

THTR 474 Intro to Standup Comedy
Spring 2024—Wednesdays (63173)—2 to 3:50pm
Location: MCC 106
Units: 2

Instructor: Judith Shelton (Jude)

Office: TBD or Virtual: <https://usc.zoom.us/my/judes.office>

Office Hours by appointment: Tuesday-Friday

Contact Info: You may contact me Tues. – Fri., 9am-5pm

Email preferred – judiths@usc.edu

I return emails on Tuesday – Friday, 9am-5pm

On class days, in an emergency only, text 626.390.3678

Course Description

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-and-a-half-minute set in front of a live campus 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)
- Use improvisation, crowd work, and editing as needed
- Differentiate audience feedback (including heckling) using sight and sound
- Demonstrate being an active listener, offering “pitches” and audience feedback
- Participate in constant, constructive evaluation of their own work
- Write and perform a three-and-a-half-minute standup act

Recommended 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 History of Stand-Up by Wayne Federman

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

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

Auditing Student Policy

Auditing students attend class strictly as an observer and will not participate.

Recommended Preparation

STAY HEALTHY: take care in high-risk situations and wash your hands.

Come to each class: on time and prepared to get on stage.

Come willing: to take risks, be honest yet playful, inquisitive, and supportive.

We do not officially take a break during class, but you may use the restroom when you need to.

Course Notes on Attendance

This is a performance class, all “the good stuff” happens in class. Missing class means missing points for the in-class exercises and discussions, which will impact your grade. Also, being late or leaving early will cost you a participation point. You may make up 15 points if the need to miss class completely/arrive late/leave early arises. Use those missed classes wisely, a variety of things could come up. Fifteen points is all I offer, so make the effort to stay healthy and be present in class. If you are not in class to perform, you will need to make up those missed points.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment:

Grades are not dictated by the success of comedy presentations or the instructor’s subjective opinion of talent, intellect, 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”.

Participation (15% of total grade):

- In-class active 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 (47% 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 at any time
- 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 (16% of total grade):

- The Midterm presentation is worth 16 points, presented in class w/no paper component
- You may use PowerPoint, but it is not required
- What *is* required is showing a photo and clip of your comic during the presentation
- If you miss the Midterm, you lose 16 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 use PowerPoint or hold 3x5 or 5x7 index cards

Show (15% of total grade):

- You must perform in the Show, it is worth 15 points
- Performers know that making their health a priority is part of the job
- Please use extra caution to keep yourself healthy during show week
- You may choose to do less time, but let’s talk about it before you decide
- If you do not perform in the show, you will lose 15 points

Final (7% of total grade):

- The Final will be submitted electronically, via Blackboard discussion board.
- The Final is a paper worth 7 points and must be at least 500 words. I will check the count.
- The Final must be posted by the end of the 2-hour Final period, no emailed papers.
- Tech problems happen during Finals week, please submit early. No late papers accepted.
- Not posting a paper on time will result in a loss of 7 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 Friday, April 26th, at 11:59pm. Blackboard submissions close at 11:59pm.
- 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 clip of your set. (A photo + audio clip will also work)
- You must post the clip 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 standup show, or a streaming comedy special and post a paragraph (at least 7 sentences) to the Blackboard discussion board.
- Make-up points do not count toward the Show, or Final. 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 (Pain) | 1 | 1 |
| Week 3, in-class write/get up exercise (Anger) | 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 | 4 | 4 |
| MIDTERM Presentation: Critical Analysis, Established Comedian | 16 | 16 |
| Week 8, in-class exercise, Crowd Work | 4 | 4 |
| Week 9, 4 th assignment: Second Set | 5 | 5 |
| Week 10, in-class exercise, Heckling | 4 | 4 |
| Week 11, 5 th assignment: Clean Set | 4 | 4 |
| Week 12, 6 th assignment: Loose Jokes, New Jokes, Tags, and Toppers | 5 | 5 |
| Week 13, 7 th assignment: Final Set-Draft, 1 st Show Rehearsal | 8 | 8 |
| Week 14, 8 th assignment: Final Set-Polished, 2 nd Show Rehearsal | 8 | 8 |
| Week 15, SHOW WEEK | 15 | 15 |
| FINAL: Paper Due: Critical Analysis, Self | 7 | 7 |
| 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:

- Students joining the class late must make up all the missed week's points.
- If your work in class is unsatisfactory, you will be warned before the deadline for dropping the course with a "W", April 5th. I will discuss your work at any time.
- Auditing students attend class strictly as an observer and do not participate.

