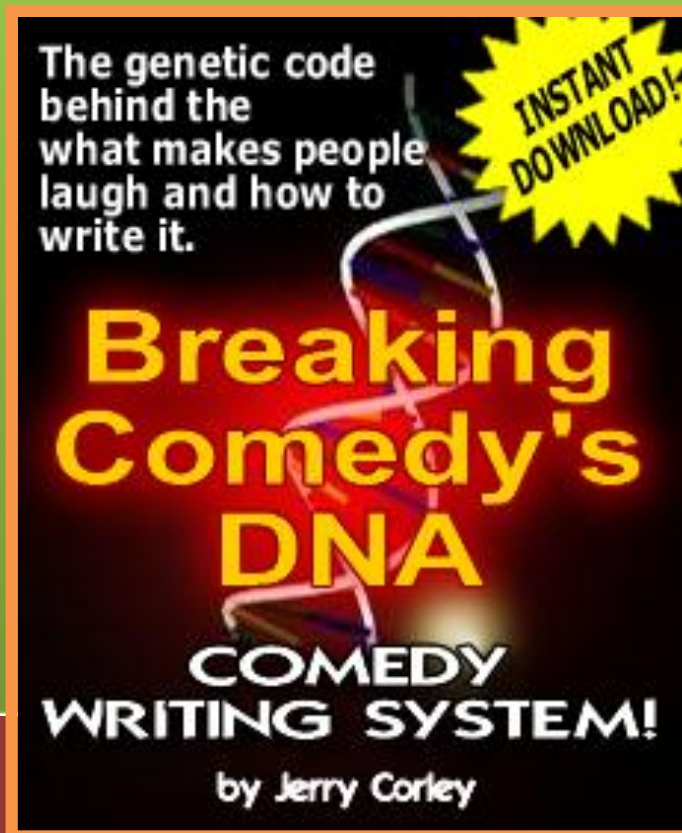


The Stand Up Comedy Clinic

Breaking Comedy's DNA

The Breakthrough Comedy Writing System
By Jerry Corley



Ver. 1.2

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This e-book was created and written by Jerry Corley, founder of the Stand Up Comedy Clinic and creator of the Breakthrough Comedy Writing System.

All material contained in this book, including jokes and sample comedy routines are original material created by Jerry Corley (unless otherwise indicated).

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PART 1

INTRODUCTION

This e-book focuses on comedy writing, the structure of comedy and comedy formula.

****In order for you to really learn to write great comedy, we are going to have to agree on something:**

Formula and Structure are not bad words.



Structure and formula are good things in comedy. It's because of the structure that the laughs occur. Without the formulas or the structures, there is no laughter. Got it?

Into this e-book, I am pouring 25 years of toil, work and overwhelming joy on the road as a professional comedian, combined with 8 years as a writer for the Tonight Show with Jay Leno and many years now teaching the techniques I am about to share with you. I've tried to break them down; I mean, really break them down into their simplest forms so that you can take control of your writing and use the principles as tools.

This book is designed for the beginner, all the way to the advanced comedian and comedy writer. Whatever your level I encourage you to ride the entire ride; you'll take away some cool new tricks.

This is the same information I share in my weekend workshops that I teach in Los Angeles. These techniques work for the new comedy writer and the experienced.

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I recently had a student in my class who started in comedy around the same time I did. We used to do the open mics together around L.A. When he attended my class, he was already making a good living as a professional comedian. He had done a lot of T.V. After class he said to me, "I've been a coincidental comedian all this time. I now feel that I have the tools to write comedy on anything."

CAN COMEDY BE TAUGHT?

When we watch a good comedian, we are so impressed with how they magically come up with material that is so funny. We are so impressed by these comedians, that we will share video links with friends.

We wish we can write comedy like that. Here's the problem: a vast majority of people out there don't think comedy can be taught. They think that someone either has "it" or they don't.

While there are certain people who seem to be born with a natural talent for comedy, nobody just walks on stage their first time and is a comedy star. They have to learn the ropes. They usually learn through trial and error. Eventually they begin to identify patterns that the audience seems to react to. I've been studying those patterns and structure for years and have tested them in front of audiences all over the world. Structures that consistently get the audience to laugh...

**What if I told you that you could learn those same techniques
that those comedian use to get laughs night after night?
And learn to write funny about almost anything?**



Comedy is not magic. As intelligent adults we understand that a magician is creating illusions that deceive the eye. Our wonder is in how they accomplish these "tricks." We may be baffled and surprised, but we know that it is a well-crafted illusion that takes practice, skill and certain techniques that need to be developed so that they can accomplish the goal of tricking

us.

Although comedy is not magic, it *is* about illusion and misdirection, and in that respect, it is very similar to magic. A comedian crafts words and actions to misdirect an audience and then shatters their perception, creating surprise.

It's the surprise that triggers the laughter.

This book will not magically transform you into a famous comedian or even a working comedian, but *I can assure you* that if you apply yourself and really work the material we are going to cover together, you will develop or improve your comedy writing so much so that you will feel like you are totally empowered to write new and better comedy material about virtually anything.

PART 2

The Anatomy Of A Comedian



You may be wondering if you have what it takes to be funny... Let me tell you something: If you feel like you have good comedy instincts. If your friends have told you that you're funny, with work and practice, I believe--I *know*, that you can learn to do the same.

There's an old saying: "If it was that easy, everyone would be doing it!" I won't mislead you and tell you that comedy writing is easy. It's not. It takes work; sometimes hard, tedious work. Occasionally, there is failure, but soon you will see the results and

you'll be writing funny stuff more frequently and faster than you thought possible and the feeling of being able to write material on almost anything and creating consistently funny stuff is unexplainably rewarding.

In this book, I share with you the techniques and secrets I used to generate a hundred and twenty jokes a day!

The fact is that good comedians and comedy writers are in demand. Once you learn your craft and you are good, you will get work. **Johnny Carson, "The King of Late Night," who had a talk show on NBC for 30 years, put it this way:**

"... There is a lot of money to be made as a comedian, and once you learn your trade, you will never be without work; you will always work. There is always a place to work for price. It might be a high price, or it might be a low price, but you will always earn a living once you learn your craft."

The Reason For This Book

The reason I put together this E-book is not only to give you great tools and skill-sets that you can apply right away to help you learn your craft, to help you to write better comedy, faster, but also to motivate you and instill you with passion for this amazing art form. I want this book to be a resource for you so that you can come back to it as a reference and as you read some chapters, trigger an inspiration and smash through bouts of writer's block.

The tools, exercises and skills I provide in this book are the first in a comedy educational series I am calling my "Breakthrough Comedy Writing System."

WHY WRITE COMEDY?

The majority of this e-book focuses comedy writing. I am going to say this once: **Whether you are a writer or a stand-up, learning to write comedy is going to be your life blood and can make the difference between your ability to succeed or fail in this business!**

There are some comedy educational products out there where the point of view is that **"writing" comedy leads to failure**. I'm surprised that people would even consider buying a product that would instill that idea, especially considering the overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

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Jerry Seinfeld, clearly the most financially successful comedian of all time, writes every day. His material is created when he sits down to write.

George Carlin, one of the most legendary comedians in the U.S., sat down to write comedy every day. He prided himself in generating material by looking at nuances in words, colloquialisms, idioms, etc., along with observations and socio-political ironies.

Bill Cosby, another legendary comedian, talked about the importance of reading and writing everyday and how that contributed to his success. Without the ability to write material, he would not have been nearly as successful as he is.

So let's just put that ridiculous idea to rest. **Writing IS essential to your ability to create consistently solid material.** But that's not all you will use in creating material.

In my workshops, I have helped both the beginning comedian AND the professional. I've taught the beginner to learn to write and perform comedy, take it on the road, win comedy competitions and get television spots, all in a very short period of time! And I've taught the professional how to improve their laughs per minute and take their comedy to the next level.

I can teach you the very same techniques so that you can be a better writer and a better comedian.

In the comedy business, excellence is in short supply. If you work these exercises, I mean, really work them, each and every one, (even when it becomes difficult or seems impossible), you will become a better writer and as a result, a better comedian.

To be either, you must possess a solid writing foundation. You could be the best performer in the world, but if you don't have good material, nobody will want to listen to you.

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Also, if you are a good comedy writer and a good comedian, you exponentially increase your chances of getting a well-paying job in this fantastic industry.

And the pay is good. A network staff writer on a variety show or talk show like Late Night With David Letterman, Jimmy Fallon, Jay Leno or The Jimmy Kimmel Show, earns around four thousand dollars a week minimum. That's right, minimum. If he/she writes a 2-minute sketch, he or she can be paid an additional six thousand dollars!

Are you getting an idea of how exciting this business could be? Money aside, the joy you get from writing jokes for a living and seeing them get laughs either first hand as a comedian or second-hand, as a writer, is unmatched. Truly exciting stuff!

This book starts with fundamentals like word play and moves through the more complex joke formulas and humor analysis with numerous exercises and workouts that will get your joke writing up to the level it needs to be for you to get one of the highly-coveted jobs in television writing or stand up.

MAKING A COMMITMENT

Comedy is NOT frivolity

Writing comedy is hard work. No matter how much information you learn from this e-book, only two percent of you will actually apply it, work it and achieve some success with it. The rest of you will wind up giving up at some point. That's not a criticism, it is a fact.

Most statistics show that 3 percent will achieve some level of superiority in their specialty. In comedy I think that percentage takes an even greater hit, because so many people who get into comedy do so because they see it as frivolity.

Thus, they treat their careers frivolously.

Writing comedy and pursuing a career as a comedy writer or comedian requires dedication and commitment. Writing is especially hard work when you want to get to the good stuff fast. To produce consistently good comedy requires a solid work ethic and most people simply don't have it.

When I hold seminars for professional comedians, I ask them how many of them have a minimum of 3 hours blocked out each day that they dedicate to writing comedy. In a crowd of 150 comedians, usually around 5 people raise their hands.

Five people!

So if you apply yourself and stay disciplined and consistent with your writing, how quickly do you think you can start to surpass others who have been doing comedy longer? I bet it would be quick.

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Don't Break The Chain

When Jerry Seinfeld was coming up through the ranks and doing the open-mics in New York, he would sit and dedicate 3-5 hours every day to his writing. Most of the comics in his inner-circle thought he was nuts. Jerry had a technique he called, **"don't break the chain."**

Jerry basically had a calendar that he had on his wall. He would use a red pen to "X" out the days when he wrote. The idea was that each X would connect with the next one and he would not break the chain.



This was Jerry's way of motivating himself to write every day without fail.

That work paid off as Jerry is probably the most financially successful comedian of all time.

He's worth over 2 billion dollars—that's billion with a big fat "B."

Do Not Disturb

I want each of you who are reading this right now to make a conscious decision to dedicate a portion of your day—everyday—to writing.

Make yourself a contract, tell your family, make yourself a "DO NOT DISTURB" sign and hang it on your door in a place where you can have some privacy. It might seem stupid at first, but it works.

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You have just taken the first step in changing your career.

In fact, I used a **DO NOT DISTURB** sign for years. And you know what? It worked!

It not only made my family aware of what I was doing, it enhanced my own self-discipline. So if I missed a day someone would say. "I didn't see your sign up. So you didn't write today?"

Essentially what happened was my family wound up being my inspiration!

You can download the exact sign I used.

I made one for you! [Click Here](#)

SET GOALS

I want you to start setting goals right away. A comedy mentor of mine once said, "Treat yourself like a professional now and you'll start to write like a professional."

So set some goals. Start your goals at one joke a day. Then increase it.

THE TARGET IS 10 JOKES A DAY IN 8 WEEKS. THEN PUSH YOURSELF TO 25 AND MORE PER DAY.

A popular comedy teacher once said to her students, "If you write a joke a day, in a year you'll have three hundred and sixty-five new jokes. I said, "If you're a writer on staff at a show and you write one joke a day, you're fired!"

So treat yourself like a professional and push. You'll see that with dedication, work and goal-setting you CAN do it!

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So now that we have our time blocked out in our day, we've set our goals and we have our "DO NOT DISTURB" sign ready, let's learn some comedy writing techniques.

For the purposes of this e-book, when I refer to a comedian, I am not only talking about a person who gets on stage and performs comedy material, I am also talking about the comedy writer. Got it? Good! Here we go!

TYPES OF COMEDIANS

There are three types of comedians:

1. THE COINCIDENTAL COMEDIAN:

The coincidental comedian or coincidental comedy writer is the one who waits for something funny to happen, makes an observation or something occurs to him and he writes it down to put in his act or script. The good ones always carry with them:



- A notebook
- A pen or something to write with
- A digital recorder or phone recorder

2. THE ARCHITECT:

The architect is the comedian or humorist who can sit down on a daily basis and turn almost anything into something funny. A true comedy architect believes that he can take **any logical grouping of words** and make it funny; sometimes even turning a single word into a joke...

My script-writing partner came in and starting saying the word "Geez!" So I tried to think of what I could do to make that word funny. After



some thought and mapping out the blueprint of what else "GEEZ" could represent, I came up with this:

'My wife is large breasted. She thought I was psychic when I first met her because I guessed her cup size. Yeah, she walked in the room and I went, "GEEZ!" I was so awestruck, I named them; (pointing to the left breast) Mary...(pointing to the right breast)--ME!'"

NOTE: Notice in the above joke that I chose to write the name "Mary" rather than the word "marry." This is a perfect example of how comedy that was meant to be spoken doesn't always effectively translate to the page. If I was to write the word "Marry," it would've telegraphed the surprise at the end of the joke.

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That "Geez" joke is a very reliable joke. It gets a laugh every time I do it. **EVERY TIME!** How empowered would you feel as a comedian to know that you had material that is almost guaranteed to get a laugh every time?

How do I know it's going to get a laugh? Because it is crafted to surprise the audience with the comic interpretation of the meaning of the word "Geez."

To see the step-by-step process of how this joke was developed see the "Double Entendre" Comedy Structure on page 72.

3. THE HUMORIST:

The humorist is the comedian that utilizes both his or her comedy instincts to recognize a funny situation when it happens and to capitalize on humorous inspiration by writing the event down to use as material later. He ALSO uses his skill and understanding of comedy structure to craft jokes whenever he feels like it, or when he or she is given an assignment.

You can see that because the Humorist uses both mechanisms, he is going to be able to produce volumes more material. He doesn't have to wait only for inspiration but can combine his skills and abilities to develop material from. It is not uncommon for a humorist to be working one assignment during the day, then write a hundred and twenty or so jokes at night for a client. That's right *a hundred and twenty jokes in one evening.*

Some students have asked me what's the benefit of writing so much material when you can only use so much?

