- Spring 2022

Tuesday/Thursday 12:00PM-1:50PM
Location: PED 208
Instructor: Steve Zuckerman
Office: TBD
Office Hours: By appointment
Tues Thurs 2:00-3:30
Contact Info: email: szuckerm@usc.edu
Cell: 818-448-3135

Couse Description

We will explore all aspects of the unique artform called the sitcom, or situation comedy. We will learn the history of the genre, from Attic comedy, through Big Time Vaudeville and how it was created in America and spread throughout the world. As a class we will see and comment on shows from *I LOVE LUCY* to *THE BIG BANG THEORY* and beyond. We will expose the class to the growth of the genre from its network origins to the myriad of new delivery systems that exist today and how this is a living history and how a modern actor must understand how an actor must prepare and perform on a very specific platform.

The class will lay out the entire sitcom experience from the standpoint of the actor, by using exercises specifically designed for this course. The exercises will include but not limited to: comic monologues, cold reading, table read, first run thru, network run thru, guest cast vs. series regular, physical comedy, holding for laughs, staging for camera, acting for camera. Some of these topics will be lectures and discussions. Participation in the discussions will be crucial. We will also prepare and present numerous scenes from actual shows.

Learning Objectives

The students will learn the skills necessary to be successful in this genre. Many of these skills apply to all acting venues but we will focus on how they differ. This will include text analysis and character development unique to sitcom. In all exercises we will concentrate on COMEDY. Basic acting talent is the ability say a writers' words as if they are your own. The addition of comic timing and delivery are not givens. We will explore how to recognize how a joke is set up and how to effectively pay the joke off.

The students will learn the very unique vocabulary of comedy and of performing on television. Not all comedy is a joke. There is involuntary humor, situational humor, practical jokes, slapstick, and anecdotes. All rely on precision and rhythm, physical actions and sometimes but not always punchlines.

Each actor will participate with a total (100%) commitment in contributing to class discussion, class exercises and constructive feedback concerning the performance of scenes and exercises.

Assigned scenes will be rehearsed “out of class” as well as worked on “in class”.

Finally, each student will learn to importance of collaboration with their fellow actors but also their relationship to the writers, directors and myriad of staff involved in television production.

They will be expected to contribute to the class as if they have been hired to be in a single episode or as a series regular. Lateness and absence without acceptable excuses will not be tolerated.

Recommended Preparation: A practical understanding of all that described in the course overview plus the development of professional work habits. Prerequisites: THTR 101, THTR3, THTR 252a an THTR 252

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

All material will be emailed as a pdf.

Supplementary materials can be found on internet resources.

Assignment Submission Policy: No late assignments, projects, papers, presentations, exams shall be accepted or graded.

No emailed papers accepted. All written assignments must e hard copies and turned in at the start of the class on the deadline day.

Written assignments may be turned in before the deadline.

Grading Guidelines

Grades are not dictated by the success of acting presentations, the instructor’s subjective opinion of talent, or artistic preference.

Grades are dictated by:

Active participation in the classroom regarding the breakdown and analysis of all texts.

A 100% commitment to willingly participate and cooperate with fellow students involving exercises, discussions of all class material and constructive feedback on scene work.

A commitment to rehearsing and availability to a scene partner both inside and outside the class.

Memorization of lines.

Meeting all assignment deadlines: reading, writing, and acting.

Grading Breakdown

Personal comic monologue.....	5points
Discussion/analysis of History of comedy and sitcoms.....	10points
Character Monologue.....	10points
Physical comedy exercise.....	5points
Midterm character monologues.....	10points
Discussion/analysis of Joke Presentations.....	10points
Presentation of assigned scenes/exercises.....	25points
Cumulative active class participation.....	15points
Final (TBD).....	10points
Total.....	100points

Grading Scale

Excellent: A(4) = 100-96; A- (3.7) = 95-90 (Clear understanding of class material coupled with original and creative insight)

Good: B+ (3.3) = 89-86; B (3) = 85-84; B- (2.7) = 83-80 (Class material has been understood clearly)

Average: C+ (2.3) = 79-76; C (2) = 75-74; C- (1.7) = 73-70 (Class material has been generally understood, but gaps in understanding remain)

Poor: D (.7-1.3) = 60"s (Identifiable gaps in understanding of class material)

Fail: F (0) = 59 and below (Gaps in completion of work coupled with poor understanding of class material)

Further grading notes:

*If the GPA falls between two grades, the final grade will be weight toward the positive end of the scale for students with excellent/good attendance and class participation and toward the negative end of the scale for those with average/poor attendance and participation.