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Assignment Submission Policy

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

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).

Course evaluation

Course 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 me as the instructor to offer any feedback on the course.

ATTENDANCE

Absences:

Developing standup 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 standup 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 2 to 3:50pm. **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 might 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 wish to leave, losing 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, but this class is full, only 2 hours, and we have a lot to cover. Be mindful of days that have more points, like the 10 Jokes Day and the Midterm. I end class at 3:40pm 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, please refer to this syllabus or contact another student. Please do not email me asking what the homework is. It is all here in this syllabus. Make the choice to be in class on time, to stay the whole class, and remain aware of what is required of you.

Course Schedule: A Weekly Breakdown

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

(This timeline is subject to change in **extreme** cases. Being in class ensures you are aware of any changes.)

| | Topics/Daily Activities | Readings and Homework | Deliverable/ Due Dates |
|---------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Week 1 Jan. 10 | Warm-up, introductions, discussion of syllabus (our contract) Introduction to the tools of our trade A guide to the writing phases: Write, “get up”, record, evaluate, rewrite, get back up In-class improvised exercise and stage time | Re-write your jokes, evaluate, and compile them to build your show set. | Ongoing – you are gathering material every week for the show at the end. |
| Week 2 Jan. 17 | 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 | Re-write your jokes, evaluate, and compile them to build your show set. | Ongoing – you are gathering material every week for the show. |
| Week 3 Jan. 24 | Anger in Standup: Bend it, don’t break it Class conversation and clips In-class writing exercise and stage time | Homework: Research the joke style I assign to you | Due week 4 Jan. 31, 2024 |
| Week 4 Jan. 31 | First assignment* - Joke Styles Present assigned joke style given in class 3 3 minutes, max. I will give specifics in class and on Blackboard | Homework: Deliver 10 original jokes, in any joke style | Due week 5 Feb. 7, 2024 |

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| Week 5 Feb. 7 | Second assignment* - 10 Jokes Perform 10 original jokes, any style 3 minutes, max. Extra credit points awarded for any extra jokes with their own set up and punch. (Take advantage of this!) | Homework: <i>Work on first set</i> | Due week 6 Feb. 14, 2024 |
| Week 6 Feb. 14 | Third assignment* - First Set Bring in 2 minutes max. of best “bits” from weeks 1-5, creating a “set” Clips and discussion on Point of View and Stage Persona; the use of rhythm, timing, wit, physicality, and recurring themes | Homework: <i>Receive assigned comic in class and prepare for Midterm presentation</i> | MIDTERM week 7 Feb. 21, 2024 |
| Week 7 MIDTERM Feb. 21 | MIDTERM* Presentation Critical Analysis of Established Comic No phones, papers allowed “on stage” 3x5 or 5x7 notecards or PowerPoint OK Presentation of assigned comedian, analyzing, and critiquing their material, influences, POV, persona, work habits, career, demons, legacy, etc. I will give specifics in class and on Blackboard | No homework! <i>Please relax and recharge! It is good for you to take breaks. (But...if you want to watch some crowd work, go ahead!)</i> | |
| Week 8 Feb. 28 | Performance technique: Crowd Work and Improvising Survival skill #1 that leads to confidence and flexibility, on stage and in life In-class discussion, exercise, and stage time | Homework: <i>Prepare 2nd set</i> | Due week 9 March 6, 2024 |
| Week 9 March 6 | Fourth assignment* - Second Set Present second set, 3 minutes max. May include new material Assessment of each student’s POV/Persona | Homework: <i>Research and watch examples of heckling</i> | Discussion and exercise week 10 Mar. 20, 2024 |
| Week 10 March 20 | Performance technique: Heckling and Discernment Survival skill #2 that leads to confidence and flexibility, on stage and in life In-class discussion, exercise, and stage time | Homework: <i>Prepare “clean” set</i> | Due week 11 Mar. 27, 2024 |
| Week 11 March 27 | Fifth assignment* - Clean Set, 3 mins max. Doing clean comedy requires skill and intelligence. To do comedy on television, some live shows, benefits, you must have a clean set. Try it, you might like it! | Homework: <i>Bring in all the jokes you haven’t done but want to try</i> | Due week 12 April 3, 2024 |
| Week 12 April 3 | Sixth assignment* - Loose jokes/New Jokes Sick of your set? Think you want to try something new? This is your chance. After this class, you must pick a show set and stick to it. Minor edits, OK. | Homework: <i>Work on 3.5-minute draft of show set for class run through</i> | Due week 13 April 10, 2024 |