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The answer is simple: when you write a lot of material, you become a better writer, faster, and when you can't use a joke for your own act, you can always *sell it!*

While I was starting as a comedian, I was also selling jokes to Reader's Digest, Playboy magazine, writing humorous greeting cards and contributing material to "The Tonight Show with Jay Leno."

On the next page, you'll find a quick diagram of the different brain resources each type of comedian uses. It'll give you a pretty good idea of your own tendencies and how you might think.

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The Architect	Coincidental Comedian
<div data-bbox="755 281 1003 613">  </div>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy left-brain utilization • More writing • Current events • Can make sentences funny • Analyzes the humor for tags, act-outs, toppers • Word-play humor • More structured • Triggers more surprise • Can produce volumes of material. • Solves the puzzle of the joke • Utilizes configurational joke-writing. (puzzle-solving) • Material can be complex, heady, profound, factual. • Utilizes Magazines, Newspapers, internet to find <u>subjects</u> to create jokes about. • Rational • Sequential • Looks at parts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy Right-brain utilization • In the moment • Creative • Spontaneous • Works more on feeling-emotion • Prone to observational humor • Ponderables • Act-outs • Usually lacks structure • Inconsistent • Character driven • Song parodies • Impressions • Prop comedy • Utilizes internet, situations, movies to find humorous situations. • Random • Intuitive • Looks at wholes

HUMORIST

The humorist combines the two parts of his/her brain to use both imagination and cognitive skills to realize when observations and situations are funny AND also sit down and create jokes and routines from information and news. The benefit is that when you use both sides of the brain, there's immediate access to more material. Volumes more!

In addition, the Humorist can master the ability to take any logical grouping of words and figure out how to make it funny by applying the 12 major comedy structures. This makes the humorist more marketable in the sense that they can now write and sell material, create scripts, sketches, humorous columns, blogs, novels, etc.

****Important:** It's important to learn to allow the left-brain/right-brain mechanisms to work in harmony.

Most comedians start out as **coincidental** comedians. As we develop our awareness of the skill sets and the structures in comedy, we must remember to allow our creative side to remain free to create while the analytical side grasps and retains the structures.

Soon you'll be applying both freely and effortlessly because the technical fundamentals will just become a part of you.

Some people think that structure or form restricts your ability to write and create great comedy. In fact, it's just the opposite.

It's sort of like learning your scales as a musician. Once you learn them by heart, they become a part of you. Now you can write and play beautiful music of different styles and genres. But without the fundamentals of the scales, do you think you would play in tune?

PART 3

BASIC STRUCTURE OF A JOKE

Comedy writing can be simple and it can be very complex and even frustrating at times. Whether you are writing jokes, scripts or books, the key to getting it right is first understanding comedy at its core level.

Once you understand the basics of comedy, you will find yourself discovering more and more areas in your everyday life that inspire comedy and before you know it, the jokes will be flying out of your mouth, your brain or your fingertips on to the page.

Therefore, one part of our goal, in the beginning, is getting your "sense" of humor in tune with the incongruities that are in our lives every single day. Sometimes they are subtle and sometimes they are very obvious.

The master humorist is trained to recognize the opportunities and spin to opportunities into something funny.

Comedy is like verbal judo, or magic. After all, comedy is manipulation and misdirection. A magician can bend a spoon; a comedian can bend words and meanings to form jokes. A magician misdirects the audience's attention while he produces or hides the coin or ball; a comedian takes you one direction with a story, only to fool you with a surprise ending, all the while having you believe that he is telling a legitimate story. For example, a comedian who is losing his hair could say:

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"...it's embarrassing sometimes... Like this morning, my wife was running her fingers through my hair--but I already left for work!"

As I said before, humorists should be able to take any logical grouping of words, and make it funny. We're going to show you the way to get there. Some people will be funnier than others, but the way to be the best you can be is to start by truly understanding the basics. Learning the basics of joke writing will give you foundation and an understanding of jokes. It will also help you to come up with jokes faster and give you different angles of approach when writing, whether you're writing for yourself or for other people.

DIAGRAM OF A JOKE

As some of you may already know, the basic structure of a joke is:

SETUP → PUNCHLINE

1. The setup is usually a logical statement of fact. Don't just let that glide by... it's important to remember that the setup is logical and usually a fact. Many comedians make the mistake of trying to make the setup funny which could kill the joke.
2. The punchline is usually a follow-up to the statement, that takes the audience in an unexpected direction. Is the surprise ending, that triggers the laughter.

I actually prefer to diagram the joke form like this:

STRAIGHT LINE → PUNCHLINE

To me, it's more to the point to say straight line/ punchline, since a straight line reminds me that the setup should be the truth.

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There are several commercials on TV featuring Dr. Robert Jarvik, the inventor of the artificial heart. I'm thinking "inventor?!" My ex-wife has had an artificial heart for years!

If we break the joke down, its structure would look like this:

There are several commercials on TV featuring Dr. Robert Jarvik, the inventor of the artificial heart. I'm thinking "inventor?!" My ex wife has had an artificial heart for years!



Straightline



Punch line

Notice how the straight line is simply a statement of fact. That's crucial to remember that when you're writing comedy.

Many people when they're starting out with comedy tend to want to make things wacky funny or zany, and that's a recipe for disaster when you're writing comedy.

Think about comedy like this: I'm going to take something that's honest and truthful and turn it into something that's funny by using misdirection and surprise.

Have I made it clear how important it is to be sure the setup is a clear statement of fact? Good!

A JOKE'S CHEMISTRY

If we were to break down joke structure even further and look at it scientifically we can begin to identify the elements found in almost any joke. There are six.

I call this the **T-E-A-S-E-R**.

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T stands for target. Every joke must have a target. A joke, is a veiled attack. We are attacking something or someone, even ourselves. We are making fun of somebody's misfortune or weakness. There is a rule however, when you're attacking something or someone other than yourself...

We must remember to attack UP.

What do we mean by attacking "up?" When we say attack "up," that means we should attack things that are perceived as superior to us; i.e.: the government, Congress, the police, a mean teacher, the principal, our boss, or mother-in-law, or someone else who has done us wrong.

E stands for **EMOTION**. Comedy, for the most part, is meant to be more than just spoken. It's meant to be expressed. Psychologists say that more than 90% of communication is non-verbal.

So if you communicate by expressing yourself and showing us how you feel about something then we connect to you on another level. Therefore, when you deliver your jokes, don't forget to show us how you feel about them. If you are exasperated, frustrated, cynical, angry, happy, confused, etc.?, then show us!

Here's a bit of theater science for you: **the audience is in whatever state the performer is in...** and were not talking geography. This means if you are in a good mood on stage, then despite individual jokes getting laughs, the audience will be in a good mood with you.

I want you to really think about this. If you take anything away from this e-book take this bit of theater science with you. It really is a truly amazing piece of theater science. Think about it, if you laugh and have a good time and make fun of the fact that you didn't get a laugh on a particular joke the audience will laugh with you. And if you're feeling silly and a joke that you say makes you laugh, laugh along with it.

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It's an urban myth that you shouldn't laugh along with your own jokes. If they make you laugh, then laugh. If you have any doubt about this, watch comedian and talk show host, Craig Ferguson. He giggles and laughs while he's doing his monologue and the audience has no choice but to laugh with him. So don't forget to show your emotion and express yourself!

A is for **ANTAGONISM**. George Carlin once said to me "take the stuff that drives you crazy, and make it funny!" If you think something's weird or ridiculous or stupid or crazy or misplaced or ironic, that's kind of the impetus that ignites your inspiration to attack something. Which is part of what makes comedy such an amazing art form. You can literally take the stuff that makes you mad and make it funny!

S is for **SURPRISE**. Almost every joke you do should have some form of surprise in it. This would seem obvious since 90-percent of comedy is about surprise. Remember you can't have surprise without misdirection. We'll learn more about creating surprise later.

E is for **EXAGGERATION**. Comedy is **heightened reality**. It's not complete absurdity. It's taking what's real and putting it under a microscope or a magnifying glass for the audience to see clearly. Jumping up and down, acting like an idiot when it has no relationship to the material at hand is absurdity. If you have any question about this, ask yourself: could this happen? Did it happen? Can I perceive or imagine it happening if the scenario before me played out? If it happened and you're heightening the reality, then that could be comedy. If you're saying something to be funny, but it's totally outside the scope of reality, then it's probably not going to be funny.

Nothing will tune an audience out faster than if they cannot believe what you're saying has any truth. The only way to get around this is if you're going to exaggerate greatly, you can get away with it if it's coming from your imagination or you dreamed about it.

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Some comedy bits that have **heavy exaggeration** are more accepted by an audience when you lead us into them by saying something like:

"Imagine if..."
"Wouldn't it be weird if..."
"One day I'm going to..."
"I had a dream that I..."
"What if?...etc.,"

What if breast milk spoiled? Where would they put the expiration date?

If you drove your car at the speed of sound, could you hear your stereo?

R is for **REALISM**. Realism, works right alongside exaggeration. Make sure you start with something real before you try to turn it into something funny. Be honest, be truthful and then use the structures that we will learn in this book to turn anything into something funny.

A joke writer reads the news and current events like a pilot in the scout plane during a war. Finally when something worth writing about stands out, the comedian says, "I've identified the target!" That's when the joke writing begins.

An important thing to remember is that the target or subject must be worthy of attack. If you attack Mother Teresa, or a child with cerebral palsy, it's not going to make for a very funny joke, necessarily.

Notice I said "necessarily." A really clever comedian might be able to pull it off—he would have to be dark and cynical—but a good comic

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could pull it off. I believe that when it comes to comedy, nothing is completely off-limits if you can structure it in a funny way.

The best way to study the T-E-A-S-E-R formula is to look at the one and two-liner joke structure. Keep in mind that even if your style of comedy is story-telling, it's absolutely essential to familiarize yourself with the one and two-liners. These are your fundamentals and will allow you to tell funnier stories.

Here's a few one and two liners:

I had pizza last night; I ordered a thin and crusty supreme...they sent me Diana Ross.

My wife said, for her birthday, she wanted me take her out to eat somewhere expensive... so I took her to the airport.

I failed math so many times, I can't even count

Let's look at this set up/punchline scenario in more of a story structure:

I was performing in a town called Havre, Montana and some guy said to me, "You know why they call it Havre?" I said, "No." He said, "Because the women is so ugly, guys are like, 'You like my wife? You can have her!'" I said, "Dude, that's nothin'. Last week I was in a town called 'Dewer.'"

Once again, notice how the setup in this joke is a **factual statement**. Can you see how this joke is more of a story? Yet, the fundamentals of comedy are still present. Now see how that joke might fit into an opening of a set:

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After your intro:

"Thank you. I've been traveling. I was in Montana last week. I love Montana—'Big Sky Country.' That's what they call themselves. Big Sky—like they have the biggest sky in the country. They do too. I drove into the state through Idaho and as soon as crossed from Idaho into Montana, I was amazed at the utter vastness of the sky... I was like (Looking up at the sky) 'Oh, yeah this Montana Sky is substantially larger than that Idaho sky back there. Wait...step back into Idaho, It's kind of a low ceiling... a little more cramped (step back into Montana) but here in Montana, it's a big sky, sky, sky, sky. (Like an echo) The air must be thinner in Montana, because I was in a town called Havre Montana, and some guy said to me, 'You know why they call it Havre?' I said, 'No.' He said, 'Because the women is so ugly, guys are like, 'You like my wife? You can have her!' I said, 'Dude, that's nothin'. Last week I was in a town called 'Dewer.'" And I did... outdoors, you know, under the big sky..."

That joke always gets a nice laugh. It gets a bigger laugh in Montana or neighboring states, but I've done that joke in Florida, Texas and everywhere else and it always gets a nice response.



EXERCISE

Identifying the Joke Elements

This is a simple, back-to-basics workout.

It helps you to develop your “eye” in identifying the elements of a joke, which will ultimately help you write the best jokes possible.

In the five jokes below, answer these four questions:

(Use the first one as an example and then start your engines!)

1. Who or what is the joke attacking?
2. How is the reality heightened or exaggerated?
3. Does the joke have an emotional point of view? If so, what word would you use to identify the emotion?
4. Why did it surprise you? Where did you think the joke was going before you were surprised?

EXAMPLE:

The Iraq war fiasco has been causing the president a lot of sleepless afternoons.

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1. The joke is attacking the president
2. The heightened reality or exaggeration is "a lot of sleepless afternoons."
3. The emotional point of view is *sarcasm*.
4. The surprise comes in the surprise ending of "afternoons," since the phrase we commonly hear is "sleepless nights."

Now it's your turn:

The E channel was talking about how a celebrity "paid his dues" because he worked three years as a dishwasher in Hollywood before he became a star. I paid my dues too, it took me three years working as a bus boy before I became a waiter.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

"Dancing With The Stars" has invited Jerry Springer to come on the show next season. Which leads me to ask this question: Who's going to be his star?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

My mother has been having trouble with her memory.

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Which can be a boon for me on my birthday, because she always gives me a birthday card with \$100 bill in it.

If she's having a really bad day, I can net about a grand!

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

I woke up this morning in the hotel room and a housekeeper was banging on the door... Just banging. Finally I had to get up and let her out!

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

A cop pulled me over the other day. He said, "Do you know how fast you were going?" I said, "You think at that speed I'd risk taking my eyes off the road to check the speedometer?"

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

Bonus Exercise:

Now that you've identified the setup and punchline for each of these jokes, take a moment to remove the punchline and write your own punchline and see if you can come up with a better one.

The object of this exercise is not for you to use these as your own jokes but to sharpen your ability to more readily recognize factual set up phrases and come up with your own punch lines.

This is an excellent exercise for you to do at the beginning of your journey to understanding comedy writing. It will help you to become familiar with the rhythm of a joke, the intention of a joke and to get practice writing a punch.

PART 4

UNDERSTANDING HUMAN LAUGHTER



UNDERSTANDING HUMAN LAUGHTER

I think one of the best parts of this book is this section where we actually get inside the brain and figure out what causes laughter. Think about it; once you understand this laughter mechanism inside the brain, it gives you tremendous power when it comes to writing and crafting comedy material.

Now you can plan your material as you're writing it to light up certain nerve centers of the brain. When those nerve centers are triggered, the humans in the audience are actually programmed to laugh.

Cool huh?

Part of being the best comedian and comedy writer you can be is learning the fundamentals of human laughter. If you can understand what makes someone laugh it will help you to better shape your material so that it is actually designed to trigger laughs.

The human condition provides for us to be hard wired to laugh. We love it. We love the feeling it gives us, and why not? When we laugh our bodies release endorphins, the same chemical responsible for making us feel a sense of euphoria. In other words laughter makes us "high!"