*If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a grade of W. I will be happy to discuss your work at any time.

Additional policies:

Attendance is of primary importance in this class. The intellectual and emotional response to a writers' voice is only understood in an ensemble atmosphere which consists of cooperation and a focus of energy by the entire class regarding the material assigned in the classroom and for outside rehearsal. Points will be subtracted from the grade for tardiness and absence. In accordance with the university policy it will not be more than 15% of the grade.

* Except for water, no food or drinks are allowed in class at any time.

*All students must help with the setup and strike of every class.

*Students must place all extraneous belongings, (backpacks, sweaters, jackets, skateboards, laptops, cell phones, etc.) in the designated corner of the classroom at the start of class. **NO CELL PHONES DURING CLASS, NO ELECTRONIC DEVICES**

*Students must be in clothing appropriate to the character at the start of class or be in proper rehearsal clothes. **NO FLIP FLOPS!** Open toed sandals may be appropriate (consult the teacher).

COURSE WEEK TO WEEK BREAKDOWN:

(The timeline is subject to change depending on the dynamics, pace and unpredictability of the creative process of any given class)

Week 1 (1/11, 1/13) Reading and explanation of syllabus. Discuss course goals. Explanation of personal monologues. History of comedy. Discussion and analysis.
Homework: List of favorite sitcoms. Prepare personal monologues.

Week 2 (1/18,1/20) Presentation of personal monologues with constructive feedback. These are non-character monologues. Discussion of favorite sitcoms.

Week 3 (1/25,1/27) Watch a selective history of sitcoms. Discussion and analysis.
Homework: Prepare jokes to be presented.

Week 4 (2/1,2/3) Presentation of jokes with constructive feedback.

Week 5 (2/8,2/10) Watch selected examples of physical comedy on sitcoms. Discussion and analysis. Physical comedy workshop with noted stage fight and physical comedy expert.
Homework: prepare personal physical comedy moments.

Week 6 (2/15,2/17) Presentation of personal physical comedy moments.
Homework: Read selected sitcoms

Week 7 (2/22,2/24) Assign casts for table reads. Begin reading episodes.

Week 8 (3/1,3/3) Table reading continues with discussion and analysis.
Homework: prepare character monologues.

Week 9 (3/8,3/10) Presentation of Character sitcom monologues with constructive class feedback. Assign scene work.

Week 10 (3/No Class spring Break)
Homework: Prepare assigned scenes out of class.

Week 11 (3/22,3/24) Staging for TV. Casting discussion with professional actor manager.

Week 12 (3/29,3/31) Presentation of assigned scenes with constructive class feedback.
Homework: Rehearse assigned scenes out of class.

Week 13 (4/5,4/7) Presentation of assigned scenes with constructive class feedback.
Homework: Rehearse assigned scenes out of class.

Week 14 (4/12,4/14) Presentation of assigned scenes with constructive class feedback.
Homework: Read selected full episodes.

Week 15 (4/19,4/21) Video episodes and recap.

Classes end 4/29

Final exam-TBD

IMPOTANT DATES SPRING 2020

JANUARY 10-Spring semester classes begin

JANUARY 17-Martin Luther King Day, University holiday

FEBRUARY 21-Presidents Day, University holiday

April 29 -Spring semester ends

April 30-May 3-Study Days

MAY 4-11Exams

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 and 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. The university prohibits discrimination or harassment based on the following *protected characteristics*: race, color, national origin, ancestry, religion, sex, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, physical disability, medical condition, mental disability, marital status, pregnancy, veteran status, genetic information, and any other characteristic which may be specified in applicable laws and governmental regulations. The university

also prohibits sexual assault, non-consensual sexual contact, sexual misconduct, intimate partner violence, stalking, malicious dissuasion, retaliation, and violation of interim measures.

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 Support and Advocacy - (213) 821-4710

uscsa.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.