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|---|--|---|--|
| Week 13 April 10 | Seventh assignment* - First rehearsal w/ hosts* Perform a 3.5-minute draft of final set Must choose from material presented in classes 1-12 Hosts will audition on this day *Not everyone who wants to host will host | Homework: Bring your polished set for a final class run through 3.5 minutes max. MEMORIZED! | Due week 14 April 17, 2024 (Reminder: make-up work due April 26 th , by 11:59 pm) |
| Week 14 April 17 | Eighth assignment* - Final rehearsal w/ hosts* Perform a 3.5-minute polished set No new material Some hosts will be called back on this day *Not everyone who wants to host will host EVALUATIONS must be at 80% before I can start this class, so please do them early! | Homework: Perform 3.5- minute set at class show. MEMORIZED! NO NOTES, so you can play! | Due week 15 April 26, 2024 Make-up work due April 26th, by 11:59 pm Board closes at Midnight. No emailed work. |
| Week 15 April 26 | SHOW DAY! This is a Friday. Your regular Wednesday class period this week will be a make-up day and not required. Come if you want to get in some make-up work. | Homework: CRUSH IT AT THE SHOW! Write and post Final paper | Due Monday May 6, 2024 by 4pm via Blackboard, no emailed papers accepted |
| FINAL May 6 Due by 4pm | Final* Critical Analysis, Self – Paper only, no class Written paper due, self-assessing your overall progress through the class; including personal challenges, strengths, weaknesses, victories, and how you will use these standup skills going forward. Submitted via Blackboard discussion board, only. 500 words minimum. No class meeting. | | Hooray, you did it! Thank you for respecting the process and doing your best! |

Class Show Dates

Standup Shows are on campus, typically the last day of classes, **April 26th at 5:30, 7:30, or 9:30** but are subject to change. I will give you plenty of notice. You will perform in one show, only. You must be at one of the two rehearsals (class 13 and 14) to **participate** in the show
Hosts, you must be at both rehearsals (class 13 and 14) to **host** the show

Missing either class rehearsal will result in lost points

KEY DATES <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20241/calendar/> (be sure to double check these dates)

Jan 8: Spring semester classes begin

Jan. 26: Last day to drop this class without a “W”, or to select “P/NP”

Feb. 23: Last day to drop without a mark of “W” on official transcript only

Feb. 23: Last day to change P/NP to a letter grade

March 11-15: Spring recess

April 5: Last day to drop this class with a mark of “W”

April 26: Spring semester classes end

April 27-30: Study days

May 1-8: Final examinations

May 9: Spring semester ends

May 10: Commencement

Additional Notes

- ***No eating is allowed during class at any time, per USC SDA guidelines.***
- ***You may drink water when you need to.***
- ***No social media, texting, computer work. Phones are for sets and recording only.***
- ***We do not take a break, but you may use the restroom as needed.***

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. Do good work, know yourselves better, risk a little, support each other, and laugh every Wednesday with me!

Judith Shelton (Jude)

SDA PRODUCTIONS, ISPS, AND EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

SDA productions, ISPs and Extracurricular Activities* will 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 (such as marching band, song girls, or varsity sports) are exempt. You must submit official documentation to your professor regarding your participation in an event prior to your absence.

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

Statement for Students with Disabilities

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 me (or to TA) 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) ability@usc.edu.

Emergency Preparedness/Course Continuity in a Crisis

In case of a declared emergency 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.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theater Consent Culture Statement:

Through our pluralistic approach of diverse pedagogies, methodologies, ideologies, and modalities of artistic expression, we invite(engage) and challenge students to expand their breadth and depth of knowledge, complexity, and range of the human experience. Even though we nurture, guide, and challenge our students to embrace the unknown or unfamiliar and step outside of their comfort zones through storytelling/art, we aim to practice effective strategies and offer tools to students mindful of their physical, psychological, social, and emotional wellbeing. In alignment with professional and industry standards, we will integrate core principles and techniques of Intimacy in Theater and Building Cultures of Affirmative Consent. This will provide agency, offer resources and support to the teachers, students, directors, and staff to establish healthy boundaries of consent when working on material that is physically, intimately, or emotionally charged content in both the classroom and production.

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>

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 Student Accessibility Services - (213) 740-0776

<https://osas.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.