You've downloaded this e-book because you're in the business of making people laugh either from the stage or the word processor, or you want to be in that business, or you just want to make people laugh; you aim to get laughter with your words and your actions in your everyday lives.

But do you really know what makes people laugh? Most people, (even professional comedians and writers), don't.

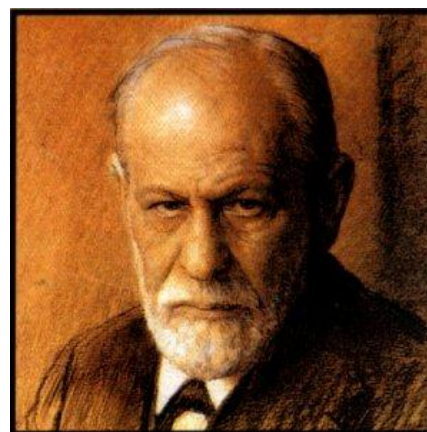
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If you go to a comedy club and ask a comedian, "what makes people laugh?" they'll usually reply with "a punch line." But where does that leave us? It leaves us with nothing we can use to be better at our craft, because "a punch line" is vague and gives us nothing to work with, or build from.

Humor as it applies to the human condition hasn't been really studied until recently. Psychologists still argue over why people laugh.

I can probably write a whole book on the arguments behind the theories of these psychologists, starting with the Benign Violation Theory and moving into Freud believing that we laugh because we cover our repressed sexual feelings--which, really?! If I was repressed sexually, I wouldn't be laughing, I'd be crying!

**That's Freud to the right.
Dude doesn't look like he's
laughing...maybe he's not
laughing because he's not sexually
repressed OR because he's NOT
covering it up?**



So for the purposes of this e-book and your sanity, I am going to keep it simple. Shakespeare said, "Brevity is the soul of wit." I believe that it is also the soul of teaching wit, so I will try to avoid all the psycho-babble and explain it in plain English.

So in the next part of this e-book, I have broken down the eight major laughter triggers when it comes to comedy writing. Get ready... get set...

LAUGH TRIGGERS

There are many human laugh triggers, tickling being one of them, but for the purposes of this e-course, I am going to focus on the human laughter triggers that relate to writing and performing comedy.

So we will be focusing on comedy, both written and spoken and how you can use specific elements to trigger the human laugh mechanism. You are about to receive the grail when it comes to understanding comedy.

This next sentence, originally taught to me by comedian Tom Dreesen, is, I believe, the biggest solution there is to understanding how comedy works. Here it is, (there should really be a drum roll here!)...

The number one element that triggers human laughter is...

SURPRISE.

Once you understand this concept, you are now miles ahead of the huge majority of people out there and ahead—believe it or not—of most comedians.

I woke up in the hotel this morning and the housekeeper was banging on the door, just banging...finally I had to get up and let her out!"

That's right. Most comedians don't know what triggers human laughter. That seems really strange to me. Wouldn't you want to know what makes people laugh if you're in the business of doing just that?

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If you go to a comedy club right now and ask the majority of comedians what triggers human laughter and they will probably answer you by saying, "a punch line," or "timing."

That's nice but what does that mean? It doesn't mean anything if you don't know what it is...

My wife is an airline pilot. I could not fathom her being able to control an airplane with any skill, confidence and certainty without knowing the science of aerodynamics. But there you have it.

And if you were flying on airplane at thirty-eight thousand feet, wouldn't you want your pilot to have a full understanding of aerodynamics rather than thinking it's some sort of magic?

Most comedians don't know what triggers human laughter.

But now that you know about surprise, you will have a command that so many people in the business lack. Most comics lived by the old adage, "If it gets a laugh, leave it in..." without really knowing *why* it got a laugh.

Jerry Seinfeld, literally one of the most successful comedians ever, still goes out thinking and hoping something is funny rather than knowing *why* it is funny. He will step on stage and try out so much material hoping it will get a laugh and wind



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up scratching out about sixty percent of what he initially tries on stage. Wow 60% !!!

Jerry Seinfeld is one of my all-time favorite comedians, so I'm not criticizing, but I would rather write comedy that I knew contained all the elements to trigger laughter, than just working on instinct and hope.

There is still a degree of hope involved as you will find out, but eventually you will know with a high degree of accuracy that a joke is funny.

George Carlin said he knew with ninety-eight percent accuracy that a joke would be funny before he stepped on stage.

There's an old saying in comedy that we're only guessing and audience is the judge." However, by understanding what triggers human laughter and learning all the comedy structures your "guesses" will be a lot more accurate!

THEORIES OF LAUGHTER

Surprise isn't the only theory behind why we laugh. According to Psychologist Patricia Keith-Speigel, there are eight theories of laughter...

- **Surprise**
- **Embarrassment**
- **Incongruity**
- **Recognition**
- **Ambivalence**
- **Release**
- **Superiority**
- **Configurational**

SURPRISE

Surprise is the most powerful reason people laugh. In fact I can argue that surprise dominates the reasoning so much, that the others; embarrassment, incongruity and recognition are a means with which we create surprise.

When we use surprise effectively, it gets triggered, spontaneous laughter.

The key is *misdirection*.

We must first misdirect the audience to have them assume we are going to say one thing then we quickly pop that balloon of expectation and "POW" we have a punch line!

"I was at the mall the other day and I ran into my ex-girlfriend in the parking lot... totally screwed up the front end of my car!"

"I remember, one time, I went over to her house to beg her to take me back. It was like 2 o'clock in the morning, I was drunk and I'm banging on the door... "Stacy! Stacy!" Which is weird, because her name is Emily..."

"I'm losing my hair. Sometimes it really bugs me...like this morning, my wife was running her fingers through my hair—but I already left for work..."

EMBARRASSMENT



We often laugh at ourselves to cover our embarrassment in a given situation. It releases us of the responsibility of maintaining our idea of how we want people to view us.

If we laugh at the fact that we forgot to zip up our flies or that we tore

our pants up the seam in the rear, it helps us maintain our composure and demonstrates that we are still "in control" of our image.

Other people laugh at *our* embarrassing situation out of *recognition* because they have either done the exact same thing or could imagine being in that same situation, and they are empathizing with us by sharing the feeling; while they are also laughing out of a release of tension for the fact that *they are relieved* that it is NOT them who is the subject of the "embarrassing" situation.

I know that's a mouthful, but re-read that again, because it's a valuable piece of information in understanding the human response. If you master this, you can take an audience in any direction you want.

Think of all of the things that cause anxiety and embarrassment and I can assure you that a large portion of comedy material is already out there on it or is being written on it as we speak.

What causes embarrassment?

- Personal foibles that can affect our dignity or "coolness."

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- Sexual situations
- Private concerns
- Failures

All of these are obstacles and character flaws. Good character flaws makes great comedy. If you're a comedian and you're trying to show us how cool or sexy or rich you are, then you're not doing comedy. For the most part, the audience needs to empathize with you to root for you to succeed.

But we like to watch failures. One of the most popular video themes on the internet is "Fails."

PERSONAL FOIBLES

That's one of the beauties of comedy. You can make a mistake and use the mistake to get a laugh. Empowerment from our weaker selves! Audiences view a comedian who is willing to make fun of themselves and their mistakes as courageous!

One of the best things to write comedy about is your weaknesses.

- Are you clumsy?
- Do you struggle with the opposite sex?
- Are you weak?
- Do you often make mistakes?
- Are you broke?
- Do you procrastinate?
- Are you a slob?
- Are you always late?
- Are you overweight?
- Are you skinny?
- Are you an addict?
- Did you get bad grades in school?
- Are you a softie

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- When it comes to women, are you spineless?
- When it comes to men are you a push over?
- Are you over-sensitive?
- Are you non sensitive at all?
- Do you seem to cry over everything?
- Do you drink too much?
- Are you lousy in bed?
- Are you a narcissist?
- Do you apologize all the time?
- Are you a hopeless romantic
- Are you a cynic?
- Are you a bad driver?

Although the list looks long, these are just a few of the flaws and weaknesses each of us could have. The bigger the flaws, the better the comedy. Think about it, you no longer have to worry about those flaws, you can now turn them into some great comedy!

When I think of my flaws, the first thing that settles in my mind is my failed relationships. I couldn't seem to keep them together...

I have five kids... so I'm half-Mormon. I have five kids from three different women. Yeah, I know, so I'm either white trash or a Hollywood celebrity.

I just couldn't keep relationships together. My first marriage didn't work out...we had three kids and then my wife needed something else in her life; she needed our accountant. That's right, she married our accountant. Well, he's not MY accountant anymore; I've sought other services.

I remember the day I found out. I called her from the road, after she didn't answer the phone all night. I said, "how come you didn't answer the phone all night?" She actually said, "Well, Bob was over and we were crunching

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numbers...that's what she said. I was like, "Yeah you were doing a little division; how many times does Bob go into you!"

And I knew I hit the nail on the head, because she was dead-silent.

I did that joke on the radio once. She called the radio station and said, "Well, at least he does long division; you just did fractions!"

So from a simple list of flaws, I develop a nice bit that defines my life and relationships. Remember don't be afraid of your flaws...exploit them!

SEXUAL SITUATIONS

More than 50 percent of all humor out there is related directly or indirectly to sex. Why? Because some of our biggest anxieties are related to sex;

"Am I big enough?" "Does she think I'm sexy?" "Do I look fat in this?"
"Do I please her/him?"

"My girlfriend and I were making love and she said, "You're the perfect size. My ex-boyfriend was so big, he hurt me..." I couldn't get it up for three weeks."

Talking openly about the subject of sex and our shortcomings (pardon the pun), creates embarrassment and to hide our embarrassment we laugh.

Also, if it's something the audience relates to, they recognize it...is recognition on the list of reasons we laugh? Yes it is!

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Here's where I want you to be careful and use your intelligence and your desire to develop quality humor. Many beginning comedians have a tendency to go right to the gutter when they start writing comedy. They do a lot of jokes about farting, peeing and other embarrassing bathroom humor, and although I know there's a place for that, I want you to work hard to find more creative ways to write comedy without going right to the poop jokes.

"I just got a new video poker app for my Droid. I love to play it when I'm in the bathroom. On one hand my wife is happy I've found a new way to play with myself, on the other hand, she's getting tired of hearing me yell from the bathroom, 'STRAIGHT FLUSH!'"

When I first wrote that joke, there was no mention of my wife. It was just me yelling 'straight flush,' but embedding the human interaction—*her frustration with me*—disguises the fact that we're talking about going to the bathroom. Does that make sense?

Therefore, finessing the joke just a little bit and making it about her frustrations takes the bathroom edge off the joke, but still leaves room for embarrassment and...

INCONGRUITY

Incongruity is the most common joke structure used in comedy today. It's been popular since the beginning of comedy. What is incongruity? Incongruity is basically imposing characteristics of one thing on to another thing that normally isn't recognized to possess those characteristics.

A simple way to do this might be to personify an animal, like when Jerry Seinfeld says,

"I don't think horses really know they're racing. I think horses are sitting at the starting gate thinking, 'I know there's a bag of oats at the end of this and I want to get there first.'"



We don't normally imagine a horse thinking like a human being. So when Jerry makes us imagine that, it's the INCONGRUITY of it that makes us laugh. Why? **Because incongruity creates surprise.**

In the earlier joke about the video poker app and the bathroom, you have two elements we normally don't put together ("Poker" and "the Bathroom") and in the joke I impose the characteristics of the bathroom onto the subject matter of poker, (I.E.: "straight flush!"), creating incongruity which leads to surprise, which triggers laughter.

Are you starting to see how this works?

There are so many different ways that you can use incongruity. Remember the television show "The Odd Couple?" We had two men

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sharing an apartment. One was a slob, the other was a neat freak. The differences between them or their "incongruities" was where the comedy came from.

Let's look at this from a more singular perspective:

The very talented actress, Annie Potts, was being interviewed recently about her upcoming sitcom called "GCB."



She talked about a scene where her character, a very petite upscale Southern Christian woman, shoots a shotgun several times.

She says in the interview, "There's something intrinsically funny about a petite woman shooting a shotgun."

The fact is: there's **incongruity** present and *that's* what makes it funny. The incongruity comes from the fact that we don't normally recognize a petite Southern Belle possessing the characteristics of a rogue redneck who normally lets his gun do the talking for him!

You can do this with anyone and create a comedic scene. Want to write some really quick, easy and yet powerful comedy? Try the exercise below:



EXERCISE

Here's a quick exercise in incongruity:

As a **quick exercise** think of three celebrities with defined characteristics and write them down. Then put them in a situation in which you would normally not see them and act them out.

- Imagine Comedian Chris Rock as a line judge for Wimbledon. How would he call the ball out?
- Arnold Schwarzenegger in a gay porn.
- Betty White as a foul-mouthed trucker. (Or why not give Betty White a shotgun and have her shoot at the tax man who wants to take her home in a tax audit).

See how easy that is?

Stretch it further:

- Imagine a Pimp at a baby shower.
- What about a hooker at a five star restaurant (Let's push it further: A ghetto-crack-whore at a Mormon church meeting)
- A New York 'Gumba' reading Mary Had A Little Lamb to a kindergarten class.
- A professional hockey player taking ballet classes
- A really klutzy guy on a first date with a smokin' hot chick
- A computer nerd dating a Sports Illustrated model

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- A super-hairy guy at a nude beach (or a waxing salon)

Notice how most of these “characters” are somewhat familiar to us. We may recognize similar characters in our own lives. Also notice how I put them in diametrically opposite situations or matched them with diametrically opposite people, (like with the computer nerd and the Sports Illustrated model).

Now take people from your own life who have definable traits like the ones above, and put them into situations that are opposite from their character traits.

Try to come up with five. Push yourself. Walk away if you have to but really try to start to identify with this concept. It will really help you in creating comic situations.

Remember to **KEEP IT SIMPLE.**

It is the simple incongruity that will make this funny. If you try too hard to “funny-it-up,” it will probably fail.

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You could do this all day. One of the easiest ways to get a laugh is to have a female senior citizen, talk about sex. I have a student in my class (the lovely Esther Hersh), in her seventies... (of course she'll never admit to it). But during her act she says:

"So now I'm dating, and dating is hard, mainly because my men aren't."

The simple juxtaposition of putting this senior citizen, woman in a sexual situation creates incongruity—that, along with the double entendre use of the word 'hard,' creates surprise, which triggers laughter!

More on this later...

RECOGNITION

So far in this e-book, I've given you 3 very powerful comedy structures to trigger human laughter. Now I'm going to give you one of the key formulas that is used by the richest—arguably the most successful comedian—in history; Jerry Seinfeld.

