

THTR 482 Standup 2: Becoming a Pro
Spring 2025—Mondays (63197)—6:00pm to 7:50pm
Location: PED 208
Units: 2

Instructor: Judith Shelton (Jude)

Office: JEF 202 or Virtual: <https://usc.zoom.us/my/judes.office>

Office Hours by appointment: Monday, Wednesday, and Friday

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

Email preferred – judiths@usc.edu

I return emails Monday – Friday, 9am-5pm

On class days, in an emergency only, text 626.390.3678

Course Description

This course continues where THTR 474 left off, using additional writing tools and techniques while performing in class over and over to create longer, more effective sets. You will also engage in the non-performing, but just as important, work of the comic by actively pitching, producing, and promoting your own standup show. By the end of the course, you will leave with a greater understanding of what other work is available to comics, where to head next in your comedy career, and an additional 5-7 minutes of stage-worthy material. Succeeding as a comic requires self-motivation. I expect Standup 2 comics to be committed to their craft and development. I meet that intention with less handholding, a more discerning eye, and more specific notes.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, students will:

- Revisit and refine the skills learned in Intro to Standup
- Develop additional material via the “Writer’s Room” and your “Head Writer”
- Write for other comics and perform material written by other comics
- Execute script “punch up” in collaboration with a USC SCA screenwriter or similar
- Participate in constant, constructive evaluation of one’s comedic material and style
- “Try on” other points of view and styles
- Flesh out the characters in your act and bring them to life
- Practice hosting and headlining
- Explore other career opportunities for comics
- Identify a personal care plan focusing on mental health and longevity in the business
- Self-produce a standup show in which to showcase your work
- Write and perform a brand new 5-minute set

Readings

***Comedy Writing for Late-Night TV* by Joe Toplyn – REQUIRED – we will use this book in class**

How to Succeed in Business Without Really Crying by Carol Leifer (Audiobook recommended)

It’s Garry Shandling’s Book by Judd Apatow (recommended)

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

Like Intro to Standup, this is a performance class; all “the good stuff” happens in class. Missing class means missing points for the in-class exercises and discussions, impacting 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; things might come up. I offer fifteen points, so try to stay healthy and be present in class. You must make up those points if you are not in class to perform.

Description of Grading Criteria and Assessment:

Grades are not dictated by the success of comedy sets 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, final show, and Final paper. I provide options to make up 15 points total per semester. More details are listed under “Make-Up Options.”

Be advised: auditing students observe but do not participate.

Participation (15% of total grade):

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

Exercises and Assignments (42% 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 Show and production duties (20% of total grade):

- The Midterm show is worth 15 points
- You must contribute to the production of the show. I will award 1-5 points depending on your effort. I will check in if you are slacking on your responsibilities, but it is up to you.
- If you miss the Midterm show, you lose 15 points, which will greatly impact your grade

Final Show (15% of total grade):

- You must perform in the Show, it is worth 15 points
- You may choose to do less time, but let’s talk about it before you decide

Final (8% of total grade):

- The Final is a paper worth 8 points, due at the end of the 2-hour Final period and must be at least 500 words
- The Final will be submitted electronically via Brightspace discussion board
- Tech problems happen during Finals week, so please plan ahead; no late papers accepted
- Not handing in a paper will result in a loss of 8 points, which will impact your grade

Make-up options:

- If you miss an exercise, assignment, or presentation, you may make up 15 points.
- You must post your make-up work via the specific discussion board on Brightspace, only, by Friday, May 2nd at 11:59pm. Board closes at Midnight, no late posts accepted.
- You may make up 8 points by doing a NON-USC booked standup show.
- You may make up 6 points by doing a USC booked standup show.
- You may make up 4 points by doing an open mic anywhere.
- You must record your set and photograph the space; video will count as both.
- You must post both items AND a hearty paragraph (5 sentences) to the specific discussion board on Brightspace.
- Technical/posting issues will result in a loss of points, leave time to figure it out.
- You may make up 2 points by attending my Wednesday section, 6-7:50pm, PED 206.
- You may make up 4 points by watching LIVE standup and posting a picture and full paragraph (7 sentences) to the discussion board on Brightspace. NO STREAMING in 482.
- Make-up points cannot take you over 100 points, 100 points is the maximum.