Seinfeld's calling card is observational humor. He is gifted at pointing at the visual nuances in our lives that we recognize and the moment we connect to that recognition, we laugh.

It's the simple **recognition** that triggers the laughter.

Recognition is really huge in this business because it actually will trigger a physical reaction from the audience. When they recognize something they will jerk in their seats, point at the stage and say things like, "I've done *that!*"

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When you get the audience that committed to your act, you are in the driver's seat.

So how do you do this?

Remember when we talked about the 3 types of comedians;
"Coincidental, Architects and Humorists," at the top of the page?

Well this particular laughter trigger element is probably mostly based in the first category, because if you think about it, you have to observe something in order to recognize it. But just by me mentioning it in this e-book, it will help you be more aware of the nuances of observation so that you can then be ready and prepared to write them down.

If your act has top notch, clear and poignant observations, the audience's recognition will be that much more graphic and acute. This usually leads to stronger laughs and bigger applause.



Quick Note: Be sure you carry a notebook and something to write with at all times. I still carry a notebook in my back pocket every single day. If you don't have a notebook, then a digital recorder or the recorder on your phone also is a great way to capture your notes.

Important: When you write something down, be sure to write the details of the event, not just a key word! From experience I can tell you, you probably won't remember the finer details. It is in the details, where the recognition is developed.

THERE ARE 5 PRIMARY RECOGNITION STRATEGIES:

1. **Physical Observations:** Observing behaviors of living creatures or inanimate objects.

"Why is it that you get artificial lemon flavor in food, but real lemon juice in dishwashing liquid?"

2. **Verbal Observations:** When see written words either on signs or billboards, or other advertisements or when a person says something that we've heard before but never thought about writing it down.

(**NOTE:** look for things that are quirky, ironic, or make no sense):

Has your girlfriend ever said to you: "I'm going to ask you something and you have to promise you won't get mad?" That's when you know you're in for a long night!

I saw a sign that said: "Authentic Chinese Cuisine - Se habla espanol."

I saw another sign that said: No Dogs Allowed. Except seeing-eye dogs. Who's that sign for?"

I was watching this commercial for laundry detergent it said,

"Our detergent does a better job getting blood out of your shirt than the leading detergent.' If you've got blood on your shirt, choosing the right detergent is the least of your problems."

3. **Personal Observations:** These are observations that occur in your more intimate world; home with relatives. They are observations that are unique to your life.

My wife came home from the store the other day with all these expensive new clothes. She starts out the conversation by saying. "Honey, you have no idea how much money I saved us!"

"When you're married, did you ever notice that her money is "her" money, but your money is "our" money?"

4. **Esoteric Observations:** General observations culled from small seemingly insignificant life events. Like the feeling you have when you lean back in a chair and it almost falls backwards, but you catch yourself or when you tighten the cap on a soda bottle and you pinch your finger, or...

When you're broke, online banking is just anxiety reinforcement. Every time you go online to check your balance there's that tension that builds up dreading what balance is going to be displayed on the website.

You ever notice that women who are against abortion, are women you wouldn't want to fuck anyway? - George Carlin

5. **Human Behavior:** Usually related to physical behavior of humans or animals. Football Players doing the celebration dance after a tackle. Guys will do push-ups before going out on a date.

You ever ask someone how they are doing and they respond by starting with a big, whiney sigh? You know it's going to be a long conversation...

The important thing to remember is that if you simply remember to write down your observation, then you can recall it later to the audience. The more specific you get, the more detail your description has, the more crystal clear the imagery is to the audience.

How come we press harder on the remote control when you know the battery is dead?

And the quicker an audience gets a clear image in their minds, the more instantaneous the laugh.

I cannot emphasize how important it is to get the specifics of the observation, especially when you're dealing with verbal nuances. If you say the phrase exactly right, it's the recognition that gets the laughs.

You ever notice when you're in your car you'll lean forward toward the stereo unit to hear better, even when the speakers are on the sides?

Take for example the line above about the blood stain in your shirt. When the announcer says "our detergent gets out blood stains better than the leading brand." Saying the words "leading brand" is exactly how an announcer would say such a thing. **Specifics are crucial.**

OTHER WAYS TO TRIGGER RECOGNITION LAUGHTER:

- Impressions
- Song Parodies
- Musical emulation
- Sound effects

You ever notice that if an impression is not good or a song is sung out of tune that the performance not only risks NOT being funny, but could totally destroy the credibility of the performer?

But if the impression resembles the character and the song is in key, it could take that act to a completely different level!

Impressions rock the house when done right because the audience **recognizes** the character and they are surprised that the comedian can do the voice so well.

Here's the great thing about doing voices: You don't necessarily have to do celebrity voices to get laughs. You could do your mother, father, cousin, clerk at the store, a gay person with a lisp...whatever.

If you totally nail that voice's nuances, (an accent, lisp, whiney sound, etc.), the audience will reward you with laughter and, on occasion, applause. And those are nice occasions to have!

So if you do a good voice or accent, think about building it into your act. But make sure you practice so you can NAIL the voice.

And don't forget:

The key to successful recognition is *specificity*.

A QUICK WORD regarding prop comedy, song parodies, impressions or doing comedy with an instrument...



There are a lot of comedians out there who frown fiercely on prop comedians, guitar comedians, impressionists or comedians who do song parodies. My thoughts on the matter or a very simple: if you feel that doing prop comedy, impressions, song

parodies or working with a musical instrument is being true to you, then by all means do it!

I honestly don't understand why any comedian would spend valuable time criticizing or putting down any other comic, regardless of if they use a prop in their act or musical instrument.

Scott Thompson, (a.k.a.: "Carrot Top," is a prop comic. A lot of comedians criticize him. And yet, Carrot Top is one of the highest-paid entertainers in the country today.

Instead of criticizing somebody like this, wouldn't it be more beneficial to learn from their successes; their tenacity, their business acumen, etc., than spend negative energy criticizing them simply for being a prop comic?

A WORD ON TIMING



If you were to ask comedians what triggers human laughter they might say something like, “timing is the most important thing in comedy.” Sure that sounds good, but what does that mean? How do you break down timing into an understandable process?

Other comedians say that you either have it or you don't. I don't believe in that. I've worked with comedy students of all kinds. I even work with a student who has brain damage. When we first started I thought to myself, “Wow! There is no way this is going to work. But we worked on it and worked on it, and you know what? He's developing his timing!



This taught me something very important:

Timing is a skill that can be taught!

Timing is not as complicated as one might think. Timing is more a listening technique than anything else.

Let me explain:

Comedy is about misdirection. It's about letting the audience assume you are going to say something... then at the last possible moment

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you say something else, thus shattering the image that you led them to believe you intended. The timing comes in when you give them a moment to see that image in their mind's eye before you shatter it.

"I've been losing my hair. Sometimes it really bothers me, like in the mornings when my wife is running her fingers through my hair...but I already left for work."

When I say "in the mornings when my wife is running her fingers through my hair..." I have to take a moment and allow the listener to get the image of me lying next to my wife in bed while she is running her fingers through my hair. Once they get that image (and it only takes a second), that's when I shatter that image by saying, "but I already left for work!"

Here's a simple trick you can do to help you develop that timing: When you do a set up like the one above, take a moment and sniff before you say the punch. This will help in learning how long you should wait to say the punch line. Use this in practice until you get comfortable with your own pacing. That small 'incidental' pause may help your timing.

Another important point when it comes to timing is sincerity. You must be engaged with real empathy toward your material. You should be honest in your expressions and really be emotionally connected to your material.

Think about this: Human beings are emotional beings. If you are honest about everything you are saying—even when you exaggerate the truth in your punch line, you are not only talking to your audience, you are also "emoting." And if you are doing it honestly two things occur:

1. You're audience connects with you emotionally.

2. Your honesty in your reactions and emotions will keep the 'timing' honest too.

Here's another exercise in timing:

Whenever you leave a message on someone's voice mail and you leave your phone number, be sure you say the number as you imagine the other person writing the number down.

If you do this, you will notice that you will actually slow your delivery of the number down automatically.

Not only will this little tid-bit help you to be more aware of your timing, it will help you develop more solid relationships, because when the person on the other end of the phone is writing that number down and they don't have to rewind to hear the number... they will THANK YOU!



But enough about that. Let's continue with the laughter triggers...

AMBIVALENCE

Ambivalence is a form of incongruity. Usually we use ambivalence in a comedy situation when we are expected to care about something but don't. It is the nature of not caring that is incongruent, and that surprises the audience and causes them to laugh. Let's look at a couple of examples of jokes that utilize ambivalence:

I remember the good ole days when kids worked in factories.

I was trying to teach my five-year-old how to tie her shoes. She was like, "Dad! I can't Dad, I can't! I said, "How many times I told you not to use that word? I am NOT your Dad."

When my mother got older she started having memory problems which was a boon for me on my birthday. She would give me a birthday card with \$100 bill in it. Then she'd say, "Jerry, did I give you your birthday card?" I look at her and say, "Uhhmm...No!"

If she was having a really bad day, I could net about a grand!"

As you can see, it is the ambivalence, the "not caring," that triggers the laughter. You have to be careful with this however, because if you pick on the wrong thing or the wrong person, you could elicit groans rather than laughs.

RELEASE

Release, is a more complicated laughter trigger. He ever see those movies where there's a group of business people in the conference room and one of the employees makes a joke, and there's a long pause as everybody looks at the boss, finally the boss laughs and then everybody else laughs too... This is a perfect example of release.

There was tension built up from the anxiety created by what the boss might think about what was said. Then, everybody laughed because the boss laughed, releasing the tension.

We also experience release when we discuss life's tragedies on stage in a way that plans to get to a laugh at the end of something very serious. In my act, I talk about my mother dying and how it sent me into a temporary tailspin:

... And when you go to any of these funeral events there's always that one guy who ask you "the question."

You know the one I'm talking about? That guy will come up to you and say, "What you want them to say about you at your funeral?"

And the guy came up to me, the son, and he said, "What do you want them to say about you at your funeral Jerry?" and I looked at him with tears in my eyes and I said, "What what do I want them to say about me at my funeral? I want them to say... 'Hey look! He's moving!'"

This story is told from a very personal point of view. The audience is rapt with emotion; my emotion. So when I finally get to the last line, they are so relieved that the line is funny, that they actually burst with laughter. This line, by the way, is almost always followed by applause.

That's the power of release.

The joke or comedy bit that is structured to trigger release has to be crafted very carefully but it can also elicit a pure emotional response from the audience; the kind of emotional response that sets you, the comedian, apart from everybody else.

Sometimes release can be triggered because the comedian is discussing a very sensitive topic.

I remember I wrote a Pope joke the day the Pope John Paul II died. I saw the story in the New York Times; I had just had to!

The audience, of course, was very sensitive about this so I had to craft the joke just right:

"You may have heard that the Pope died today. (Audience immediately builds tension) Now it doesn't matter whether you're Catholic, Jewish, Mormon, you cannot deny the commitment John Paul had to his faith. He was an amazing man. But he died and the article in the New York Times was saying that tens of thousands of people were praying for the Pope...what are they praying for? That he'll go to Heaven? Because if the Pope needs that kind of assistance to get to Heaven, the rest of us are screwed!" (Laughter and applause)



You can probably see that the laughter and applause triggered from this joke comes both from the structure of the joke; the idea that the Pope, one the most holy men in the world, would actually need help from the common man, to get into Heaven, and the release of the audience's tension caused from their concern about what I was going to say about the

recently deceased Pope.

Release, as a laughter trigger can be very powerful because it is attached to the audience's emotions and if the joke is executed effectively the payoff received from the audience can be profound and powerful!

Some ideas and subjects that may create tension and provide the opportunity to trigger the release mechanism are:

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- Death
- Abortion
- Kids
- Religion
- Rape
- Politics
- Gun rights
- Racism
- Sexual Preference (Gay rights)
- Tragedies (9-11, Nuclear Disaster, Holocaust, etc.)
- The Bible
- The Quran

Jokes that trigger the release mechanism aren't attacks, necessarily. They are jokes designed to appear as attacks and the mere surprise created by fact that they don't attack is what triggers the release. It's a complex joke writing technique, but worth the effort because it provides a profound audience response and gets them thinking.

"Don't just make them laugh, make them think..." –George Carlin

SUPERIORITY

One of the most universal laughter triggers in our human psyche. Thankfully, (well, certainly for comedys' sake), we are a very insecure species. We are always worried about how we are being perceived. Our self-image is so important to us that we constantly need assurance that we are not just okay, but there are other people out there worse off than us.

Don't think you fit into this? Ask yourself this question: when I am introduced to someone, do I have problems remembering their name, even right after the introduction?

If that happens to you—and, don't worry, it happens to everyone, then you suffer from a common ailment known as "being human."

There is a reason that we run into this problem. Some people are good at remembering those names, but it usually takes practice and self-awareness. The reason we forget the name so quickly is because our brains are usually sub-consciously so preoccupied with how the person we are being introduced to perceives us, that we aren't in the state of mind to register and record their name in our brain.

So we all suffer from a level of insecurity. Why is this a good thing? Because we can use it in comedy to create laughter.

Since we know this exists we can exploit it, turn it on its head and use it as a tool! A very cool tool. *(Read about it in my upcoming book, "How To Take Social Disorders and Turn Them Into Comedy Gold!")

Superiority is used in many ways:

- Self-deprecating humor
- Insult humor
- Attacking the status-quo
- Picking on authority
- Putting down a heckler
- Attacking an ex who did us wrong
- Making fun of the know-it-all
- Making fun of a celebrity who deserves it

One of the easiest ways to use superiority—and one of my favorites—is to self-deprecate, (make fun of myself).

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Anytime I say something that makes me superior in the joke or story I'm telling, I say something almost immediately to bring myself down or knock myself down a peg. That makes the audience feel superior and it also lets them know that I don't take myself too seriously.

A cop pulled me over and said, "You know how fast you were going?" I said, "You think at that speed, I'm gonna risk taking my eyes off the road to check the speedometer?"

He said, "Oh, you wanna play around?" I said, "Does that mean I have to dress like a sheep...?"

...so, when I regained consciousness..."

Saying, "...so, when I regained consciousness..." implies that the cop used his Billy club to knock me out and with what I said, I probably deserved it. That action humbled me, but makes the audience feel superior!

CONFIGURATIONAL

For quite some time experts didn't think that the configurational theory of laughter was applicable to commercially accepted comedy, but I'm here to tell you that it is alive and well. If Jon Stewart's "Daily Show" is considered commercially acceptable, then it's more than acceptable, it is a hit.

Configurational theorists argue that the humor occurs when unconnected ideas fall into place and in that moment, make sense. It's what I would call an "Ah-ha!" moment. It is the solving of the puzzle that gets an audience to laugh. Jon Stewart is a master at this style of material. It requires work to carefully lay out the pieces so that they come together.

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I used it with a joke I did about the car from Yugoslavia called the Yugo...

"You know why they call it the "Yugo?" Because when you get to a hill, it cuts out; you shut it off, you get out and YOU go up the hill."

Ponderables fall into this category:

"If you drove your car at the speed of sound, could you hear your stereo?"



Steven Wright uses a configurational approach to trigger laughter:

"I saw a sign that said "Rest Area One Mile..." I thought, "Wow that's huge!"

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With that joke above, what he means is that he perceives the sign to mean the rest area is one full mile. That would, indeed be a huge rest area!

Mitch Hedberg was another comedian who absolutely loved utilizing configurational laugh triggers:

A waffle is like a pancake with a syrup trap

Every book is a children's book, if the kid can read.

I would imagine that if you could understand Morse code, a tap dancer would drive you crazy.

I could read Mitch Hedberg all day. He makes me laugh!

He had a huge following, all by making people put the pieces together to solve his laughter puzzles... and to think that some comedy gurus don't think that configuration is useful in contemporary comedy today!

*Have you heard of the new dating website called sex-
istentialist dot com? When you meet someone you like, you
don't go out; you just jump to the part where you stop
returning each other's emails. – Joe Dungan*

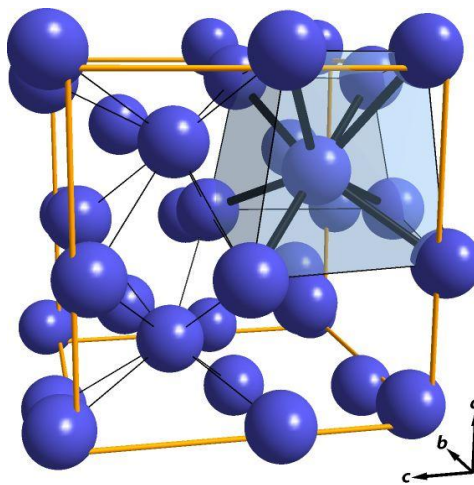
That covers the eight major laughter triggers. Who would've thought that a look into your brain could be so painless.

You should be feeling like you're beginning have a fuller understanding of how comedy, when properly constructed, can achieve the goal of getting people to spontaneously laugh. But understanding the way the brain works with laughter triggers is just the beginning.

Now that we understand the eight major reasons humans laugh, let's move on to how to develop and trigger these elements of laughter by utilizing the Twelve Major Comedy Structures when writing and performing our comedy.

PART 5

12 COMEDY STRUCTURES



12 COMEDY STRUCTURES

What if I was to tell you that every comedian who ever made you laugh uses one of 12 major comedy structures to reach their goal of getting a laugh, whether they know it or not?

You might think I'm crazy. Well, in my studies over the last 26 years, I have found that from Lenny Bruce to Jerry Seinfeld, from Dave Chappelle to David Steinberg, no matter what comedian you're talking about, whenever they make you laugh, one or more of these 12 major comedy structures is present in their presentation.

Let's move forward and take a look.

Now, you will have an opportunity to study these structures and master them so that you can willfully apply them in your writing. It takes time, but when you truly study and learn the structures in this book you will be saving years of study through the traditional comedians' educational path; which previously was simply trial and error.

For years comedians and humor writers have argued that there are only a few jokes. What they mean by that is that there are only a few types of joke structures or formulas. These are like a musician's scales. You learn to play them and you can build any song of any variety, with them. In your case you'll be building comedic bits, stories and acts.

You'll notice that the underlying framework of most comedic formulas is to **set up an assumption and shatter the assumption**. Or create *surprise* by making the audience think that you are going to say or do one thing, then doing another. Most comedy formulas have this underlying element of shattering an assumed expectation to get a laugh using the following formulas:

DOUBLE ENTENDRES

Double entendre simply means: “two meanings.” These are the plays on words that utilize the intended meaning of a word then spin it to play the alternate or comedic meaning of the word.

Example:

John McKay, former head coach of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers was having a horrible season. The team couldn't do anything right. During a press conference after a loss, the press asked McKay a question: "What are your thoughts on the execution of the offense?" McKay responded, "I'd be okay with that."

From the example above, did you get the image of pressroom, and the head coach sitting at the table behind a microphone? Do you understand how Coach McKay used the comedic meaning of the word “execution” to get a laugh from the press’s intended meaning of the word?

Press’s intended meaning of “execution”: how the offense “ran” the play.

McKay’s comedic interpretation of “execution”: To kill (or, in this case, put out of their misery).

Could you see how this double entendre formula could be used in script writing in a variety of scenes using different subject matter? We can create dialogue and have one character express themselves with an intended meaning of a word, then have the other character play that keyword with a comedic meaning.

The legendary Steven Wright used this joke:

"This morning, my girlfriend asked me if I slept good. I said, "No, I made a few mistakes."

BREAKING DOWN THE "GEEZ" JOKE FROM PAGE 16

In the section about "3 Types of Comedians," I use the "Geez" joke as an example of crafting a joke from a single word:

'My wife is large breasted. She thought I was psychic when I first met her because I guessed her cup size. Yeah, she walked in the room and I went, "GEEZ!" I was so awestruck, I named them; (pointing to the left breast) Mary...(pointing to the right breast)--ME!'"

Here's the process of how I developed that joke:

1. **IDENTIFY:** When my writing partner Rob Rose said the word "Geez," I found it unusual. I decided I wanted to make a joke about it.
2. **DEFINE:** Taking the word "Geez" and isolating it I decide that it has multiple meanings: I ask "What else can "Geez" be?"
 - a. could be G-spot
 - b. could be G-Force
 - c. could be G-money
 - d. could be G (as in a Grand \$1000)
 - e. could be plural for the letter G...as in G's.
3. **IMAGINE:** Immediately my mind goes to G's as in breast size. (I'm a guy... that's just the way I am!)

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4. **CREATE:** Once I decided to go with G's (as in breast size), I had to brainstorm (make up) a scenario where it would make sense in a story. Since my wife is large-breasted (She actually has a G-Cup), I had to imagine *what if* I used the word "Geez" on her? What could her response be?
5. **DECIDE:** I decided that most double-entendre scenarios have the *comedian* or *comedy writer* coming up with the alternate meaning of the keyword to create surprise. Instead, I thought that if I made my wife the one that misunderstood the word usage, it makes me less of a sexist, but still surprises the audience with the double meaning of the word "Geez!"
6. **WRITE:** I write several drafts of the joke with different outcomes. Until I finally settle on the one you see above. Notice how important the words "cup size" are in the joke. Because the letter G refers to the cup size of a bra, it really enhances the connection when I finally say the word, "Geez!" In fact, one might argue that without the "cup size" in the setup, the audience risks not getting the joke at all.

It is the simple Double Entendre structure that gets the laugh in that joke.

NOTE: Notice I said "several drafts" of the joke. Most good jokes require at least a few rewrites until the writer finally settles on what he thinks is the best version. Don't be afraid of rewriting. Each joke you write, you should ask yourself, "can this be funnier?"

REVERSES

Reverses trick the audience by a last second switch in the point of view. A reverse is achieved by the comedian or writer creating an expectation of a certain outcome, then making the audience believe

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that the outcome is imminent, only to blast that expectation into oblivion; sometimes in a very blatant and exaggerated way.

"I woke up in the hotel and the housekeeper was banging on the door, just banging...finally, I had to get up and let her out!"

I was trying to teach my daughter how to tie her shoes and she's like: "I can't Dad, I can't! I said, "How many times have I told you not to use that word... I am not your Dad!"

I went to my girlfriend's house to beg her to take me back. I was banging on the door, yelling, "Stacy! Stacy!—which is weird, 'cuz her name is Emily.

TRIPLES

Also known as *the 3-way build up*. They build tension and manipulate the framework of a sentence toward an expected result by using two seemingly logical words or phrases, followed by a third exaggeration. The first two words create expectation as to the possible outcome of the situation, then the third word or phrase is the surprise, which changes the expected outcome.

Did you know that "Synistriphobia" is the fear of having something to your left side."

Dextraphobia" is the fear of having something to your right side.

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What's the fear of having something behind you? I guess they call that "Homophobia."

Or this triple, the one that got me a job writing for Jay Leno and the Tonight Show:

Oahu, Hawaii lost power to the entire island recently. Yeah, Traffic lights were out, court buildings were shut down, and a vacationing Don King was seen with flat hair.

INCONGRUITY

Incongruity is a favorite of comedians today. It pairs two logical, but unconventional ideas and imposes the values of one thing on to another thing that doesn't usually fit; otherwise known as juxtaposing contrasting elements. It's the surprising result that actually seems to make sense that gets the audience to laugh.

"I saw a Chinese Restaurant with a sign that said, "Authentic Chinese Cuisine—Se Habla Espanol."

The incongruity formula is one of the most popular formulas in comedy today. Comedians use it all the time when they give a human quality to inanimate objects. Jerry Seinfeld, for example:

"I don't think horses know they are racing. I think the horses are standing there thinking. "I know there's a bag of oats at the end of this trail and I want to get there first."

Sometimes you can create an incongruous relationship by introducing a second idea by using an analogy:

"You ever see a girl who's so pretty, you're afraid to make eye contact? She's like the Medusa; you're afraid that you'll turn to stone—or something will get hard!"

SIMPLE TRUTH

It states a truth then responds to it with something unexpected and usually silly by using the literal meaning of a phrase.

Call me a taxi...

Okay, you're a taxi!

Person A: Say the magic words

Person B: The – Magic – Words

"My father was a bastard! He wasn't a bad guy; he just didn't know his Father."

My wife was pregnant and...

I said to my wife, "how you feeling?" She said, "I'm having some gas pains..." and I said, Babe, everyone is; it's like four-dollars a gallon!"

Or when the simple truth comes after the explanation...

"I don't know why people have a problem legalizing marijuana. People even smoked weed in the bible. It says right there that people were getting stoned to death."

SUPERIORITY

Superiority encourages the audience to feel superior to silly thoughts or actions, ie: self-deprecation, attacking authority (cops, politicians, etc.), or attacking people that think they are better than others.

"I saw this guy at the coffee shop and he had this big wallet tucked into his shorts...you know those big wallets with the chain connected to it and then the chain connects to the pants—like someone's going to try to steal it from him in the first place? Connected to the chain were some keys.

Well his shorts kept coming down and he looked really uncomfortable. So I said, "Dude, you know you have a pocket on the right side of your pants. Maybe you could put your wallet there." He was like, "Then my keys would be on my right side."

I'm like, "So?"

"Then you're a fag!"

"What?! You mean if you wear your keys on your left side, you're straight, but if you wear your keys on the right side you're gay?"

He said, "That's right."

I said, "Dude, where I come from, if you wear keys at all...you're a janitor!"

PAIRED PHRASES

This is a comedy structure that utilizes the rhythms of antonyms homonyms and synonyms in a comparison fashion. What's important is the phrasing of the joke. The order in which the lines appear in the setup as compared to the punch is important for the joke to have maximum impact.

Presidents Obama, Clinton and Bush joined together to raise money for the victims of the earthquake in Haiti. But they will be going under the nicknames of "HOPE," "GROPE," and "DOPE."

Notice in the first joke that the punch words "hope," "grobe," and "dope" are written in the same order as the Presidents. That structure is essential to the audience being able to connect each president to their intended descriptor.

This is also a modification of the compare and contrast formula in that with some forms of the joke, the writer is comparing the first part of the sentence to the second.

Or this one from my students, Patrick Kanehan:

"You know the L.A. Times recently said that you could buy happiness for seventy-five thousand a year. I'll take mildly pissed off for thirty-five."

SLAPSTICK

That uses physical comedy and "stupidity" to make the audience feel superior by "acting out" the joke. Today's slapstick differs from the slapstick of the 1930's through 1960's. We don't hit

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people in the head with ball-peen hammers to elicit a laugh, although some people think it might be funny to take a nail gun to the face of Charlie Sheen—considering how bad he looks lately, would it make any difference?

RECOGNITION

Also known as observational comedy; When you discover something we do in our everyday lives and put it under a magnifying glass reliving it for the audience with a little exaggeration. Observational humor is very powerful. Especially when you really key in on something that is recognizable by your audience. You can observe everyday things, signs, or commercials or complications:

Instructions for plugging in a USB jack: Attempt to plug in. Turn over, attempt to plug in again...turn over, attempt to plug in again.

Is it me or is removing the cellophane from a CD just a practical joke?

How come dogs never have boogers in their noses, yet they have boogers in their eyes? Why? And don't their noses remind you of little electrical outlets? You just want to plug things in.

You ever blow your nose and it is so successful, you just want to do it again?

...and why do we always look at the handkerchief after we blow our nose?

I saw this commercial, it said, "Ex-Lax, works overnight by 8am... what if you oversleep?"

You ever see that commercial for Cialis? It says, "If you experience an erection that lasts more than four hours, call your doctor. Hey, if I experience an erection that lasts more than four hours, I'm calling everyone."

Recognizing behaviors

The best comedians also remember to include behaviors. When identifying recognizable humor in their everyday lives. I remember watching George Carlin on The Tonight Show with Johnny Carson (I have to mention Johnny, because Tonight with Jay is just NOT the same program.), George came on and did a bit about the difference between how dogs and cats blink. I found myself laughing pretty hard at the cat as I said aloud, "that is so true!" That's when I knew it was an important comedy structure.

Dear Abby, this guy I've been seeing has gotten me pregnant. I want to have an abortion but I'm not sure our relationship is at the level to discuss money..." When his dick went into your vagina...the relationship reached that level!

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Boyfriend Girlfriend – you know you're in for a long night when your girlfriend says to you, "Can I tell you something and you promise not to get mad?"

My mother is eccentric: she called the other day and was like, "I think your sister's ex-husband wants to kill her." I said, "Mom, did you call the police?" She's like, "No, he still owes her money!"

Ever see someone come out of their house and they forget something? They always SNAP! Their fingers, turn around and go back. That's because it would look really stupid if they just did this: (ACT-OUT: Walk one way, turn back)

COMPARE & CONTRAST

This is when you impose surprise on the reader or listener by making a statement that implies complexity then going simple. They think you're getting "all technical on them" then you pull the rug out by being as simple as possible.

"I know that I have complex skin...my boyfriend is pretty sure he has a face" – Cathy Ladman

"I just broke up with my girlfriend. We had to, we were just not compatible. You see, I am a Capricorn and she was a...bitch."