Exercises and Assignments	Points
Week 1, In-class improvised exercise	1
Week 2, NO CLASS, MLK Jr. Day	0
Week 3, 1 st assignment: First Set	3
Week 4, 2 nd assignment: Late Night Monologue	5
Week 5, in-class exercise: Writer's Room-Pitching	3
Week 6, NO CLASS, Presidents' Day	0
Week 7, 3 rd assignment: Second Set	4
Week 8, 4 th assignment: Rehearsal for Off-Campus Show	5
Week 9, MIDTERM SELF-PRODUCED OFF-CAMPUS SHOW	20
Week 10, NO CLASS, SPRING BREAK	0
Week 11, 5 th assignment: Writer's Room-Head Writer	7
Week 12, 6 th assignment: Third Set	6
Week 13, 7 th assignment: Comedy in The Style Of	7
Week 14, 8 th assignment: Fourth Set	6
Week 15, TBD Depending on what I think you need before the final show	5
Week 16 (4/28), 9 th assignment: Rehearsal for on-campus Show	5
Week 16 (5/1), 10 th assignment: USC ON-CAMPUS SHOW	15
FINAL: Paper Due: Critical Analysis, Self	8
TOTAL:	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 11th. I will discuss your work at any time.
- Auditing students attend class strictly as observers and do not participate.

Assignment Submission Policy

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

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](#).

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 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 6pm to 7:50pm. **If you arrive after 6:05pm you will lose your participation point for the day.** Comics 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. Comics 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 now, and we have a lot to cover. Be mindful of days that have more points. I end class at 7:40pm 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 comic. 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 to 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 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 Jan. 13	Warm-up, introductions, discussion of syllabus (our contract) In-class improvised exercise and stage time Discussion of off-campus show, create tasks and assign groups	Homework: Read Toplyn ch. 1-4 3-minute set, max.	Due week 3
Week 2 Jan. 20	NO CLASS-MLK JR. DAY	Homework: 3- minute set, max. Read ch. 5, Toplyn	Due week 3
Week 3 Jan. 27	First assignment* - First Set Students perform first 3-minute set Discuss Toplyn monologue joke writing *Off-campus show production meeting	Homework: Bring in 4-min. topical monologue Toplyn ch. 6	Due week 4
Week 4 Feb. 3	Second assignment* - Late Night Monologue Please bring in a 4-minute monologue inspired by news headlines, cultural events, and pop culture within the last 7 days. *Off-campus show production meeting	Homework: Bring in 3 ideas that could use some help Toplyn ch. 7	Due week 5

Week 5 Feb. 10	<p>Writer's Room: Pitching Students break into smaller groups and pitch on each other's jokes Writing session followed by stage time *Off-campus show production meeting</p>	<p>Homework: <i>Bring in 2nd set, 4 minutes, max. Topyln ch. 8</i></p>	Due week 7
Week 6 Feb. 17	NO CLASS-PRESIDENTS' DAY	<p>Homework: <i>Bring in 2nd set, 4 minutes, max.</i></p>	Due week 7
Week 7 Feb. 24	<p>Third assignment* - Second Set Students bring in 4 minutes of best "bits" from weeks 1-6, creating new "set" *Off-campus show production meeting</p>	<p>Homework: <i>Prep for final off-campus show rehearsal</i></p>	Due Week 8
Week 8 March 3	<p>Fourth assignment* - Rehearsal w/hosts For Off-Campus Show The act returns in an advanced form, receiving feedback and notes Emphasis on beginning and ending, handling "mistakes", nerves, boredom, etc. SET MUST BE MEMORIZED! *Off-campus show production meeting Finish last-minute production tasks</p>	<p>Homework: <i>Continue adjusting and improving set for 1st show off-campus. Complete all tasks and promote show</i></p>	Due week 9
Week 9 March 10	MIDTERM: Off-Campus Show!	<p>Homework: <i>Receive your comic and get them 3-minutes of new material, by 3/20, 12Noon</i></p>	Due week 11
Week 10 March 17	NO CLASS-SPRING BREAK	<p>Homework: <i>Get your comic 3-minutes of new material, by 3/20, 12Noon</i></p>	Due week 11
Week 11 March 24	<p>Fifth assignment* - Writer's Room: Head Writer Students "tailor" and perform the material written for them, 3 minutes max. *Discussion of off-campus show</p>	<p>Homework: <i>Work on third set, 5 minutes max.</i></p>	Due week 12
Week 12 March 31	<p>Sixth assignment* - Third Set Students present third set, 5 minutes of best jokes from weeks 1-11.</p>	<p>Homework: <i>Receive comic assignment Costumes and props mandatory! 3-4 minutes max.</i></p>	Due week 13