COMEDIC IRONY

Humor was probably invented by a Neanderthal who tripped over a log to amuse his cavemates, then fell into the fire and burned to death, thereby inventing irony as well. – David Misch

Let's look at comedic irony. Irony has taken on different meanings over the years. If we were to look at the dictionary's definition of irony, we would find a different definition than the definition most commonly applied in comedy.

- the expression of one's meaning by using language that normally signifies the opposite, typically for humorous or emphatic effect: “*Don't* go overboard with the gratitude,” he rejoined with heavy irony
- a state of affairs or an event that seems deliberately contrary to what one expects and is often amusing as a result: [*with clause*] : the irony is that I thought he could help me
- (also **dramatic** or **tragic irony**) a literary technique, originally used in Greek tragedy, by which the full significance of a character's words or actions are clear to the audience or reader although unknown to the character.

Comedy uses the definition that is more suited to “dramatic irony.” Dramatic irony usually associates itself—like in Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet—whereas a situation occurs that is a surprise that will undo or affect the main character. What makes it ironic is that someone—the audience—or another individual or character entity in the story knows about it.

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For example, in "Romeo and Juliet," Romeo finds Juliet and believes she is dead. So torn apart is Romeo, that he kills himself. But what he doesn't know is that Juliet took a potion that made her *appear* to be dead and instead, she is in a deep sleep. Juliet awakes to find that Romeo is dead and kills *herself*. How's that for a love story?!

One of the problems with irony in comedy is that it can be a bit of a puzzle for the audience. You need to have an audience that is 'tuned in' for comedy. Irony does not contain "hit-you-over-the-head" surprise like a good reverse. So when you use irony in humor construction, it'll usually bring about a subtle response, unless it's poignant or profound. As in the audience is amazed at the discovery where they are thinking "Wow, what a coincidence!"

In the classic story of Oedipus Rex, unaware that he was adopted, unknowingly fulfilled a prophecy of killing his father and marrying his mother.

Irony is often found in riddles:

I'm sure you all remember this joke/riddle,

"A boy and his father are involved in a tragic car accident in which the boy's father is killed instantly. The boy, holding on to his life by a thread is rushed to the hospital triage. The surgeon walks in and says, 'I cannot operate on this child; he is my son.'"

Barry grew up in a poor neighborhood. "I was poor. In our neighborhood it was common for the men to have one family on one side of town and another family on the other side of town. I didn't meet my sister 'til I was 16...we was on our third date."

Another example of irony is when we can take an authority and reveal a level of hypocrisy or one-hundred-and-eighty-degree incongruity.

Here's an example from another student of mine, David Conolly:

"My father has one of the toughest jobs in the world. He's a priest at a mental hospital...

Think about it; his job as a priest was to teach people that there is (pointing to the heavens), someone watching them at all times.

And his congregation—were there in the mental hospital because they believed that someone is watching them at all times..."

George Carlin was a pretty popular comedian, (I use that term lightly...). He used comedic irony all the time. One of his classic opening lines:

"You ever realize that the women who are against abortion are women you wouldn't want to fuck anyway?!"

One of my students Vicki Godal used this line:

"You ever realize that people who don't believe in climate change; they think it's just part of the earth's natural evolution, don't believe in evolution?"

You can see that comedic irony is often used to make a profound statement. You can use it a lot to pick on the status quo. One reason is

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that they are so busy being the status quo, they make stupid, easily refutable statements:

"Focus on the Family founder, James Dobson, said this gem the other day. He said, 'If we allow gays to parent, they will raise gay children.' 'We interrupt this comedy show, to bring you a special bulletin...straight parents have been raising gay children for centuries...'"

BENIGN RETALIATION

This is a formula I've been working on for many years now. Just as the planet Pluto was removed as a planet and called a "minor planet," because it lacked certain criteria, 'Benign Retaliation,' had all the elements necessary to be included as a full-blown Joke Formula.

It's one of my favorites because the nature of this formula makes it a complete story with an antagonist and a protagonist, (the performer could be either). Usually, this formula used in joke or story-telling makes the audience root for the protagonist. We want him or her to win by getting back at the person that did him wrong.

Humans love pay back. We love to get back at somebody who has done us wrong, or led us astray, or gave us bad information or lied to us *without really shooting them stabbing them or otherwise causing them bodily harm*. If we do cause them bodily harm, it is usually done in fantasy using a "what if" scenario. Benign Retaliation is very powerful in comedy because it attacks out of revenge, which is almost the precise reason we do comedy.

Let's take a look at some examples of Benign Retaliation:

One of my students, wrote this one:

"I come home from work one night and my wife is frantically cleaning the house. I'm like, "Honey, what's going on? We expecting company? She's like, "Yeah, tomorrow! The housekeeper!" I'm like, "why are you cleaning? That's what she's for! It's job security!"

I love my wife, so I helped her clean...but I got her back.

Saturday morning I set the alarm for 6 am. I pop out of bed. She says, "What's going on?" I said, "Get up. We gotta mow the lawn...Gardeners are going to be here in an hour!"

You can see clear retaliation in that joke. Audiences love this type of humor. They relate to it instantly, because it's something they recognize and it's something they can use in their own lives...also, it becomes a complete story. There is a protagonist and an antagonist, there is a beginning, middle and end, and there's tension that resolves in our hero winning. These types of stories often result in an **applause break**.

Here's one I used about an ex-girlfriend. It's pretty harsh, so the reaction from the audience would vary depending on how I delivered it:

"I had this girlfriend who used to try to put me down all the time by picking on my weaknesses. She'd be like, "I can't believe you eat veal! I can't believe you don't like wine! I can't believe you don't like Yoga!" Finally, I said, "I can't believe your Daddy touched your pussy, but I don't bring that up!"

If you think about it, you can probably find tons of benign retaliation stories in your life that you can use in your comedy.

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You ever get into a discussion with your significant other, or someone at the bank, and you think of what you *should have said* after the discussion. That's one way to come up with this type of material.

"One time I was with a girl who cheated on me. Halloween rolled around and she said, "I don't know what to pretend to be for Halloween." I said, "Why don't you just dress normally and pretend to be someone who's in a committed relationship?"

Are you starting to see how a lot of good material comes from real life and real pain?

PART 6

Creating Comedy Using Surprise

Comedy is a lot like magic. When an illusionist misdirects you and makes you think a coin is in his hand and then he suddenly reveals that it has vanished and reappeared behind your ear, we giggle, because we were surprised.

When a comedian misdirects you and makes you think he's going to say one thing and then he suddenly changes direction and says another, we also giggle or laugh. Why? Because we were surprised. It's the same thing, but with words or actions.

There are several different ways to use surprise to make an audience laugh. Let's look at the three most popular:

- Double Entendre
- Reverse
- Triples

DOUBLE ENTENTRE

Double entendre is a form of word play. The majority of humor since the beginning of time is based on a play on words. Double entendre means *two* or more meanings. Often we use a double entendre to fool the listener by implying a straightforward meaning of a word, then intentionally playing the meaning of the word another way, usually it's risqué or ironic.

A sexy woman is slicing up a cake. She says to the man, "would you like a piece?" He says, "Absolutely, and I'll also take some cake..."

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Clearly the meaning of the word "piece" had two different meanings in that scenario. One was straightforward, the other was sexual. There are three important reasons the audience laughs at this.

1. The listener is surprised at the second interpretation of the meaning.
2. The meaning is also so well suited to the second interpretation of the word, the coincidence created by that is funny.
3. We were using a sexual connotation which tends to create embarrassment.

It is important that the word be suitable for both interpretations in this case. If it's not, the intended joke won't be funny.

It's very common to turn a double entendre play into a sexual connotation. Psychologically it's a way for us to have fun with the meaning of the word and be allowed to "misbehave" and convey an "indelicate" meaning to a word. If it's done in fun and in the proper context and the proper situation, then you could have some fun with it...

A couple is sitting in front of the television watching the amateur singing competition, "*American Idol*." A sexy girl is singing horribly off-key...

WIFE: (Referring to singer)
Somebody should get her off!
HUSBAND: I'd like to get her off!

WIFE: I tell you what; you learn to get me off, then you can get her off.



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You can see here that the meaning of the phrase “get her off,” had two meanings. In the first straightforward meaning, it was referring to the woman getting off the stage. In the second more risqué or comedic meaning, it was something more sexual.

This type of word play is fun and you can probably do it all day—but if you did it all day you or your spouse would probably be exhausted. (See what we did? We played with the phrase “do it”).

Seriously, you could play with it forever! (more here, huh?)

All kidding aside, you could manipulate these phrases 'til the cows came home and when they did you might ask yourself, why is the yard filled with manure?!

The great thing about the double entendre play is that you can use it for non-sexual and non-scatological word-play too:

So many of our words have multiple meanings. As a comedian or humorist, it is up to you to stay sharp and be aware of the possibilities in everyday situations...

When you're checking out at the grocery store the clerk will often say, “Did you find everything you were looking for?”

What does the clerk mean by “*everything*”? They most likely mean, “Did you find everything you were looking for in the store, right? But what can the humorist or comedian mean by “*everything*?”

The meaning of life...

Love...

Prosperity... etc.

So that question could open up a possibility to play with the phrase. So next time the clerk asks you,

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"Did you find everything you were looking for?"

You can respond:

*"Well, I found the wine and the cheese, but I couldn't find a soul mate.
You had Mahi-Mahi, but I'm not into twins!"*

This is all double entendre usage. There are so many different ways you can use double entendre word play. These are just a few!

George Carlin was a master at word play. He could do his entire act on it. He would say something like, *"Remember, on T.V. you can say that you pricked your finger, but you can't say you fingered your prick."*

I was at the mall and I ran into my girlfriend in the parking lot. Really screwed up the front end of my car!

This is another example of not being able to save the punch for the last possible word. Even though car is technically the punch word, "front end" begins to give it away...but it's still an effective joke.

If you really want to see a great double entendre word play rant, take a moment and read this next page on the word "UP." I'd love to give credit for it but the closest I can come to that is to say that it was sent to me by a student and I thought it was such a great example that it should be shared...

“UP”

This two-letter word in English has more meanings than any other two-letter word, and that word is ' **UP** '. It is listed in the dictionary as an [adv], [prep], [adj], [n] or [v].

It's easy to understand **UP** , meaning toward the sky or at the top of the list, but when we awaken in the morning, why do we wake **UP** ?

At a meeting, why does a topic come **UP** ? Why do we speak **UP** , and why are the politicians **UP** for election (if there is a tie, it is a toss **UP**) and why is it **UP** to the secretary to write **UP** a report?

We call **UP** our friends, brighten **UP** a room, polish **UP** the silver, warm **UP** the leftovers and clean **UP** the kitchen. We lock **UP** the house and fix **UP** the old car.

At other times, this little word has real special meaning . People stir **UP** trouble, line **UP** for tickets, work **UP** an appetite, and think **UP** excuses.

To be dressed is one thing but to be dressed **UP** is special.

And this **UP** is confusing: A drain must be opened **UP** because it is blocked **UP**.

We open **UP** a store in the morning but we close it **UP** at night. We seem to be pretty mixed **UP** about **UP**!

To be knowledgeable about the proper uses of **UP**, look **UP** the word **UP** in the dictionary. In a desk-sized dictionary, it takes **UP** almost 1/4 of the page and can add **UP** to about thirty definitions.

If you are **UP** to it, you might try building **UP** a list of the many ways **UP** is used. It will take **UP** a lot of your time, but if you don't give **UP** , you may wind **UP** with (**UP** to) a hundred or more.

When it threatens to rain, we say it is clouding **UP** .

When the sun comes out, we say it is clearing **UP** .

When it rains, it soaks **UP** the earth.

When it does not rain for awhile, things dry **UP** .

One could go on and on, but I'll wrap it **UP** , for now ... my time is **UP**!

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Oh ... one more thing: What is the first thing you do in the morning
and the last thing you do at night?

U

P!

Did that one crack you **UP** ?

Don't screw **UP**.

Now I'll shut **UP**!

For a good example of using word play. Watch George Carlin's
["Modern Man"](#) routine.

.....



EXERCISE

RANDOM WORDS

What's The Meaning Of This?

I think one of the most impressive things and sometimes frustrating things about our English language is that we have so many words in the language that have multiple meanings. This is a treasure-trove for comedians and humor writers. You can literally take almost any common word and find several meanings for it. This will allow you the power to take the intended meaning of a word and spin it to the surprise meaning in response and, if it's done in the right way, trigger laughter.

An exercise I do about once a month is I take 15 random words, (the more common, the better) and I write them down on a page. Then I spend time finding at least five different meanings for each word. This allows me to be really sharp, not only in the moment, but in conversation too.

Try it! Here's an example:

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Fly	House	Fish
Everything	Crowd	Push
Pull	Carry	Passport
Damn	Spot	Carriage
Face	Milk	Ring

Here's what you do for this exercise
Collect 15 random words. I like to use simple, "everyday" words, because they are most likely to appear in conversation or be used in random sentence.

For this exercise I've collected the random words for you. Take each word and find 5 different meanings for each. When you find it getting hard, keep going until you get five.

Work through those blocks and get used to pushing passed that point. This will ultimately make you better writer and the one the executives depend on in a writer's room to come up with the joke when nobody else can.

Have Fun!

Example:

I'll do the first one for you...

Fly:

To fly a kite.

If you wearing pants you can leave your fly open.

The common house fly.

The flywheel on an engine

As a jet flies. (It's different than flying a kite)

A "fly boy" is what they used to call pilots in the Airforce.

"You buy, I'll fly" meaning if you provide the money, I'll drive to the store and buy it.

A word to the wise:

Most comedians don't like to do the work to get better. We are in such a hurry to get to the jokes that we forget to hone our rudimentary skills. But with just a little effort every month, this random word exercise can make you razor-sharp-ready to identify a possible humorous play in almost any sentence.

Very Useful Tool:

I used to use a dictionary to find random words, but now I use a random word generator. You can find this tool by visiting this link:

[Random Word Generator](#)



THE REVERSE

Another way to create surprise is to use a comedy structure known as the **Reverse**.

The reverse is probably the most crystallized misdirection formula; meaning you hit the laugh hard by changing the anticipated word or action at the last second and it gets a committed, "triggered" laugh from the audience.



"I woke up in the hotel room and the housekeeper's banging on the door, just banging. Finally I had to get up and let her out."

The key with the reverse is to leave the sudden change or switch for the very last word or as close to the end as possible.

After the show last night I got a blow job. It wasn't really a blow job, it was a hand job and it wasn't that great because he had calluses.

You can see that in the above joke, the surprise word is "he," but it was difficult to get to the punch without adding words at the end after the punch word.

These are all good examples of the joke still being effective even though the punch word isn't the last word.

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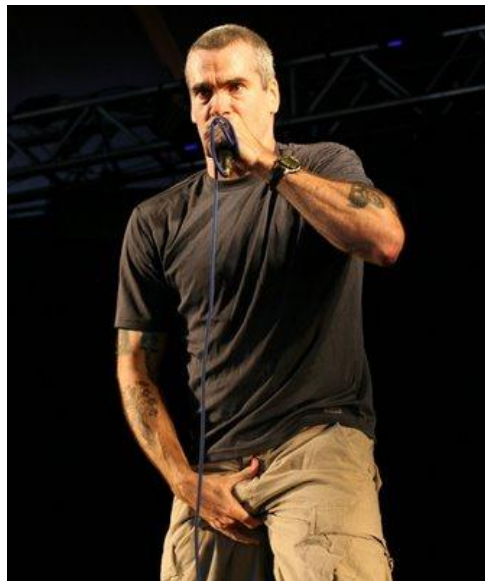
The key with the REVERSE is that the comedian or humorist sets up the audience with an assumption or anticipation, then completely shatters that assumption by changing the anticipated direction of the conversation in the last instant...

I'm trying to teach my five-year-old how to tie her shoes. She's like, "I can't, Dad. I can't." I said, "How many times have I told you not to use THAT WORD? I am NOT your Dad."

REVERSE - ACT-OUT

A reverse doesn't just have to rely on words to misdirect and lead us to surprise. It can also be actions. When a performer uses actions it is usually called an "act-out" in comedy. It's when you actually take on the persona of the person (it could be yourself) and you act it out. My very first joke was based on the REVERSE ACT-OUT comedy structure.

It went something like this:



"I was in New York recently. People talk differently in New York. Yeah, there was this person across the street yelling, 'Hey Bobby, Hey, yo, eh, huh?' (and I would grab my crotch.) 'Joey! Hey, yo, eh huh,' (and I would grab my crotch). 'Hey Tony! Hey, yo, eh, huh?!' (And I'd grab my crotch.) Then I would look at the audience and say, "And these are the women!"

Even today when I demonstrate that joke in classes, it gets a laugh. It is a **very simple template** for the reverse formula. The great thing is with the reverse/act-out structure, you are automatically disguising the misdirection; which, in this case is, pretending it's a man, then surprising them that it's a woman, because the audience is into the performance and the character.

DEFINITIVE VS. ASSUMPTIVE

You might be saying, 'that's fine, Jerry, but how do I write that from scratch? How do I get that joke to happen?

It's the job of the comedian to be aware of what the structures are and how they work. Once you have a grasp of the concept of how to misdirect and surprise an audience or a reader with the reverse structure, then you can write and either identify the reverse possibility in an existing sentence, or finesse the sentence to be a great set up line for a reverse by changing it from a definitive sentence to an assumptive sentence...

What the Hell does that mean, Jerry?

I'll tell you—better yet, I'll show you!

One of my students wrote this joke:

"I've been getting hot flashes lately and sometimes they're really bad. The other night I'm home, the kids are asleep and I get this really bad hot flash. I tore off all my clothes. My husband almost had a heart attack...Thank God we weren't at Ralph's, (a local grocery store chain)."

This is a good *concept* and the idea is funny, but it's not quite a solid joke. We need more of a surprise. So we ask, what's definite in that sentence that we can change to assumed? In the second sentence she says, "I'm home."

Can we imply that she is home without saying it? Sure, we can. After some revisions, the joke could look like this:

"I've been getting hot flashes lately and sometimes they're really bad. The other night the kids are asleep and I get this really bad hot flash. I tore off all my clothes. My husband almost had a heart attack...because we were at Ralph's, (a local grocery store chain)."

See how we removed "I'm home?" Now it's a joke. We assume in the beginning that she's at home. But we don't say it...

Let me share this endeavor to write another reverse joke.

My baby was 9 months old and I was holding her. She started pulling my chest hair. I thought it would make a good premise for a joke, so I wrote down in my notebook:

"My nine-month-old loves to play with my chest hair."

With that line right there we have all we need to craft a joke. In fact, we have too much, because it's pretty well-defined. What's the definitive in this case?

The definitive would be that it's *my* chest hair. So let's change that to an assumptive...

"You know what my baby loves to play with? Chest hair. She'll really yank on it too. Finally I said to my wife, (pointing at her chest), 'You might want to get that shit lasered.'"

So basically I created an assumption that it was *my* chest hair that my baby loves to play with. In the end, I pointed at my wife's chest and told her she should get her chest hair professionally removed.

A NOTE ON PROFANITY:



Notice that I use the word "shit" in that joke. In fact, the joke would still be just as funny, if I didn't use that word at all. I could've used the word "stuff," or just ended it with "get that lasered."

The point is, the use of profanity is usually optional. Depending on your audience, you can elicit the same reaction as long as the performer has an honest emotional commitment to the joke.

Sometimes you can just write down a sentence and instantly change the perception of what is actually happening to hit the reverse...

"My wife and I are sitting in the kitchen the other day and the baby was trying to breast feed. After about 10 minutes I say to my wife, 'Here, you take her.'"

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Sometimes when you're writing or looking for material to write about (like current event topics), the line presents itself in a perfectly assumed straight line.

I was looking for material to write about and the line appeared in the Sports section:

"Tiger Woods drops out of the World's Top 20."

This sentence is perfect for using the reverse comedy structure. Because it mentions Tiger Woods dropping out of the World's Top 20, but it never says Top 20 of *what?*

Since Tiger is widely known for being a philanderer, you could say,

The Times today said that Tiger Woods dropped out of the World's Top 20. Sadly, it was the World's top 20 clients on the Emperor's Club dot com. (A website for call girls).



You should be getting how the Reverse comedy structure works by now. You can use words or actions to misdirect an audience, then create surprise.

The key to the reverse is misdirection.

Give the audience every reason to believe that you are taking them down one path, then change the direction at the last second. Here's a recent joke I wrote:

"In Boaz, Alabama a janitor reportedly found a meth lab inside a Walmart bathroom. Walmart CEO Mike Duke, said

he will not rest until he finds the culprit responsible for hiring a janitor”.

In the above joke we use misdirection to make the reader believe we are going down the path to find the person responsible for the meth lab, then at the last second we go after Walmart and imply that they wouldn't dare waste money on keeping a bathroom clean.

But before we move on to more here's another example that I used to use as a template when I was first starting out. It's from the legendary **Gary Shandling**:

*“I just sold the house I live in; got a good price for it too.
Made the landlord mad as Hell...”*

You see how the surprise at the end of the line triggers an instant laugh?

That is why the Reverse is one of the most powerful joke structures in comedy.



NOTE: you must be careful when using the reverse joke structure and not use it repeatedly one after joke after the other, because you will give away the structure and it will no longer be a surprise to the audience.

Like with anything too much of a good thing is...well, too much! So remember to mix it up.

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Here's one of the biggest questions I get regarding comedy structure: Well Jerry, once I have the formula, how do I write the joke? Where do I get the information? How do I start?

I just work with the student today who was given an exercise to write five reverses. He was stumped. He didn't know where to start. Maybe you're experiencing the same thing...

So let me see if I can help you...

Every single day gives us an opportunity for brand-new material. Let me say that **every single day gives us an opportunity for brand-new material. We just have to be aware of the new lines that are presented to us each and every day...**

So let's break this down into a step-by-step process:
again:

First of all, I don't usually set out to write formula to begin with. I just write facts. That's right, I start with the truth.

One of my favorite ways of generating material, is to write **25 random lines about myself**. I'll just write a few below in this exercise to give you an idea of how it works.



EXERCISE

Find possible endings for each of these lines: Remember to think about what is *assumed*, and then go the *opposite direction*.

I will show you some possibilities at the end of the exercise.

1. *I have a friend who recently had twins. She named them Emily and Emelia. I don't think that's right...for a couple of reasons...*
2. *I think of my boss as a father figure...*
3. *I got fired for getting my finger stuck in the dishwasher...*
4. *I got kicked out of ballet class because I pulled a groin muscle...*
5. *My mother has buried three husbands...*
6. *Some people get so rich they lose all respect for humanity...*
7. *The other day I came home and my girlfriend was on my answering machine...*
8. *My father once said, "I'll make you a deal; If you stop peeing in your bed, I'll pay for your college..."*

9. I wanna die like my grandfather who died peacefully in his sleep...

You can come up with more than one response for each of these lines if you want to. If you find it hard to do, try to really push yourself to do it.

There are many times that we give up too early when writing comedy. So don't let yourself fall victim to that. Comedy is work. Sometimes it can be tedious, but it's in the work where you find the rewards!

Look at the next page to see some possible punch lines.



Here are some possible responses to those lines:

1. *I have a friend who recently had twins. She named them Emily and Emelia. I don't think that's right...for a couple of reasons...first of all they're boys!*
2. *I think of my boss as a father figure...that just pisses her off!*
3. *I got fired for getting my finger stuck in the dishwasher...I still don't understand why they didn't fire her too.*
4. *I got kicked out of ballet class because I pulled a groin muscle...it wasn't mine.*
5. *My mother has buried three husbands...and two were just napping.*
6. *Some people get so rich they lose all respect for humanity...that's how rich I want to be!*
7. *The other day I came home and my girlfriend was on my answering machine...which pissed off my wife!*
8. *My father once said, "I'll make you a deal If you stop peeing in your bed, I'll pay for your college...next year.*
9. *I wanna die like my grandfather who died peacefully in his sleep... wish the same could be said for the other screaming passengers in his car.*

How'd you do?

Did you find that you came up with lines that were similar to this? Do you think you came up with ones that were better? Or, did you struggle?

If you came up with new lines that were funny, congratulations!

If you struggled, take a moment to learn from the lines by analyzing each line and seeing where the misdirection takes place.

Most comedians and comedy writers fail because they don't take the time to analyze the structure and improve upon it.

Once you become familiar with the reverse technique, it's time for you to start writing your own funny lines, using this technique.



EXERCISE

Working With The Reverse

So what I'm going to ask you to do is to **write 5 of your own lines, using the reverse technique.**

An amazing thing might happen right now. You might find yourself at a complete loss as to what to write...

So what do you do next? Where do you come up with lines?

This may sound crazy, but here's the crucial thing to remember when you're writing comedy material: **don't start by trying to think of something funny to write!**

That's right! Don't think of something funny to write just think of writing something that's a fact about you because sitting down in trying to think of something funny to write is the kiss of death when you're writing comedy.

The basic structure of the joke is setup —————> punchline. I'm sure you've already heard of this. The original description of the basic structure of a joke was "straightline" —————> punchline. This implies that the first line of the joke should be a fact, right?

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If surprise is the number one trigger for human laughter and we try to 'funny up' the setup then it's hard to create surprise if the audience already thinks that we're trying to be funny.

But if we start with the fact and then we change the point of view at the last moment, we have a better chance of creating sharp surprise resulting in laughter.

So with that in mind, let's try to write some reverses:

There are two primary places you look for lines:

1. **OBSERVATIONAL**-you observe things around you and you write down the facts about them.
2. **PERSONAL**-write down statements about yourself by answering these questions:
 - What things make you mad?
 - What bothers you about yourself?
 - What are your weaknesses?
 - What are your strengths?
 - How do people describe you?
 - How would you describe yourself?
 - What are your likes?
 - What are your hobbies?
 - What's your favorite music?
 - What are your favorite games?
 - What are the favorite sports teams?
 - If you could be anything in the world, what would be?
 - What would you buy if you had \$1,000,000?
 - Where did you go to high school? What was your high school mascot?
 - What was unique about the town you grew up in?
 - What's your heritage?
 - Where do you work?

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- How do you feel about your job?
- How do you feel about your boss?
- Have you ever been fired from a job?
- What are your pet peeves?
- How would you describe your family? Large? Small?
- What religion are you and do you practice?
- What are your thoughts on religion?
- What are your favorite parts of your body?
- What makes you feel insecure about your body?

This is a nice list of questions to help us develop straight lines that will become setups in jokes about who we are.

Your instinct right now might be to look for the questions that might trigger a funny or whacky answer.

If that happens, jot down the idea on a separate piece of paper, (don't stifle an inspiration), but your job in this exercise is to avoid looking for funny or whacky answers because this exercise is used to create straight lines. Straight lines are based in truth. They are facts about us.

So get to work!

One thing to remember is to try hard to find more than one reverse for each straight line you come up with. Push yourself to find three.



You're on your own on this one!

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If you find yourself needing some one-on-one coaching, visit my [skype comedy lessons](#) page

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and set up an appointment for some one-on-one coaching. There's nothing like it in the biz!

It's important that you save the lines you come up with. If you were unable to apply the reverse comedy structure to them, don't worry. They are still facts about you and you will learn that maybe there's another comedy structure that can be utilized to help make that line a funny comedy bit.



This is where you should be writing...Are you writing?



EXERCISE

Developing Triples:

Most jokes structures create surprise by creating an expectation or assumption, then shattering that assumption by switching a point of view at the last possible moment.

Triples are no different. They are a fun and rather easy, but effective device to use in comedy, once you understand the concept.

As with any fundamental, practice makes perfect.

So let's take a closer look at the Triple and investigate the fundamentals behind the structure, then build the structure with a process that will soon have you crafting this joke structure almost at will in the near future.

One of the biggest problems most comedians and comedy writers have when writing is that they feel so overwhelmed by the mountain that is "funny," that that they can't seem to simplify enough to come up with anything funny.

So let's do that. Let's treat it like a mountain. When you look at the mountain, it's enormous and overwhelming. You couldn't imagine climbing that mountain, but when you get to the edge of the mountain and start hiking up the trailhead, you're just taking that mountain one step at a time.

If we treat comedy writing the same way, by reducing it down to its simplest structured elements. It simplifies the task of joke writing because instead of worrying about the mountain that is funny, we can just write down words and simple phrases, doing one task at a time, one step at a time. Before you know it, you'll be on top of that mountain of funny. While on top of that mountain you'll look like such an achiever, but all you did was take it one step at a time. Let's try that with this exercise of developing triples...

One sure-fire way to create surprise is by using diametric opposites, and shattering the expectations of given situations, let's create a table so we can identify what to expect in a given situation and then create comedy by simply matching those expectations with the opposite of what's expected.

Below you'll find a table to build jokes with the subject of a First Date...