Week 13 April 7	Seventh assignment* - Comedy in the Style of In week 12, you isolated an area in your own work that needs improvement. Today, you will present a 3-4 minute comedy set inspired by the point of view and persona of a comic that embodies that strength. You are not writing for them but using their style to lead you into new territory, previously uncharted as an artist, creating new and fearless, deeper material. Use of wardrobe, props, anything that helps you embody the style of this comic is mandatory. This is a fun one!	Homework: <i>Continue adjusting and improving set. Bring in 4th set, 5-7 minutes max.</i> <i>If you are going for 7 minutes, they better be good. Quality over quantity.</i>	Due week 14
Week 14 April 14	Eighth assignment* - Fourth Set *On-campus show production meeting	Homework: <i>TBD, depending on what skills I think you need to work on.</i>	Due week 15
Week 15 April 21	<i>TBD, depending on what skills I think you need to work on for the final show.</i> *On-campus show production meeting	Homework: <i>Bring in show set for rehearsal 5-7 mins. max.</i>	Due week 16
Week 16 April 28	Ninth assignment* EVALUATIONS need to be at 80% before I can start this class Rehearsal for On-Campus Show with Hosts *On-campus show production meeting	Homework: <i>Prep for show on Thursday</i>	REMINDER: Makeup work is due May 2, by 11:59 pm
May 1	Tenth assignment* On-Campus Show!	<i>Write self-assessment Final paper and post on Brightspace</i>	Due by the end of your Final Period---- Mon, May 12, by 9pm
FINAL May 12 Due by 9pm	Final* Critical Analysis, Self – Paper Due Written paper due: How was Standup 2? self-assessing the student’s overall progress through the class; including personal challenges, strengths, weaknesses, victories, and future plans (no class meeting) 500 words minimum via Brightspace DB only		Hooray, you did it! Thank you for giving your all to this process!

Off-Campus Class Show (Week 9) on March 10th:

Together, you will secure the location, produce, promote, and perform a class show during your regular class period. Where? How? Comics devote a good portion of their time finding ways to perform. Being a good “hustler” will get you far in comedy; get creative!

On-Campus Class Show on May 1st, 7:30 or 9:30:

USC Standup Comedy Showcase is on campus, the final week of classes

Location decided by SDA

KEY DATES <https://classes.usc.edu/term-20251/registration-calendar/> (up-to-date info.)

Jan 13: Spring semester classes begin

Jan. 20: Martin Luther King Day, university holiday

Jan. 31: Last day to drop this class without a “W”, or to select “P/NP”

Feb. 4: Monday-only class: Last day to drop this class without a “W”, or to select “P/NP”

Feb. 17: Presidents’ Day, university holiday

Feb. 28: Last day to drop without a mark of “W” on official transcript only

Feb. 28: Last day to change P/NP to a letter grade

March 16-23: Spring recess

April 11: Last day to drop this class with a mark of “W”

May 2: Spring semester classes end

May 3-6: Study days

May 7-14: Final examinations

May 14: Spring semester ends

May 14-17: Commencement Week

Additional Notes

- ***No eating or drinking 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 back, dear students, and thank you for working with me once again!

Together, you’ll take the next step in your journey, improve as comics, try new things, and feel more confident about your career and where to go next.

I know you will rise to the occasion!

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.

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion + Intimacy in Theatre 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>

Statement on University Academic and Support Systems

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the [Financial Aid Office webpage](#) for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

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

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline consists of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

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) 740-2500

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

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

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

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

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

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) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.