DEVELOPING TRIPLES	
Subject or Premise:	First Date
What's Expected?	Opposite of what's expected
Kindness	Act crass and discourteous
Gentlemanly conduct	Drive up to her home and honk the horn.
Dinner	Have her meet you at the restaurant
Dinner and a movie?	Roll your eyes whenever she says anything.
Conversation	Respond: "That's nothing!" To everything she says.
Pick her up in your car	Say, "I thought you were a blonde?" when you pick her up.
Arrive on time	Stare at her tits.
Look nice	Say, "You brought money, right?"
Smell nice	Fart
Impress her	When she sits in your car say, "Wow! You're giving my suspension a workout!"
Court her	Take her to a tractor pull or UFC fight or a bar with female mud wrestling.
Open the door for her	Try to cop a feel
Don't fart	Try to cop two feels
Show compassion	Look her in the eyes and say, "I know you want this!"
Be romantic and kind	Flirt with the hot waitress in the restaurant.
Tell her how nice she looks	Tell her her shoes make her look like she comes from "white trash."
Show her a nice time	Even if she's black.
Don't overdo it	At the end of the date, see if she's into anal.
Don't molest her	
Don't be too aggressive	
Don't be a dick	
Don't get overly affectionate	
Show interest in her	
Compliment her intelligence	
Make her laugh	
Good food...	
Tell her she has a nice smile	
At the end of the date, tell you had a wonderful time and you would like to see her again.	

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As you can see from the list, just listing the opposite of what's expected in this situation can produce funny ideas. Now the task becomes crafting a small story, using the expected and the unexpected within the comedy structure of the Triple.

If I was working with the Triple formula I might set up the line like this:

1. The first sentence should be the setup of the subject:

"Last week I went out on a first date with this great girl.

2. Now use a supporting sentence to legitimize the subject and transition us to build the triple:

"Man, it was everything you ever want in a first date;

3. Now you want to misdirect by building your triple using two ideas from our list of elements you would expect to see on a first date:

"Good laughter, great food...

4. Now you need the punchline, it is simply a third element that is completely unexpected on a first date. In this case I would also go outside the theme that's been developed with the first two: "Good laughter, great food..." is what's going on during dinner. Let's use exaggeration to completely shatter the dinner image, so the joke becomes...

*"I went out on a first date with this great girl last week.
(Really make the audience feel like you're into this person).
Man, it was everything you ever want on a first date; Good
laughter, good food... and great butt sex... yeah, like I said,
everything you want!"*

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I went to the sexual exaggeration here! You don't always have to do that. You could get the same effect if you did something like:

"I took this new girl out to a nice dinner last week. Man, it was everything you ever want on a first date; Good laughter, great food... immediately followed by a bout of Bulimia... Yeah, she threw up after dinner! It was like she was saying to me: "Can you give me eighty dollars? I'm going to go throw it in the toilet."

As I wrote the first draft of this joke for this exercise, I noticed that, in the joke, there was an opportunity to also plug in the Reverse formula to create a little bit extra surprise.

If you ask yourself the question: what is assumed here? You might find yourself answering: It's assumed that the bulimic person is the date. So if we use the Reverse formula to shatter that expectation, the joke might evolve to something like this:

I took this actress out to a nice dinner last week. Man, it was everything you ever want on a first date; Good laughter, great food... immediately followed by a bout of Bulimia... then she actually had the nerve to say to me: "You know, if you keep doing that, your teeth are going to rot..." I mean, the nerve, right?!

Now the joke is about me and contains several laugh points, all while it succeeds in effectively tricking the audience and creating surprise.

Playing a reverse in a joke after you do a triple is a lot of fun! The audience loves when you trick them like that. It's a form of joke gymnastics, because you lead them down the path with the truth, turn

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the triple, then turn a full reverse back-flip. Executed well, even the Russian judges would give you a ten!

What if we took some other ideas straight from the list? Let's look at: "tell her she looks nice," and build a triple with that? It might go something like this:

I went out with a new girl last week. I picked her up at her door; she looked nice, dressed nice... stunk like she was homeless, but... overall it was a good date.

Or...

I picked her up. I complimented her the best way I could. I was like, "Wow, your hair looks beautiful, your dress is perfect... your shoes look like you come from white trash... but let's have some fun, huh?!"

You get the idea. You can pretty much do this all day with this subject alone, simply because you have a list of ideas in front of you in the table. And when the raw material is there, it's almost like writing automatic jokes.

Now you try it.

Start with an idea and build the triple by listing the expected and the unexpected.

Remember that comedy writing is a skill set.

When you write comedy, practice your exercises and write some more, you learn to develop the awareness of incongruous relationships, recognition and word-play. You also sharpen your 'sense' of humor.

Learning and familiarizing yourself with the major elements that trigger human laughter like surprise, embarrassment, incongruity, recognition, release and ambivalence will help you to be instantly prepared to respond to almost anything in a humorous way.

You don't memorize the laughter triggers first, by any means, before you try to write comedy. But you should remind yourself regularly and consistently of which laughter triggers are available to you while you are writing your material, it will have far-reaching benefits.

For example, when I was promoting a show I was doing on radio, the news person was doing a fluff piece about phobias.

She said, "Did you know there is a fear of having something to your left side; it's called 'synistriphobia?' There's a fear of having something to your right side called 'dextrophobia?'"

My comedic mind went to work. First of all my mind recognized that she was writing for me. Being familiar with the 12 major comedy structures, I was instantly aware that she just stated the first two lines of a possible **Triple**. All I needed to do was come up with a third exaggerated 'phobia' and I could get a great laugh. So my mind went instantly down the list of laugh triggers and I came up with **Embarrassment**. That's when the joke came out.

I said, "What would they call the fear of having something behind you? Homophobia?"

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Everyone in the studio laughed. The booker of the club was in the studio and he was thrilled. When we went to commercial, he was like, "Wow, man! How did you come up with that so quickly? That was genius!"

I didn't think it was genius. I just thought it was obvious. The joke built itself. But I just shrugged my shoulders and said, "just lucky, I guess."

But the truth is, I wouldn't have had the "sense" to know the joke was available to me unless I was familiar with the fundamentals.

Despite trying to be humble about it, I'll let the booker believe that I'm a comedy genius, because that keeps him wanting to book me in his club year after year after year.

So remember to write and write often. Each time you apply the techniques, you become a better, sharper, faster comedy writer.

As a result, you'll have more joke options available at your fingertips when you write or perform.

Once you believe that, your confidence level will increase along with your joke-writing skill.

I've been known to write 80-120 jokes a day. That's right. 80-120! That's a lot of jokes to write, but it didn't start out that way. I started writing three to four.

I read in Melvin Helitzer's "[Comedy Writing Secrets](#)" that humorist Robert Orben used to write 25 lines from the news just to warm up, then he would get to work on his day.

I thought, "Man, I'll never be able to do that!"

Fortunately, I had a couple of comedy mentors who kept pushing me to write more and more. Eventually, 30 jokes a day, felt like 10. When I

pushed it to 60, it felt like 30 and when I pushed to 90, it felt like 60. Then it just seemed like second nature.

With the techniques you learn in this e-book, I am confident that you'll be able to do the same, but it's going to take work.

I am going to share with you the technique that is responsible for allowing me to write volumes of jokes on virtually any subject matter...

There should be a drum roll here or a fanfare because this technique is the mother-of-all when it comes to writing jokes. The secret is in its simplicity.

THE LISTING TECHNIQUE

One of the techniques I use to create a lot of jokes on one subject is called the **"listing technique."** It's the same type of technique that journalists use to create snappy headlines and it's the technique that a lot of writers use to create current event material for late night shows.

It uses a comedy structure known as Incongruity,

Incongruity as a joke-writing structure is described in a few ways:

- A joke is a convergence of two or more clearly identifiable ideas.
- It's a juxtaposition of contrasting elements.
- It's when the characteristics of one subject or idea are imposed on another diametrically different idea.

On page 134, **I've included a bonus for you!** You get to see the single most powerful writing tool in comedy: **the listing technique.** **But first...**

I'm going to have you work on a double entendre exercise to help you sharpen your ability to recognize those opportunities in comedy. Getting really good at double entendres is a great way to help make your story-telling funnier. The idea is that when you're first writing your stories, you just get them down on the page as honestly as possible. Then you can go back to that story and start commenting on the double-meanings of words to start to make that story funny.

The exercise is on the next page...



EXERCISE

Working with the Double entendre to create humor

If comedy is about surprising the listener with what is being said, then this exercise will help you develop your ability to identify and switch the intended meaning of almost any sentence.

Do this exercise on a regular basis and you will impress people with how quickly you develop your deftness for comedy.

This will not only help you develop your skill with writing comedy, but will also help you to be funnier in the moment in conversation, speeches, arguments, etc., because it will help you be instantly more aware of the double meanings in words as they occur in every day human interaction...

HERE'S WHAT YOU DO:

Collect at least 20 random sentences.

Make sure those sentences contain a subject and a predicate. They can be any kind of sentence, (a question is just as useful as a statement) and the more random the better. Write them down or copy and paste them onto a document on your computer. You can grab these sentences from the internet, from ad copy, from a book, newspaper or magazine. (It's important that you don't look for something that is funny).

Take 10 of the sentences and write at least 2 jokes for each of them by looking for an alternate meaning of one of the keywords in the sentence.

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Remember the example of the clerk at the grocery store asking, "Did you find everything you were looking for?" This is a similar exercise to help you use the implied meaning of a word to create surprise.

Anticipated Result:

With some work and regular practice, this exercise will help you to develop your awareness of the possible meanings in almost any grouping of words. Initially, you may not be able to see the hidden meaning of the word because we are so used to the meaning being used in a traditional way. But if you truly focus and use an inflection exercise by repeating the sentence while emphasizing different words in the sentence, you will begin to recognize the possibilities.

The key is to think like a humorist. Once you do that you will start looking *beyond the usual interpretation* of the word and you'll begin to develop your skill at crafting humor.

EXAMPLES:

Start with straightforward sentences, not trying to be funny:

1. "Did you find everything you were looking for?"
2. "When I came home, my girlfriend was on my answering machine."
3. "When you make a meal, don't forget the vegetable."

At first glance we might look at that and not see any double meanings, but when we really look from a comedian's perspective, the possibilities begin to reveal themselves:

Possible take-offs on the double-meanings:

1. "Did you find everything you were looking for?"
 - a. "I found the wine and the candles, but I couldn't find a

soulmate."

- b. "Almost... but if you stocked a five-foot-seven blonde, that likes bald guys, you'd have a customer for life!"
2. "When I came home, my girlfriend was on my answering machine."
- a. "...just sitting on it, naked, spinning around."
 - b. "and that just pissed off my wife."
3. "When you make a meal, don't forget the vegetable."
- a. "Is that anyway to talk about grandpa?"
 - b. "Don't worry Ma, I could never forget you."

So go get your random sentences.

I'm going to remind you once again to remember to **do the work!** Most people will read this, skim right by and never get back to the exercises. When you do that you are really cheating yourself out of the opportunity to get really good at this. It's like going to the gym, walking through and heading right to the shower. You'll never see any progress without the work.

All the best comedians are very good at recognizing double entendre possibilities. The sooner you get good at it, the sooner you'll be looked at as being that witty person who is lightning-fast. People will be saying things like, "How does he/she think of these things?"

PART 7

Making It All Come Together

Once you have the fundamentals down on the structures of comedy and you understand and fully comprehend the elements that trigger human laughter, you are ready to start writing comedy bits and stories based on your experiences and your life.

Most comedians today are more or less story tellers. They tell the audience about their experience of going to the bank, the grocery store, the doctor, the dentist, the in-laws, the airport, skiing, etc. You might think that because they are telling stories, the structures we just toiled over together don't seem to fit... after all, they are telling stories not jokes, right?

Not exactly!

Remember we said earlier that every time a comedian gets a laugh, one or more of the 12 comedy structures is present? Well, that includes stories!

The important thing to remember is that whether you are writing comedy or doing standup, the comedy has to come from the truth. That's the foundation. Even if it delves into the exaggerated and borders on the absurd, it's initial impetus should come from something true.

When I write stories for standup, I write them as if I am actually speaking before an audience. That's right. I'll talk it out in my head like it's my set. That way I can get that feeling and the words just flow as an extension of my voice. One way to substitute this is to dictate it

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into a digital recording device and then transpose it onto the page. Or you can also get some quality voice-to-text software and do the same.

When you write stories, they are intended to sound like how you would tell them to friends. It's not just a combination of jokes, but a full story with a beginning, middle and end. The crafting of the stories is as important as the jokes and the jokes happen as a result of the obstacles in the stories. When you tell stories as they happened, (or even with some heightened reality or exaggeration), your emotions and feelings are a part of the story.

The audience connects more readily to you when you are actually expressing yourself and not just saying words.

Your understanding of the structures we covered in this e-book will help you take those stories to another level.

VIDEO SAMPLE #1

Here is a quick 1-minute script from a comedy routine I did during the Olympics in Salt Lake City. The script doesn't necessarily appear funny, but the performance is where it comes alive: You can read the script then click the video below:

SET SCRIPT – 1MIN.

"...but political correctness says 'we can't.' Do you agree with me? We're overwrought, we're stuck with this political correctness garbage, right? We're afraid to make fun...we should be allowed to make fun...make fun! Like you had the Para-Olympics goin' on...I think that's cool...differently-abled people getting to participate in competitive activities. I went down to check it out, and this guy, this French athlete, bumps into me with his wheel chair. Bump-bam!

I'm like, "Oh sorry, Dude..."

He goes, (FRENCH ACCENT) "Why don't you watch where you're going you Moron!" (Pause, look at the audience) "Woah! So I leaned back (ACT-OUT) and kicked him—right in the chest! (Laugh and applause at the ambivalence of kicking a disabled guy in the chest) Now he's wheezing...people are running over, "What happened? What happened?" I said, "I don't know what event he competed in, but boy, he's winded!" (more laughs)"

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW](#)



*****NOTE:** Video will open a new browser window on the Breathroughcomedy.com website where the video will be displayed. Please give it a moment to load. Load time will vary depending upon server load and the speed of your internet connection. When done, simply close the webpage. You may return to the page anytime to review.

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On the video here, you can see that this 1-minute story is not "jokey." In fact, it's very conversational. The structures we talked about are present. Does the audience laugh?

When a comedian is showcasing or auditioning for The Improv or The Comedy Store, or a similar showcase comedy club in a big city, the expectation is for a comedian to have a laugh point (jokes), every 18-20 seconds.

It doesn't have to be exactly like that. You can have a setup then get multiple laughs from the set up. See how the story has laughs all throughout with an applause break. This all takes place in less than a minute and it averages out to a laugh every 18-20 or more.

Notice also how the comedy bit is designed like a story. There is a protagonist (Me) and there is an antagonist (The French athlete). After I apologize to him, I do an act-out with him calling me a moron (in a French accent). The incongruity and unexpected behavior creates surprise and sets up a perfect situation for benign retaliation, the retaliation may not seem benign, as I kicked the guy right in the chest, (Ambivalence is present), but considering my response, (the kick), is so outlandish, the audience perceives the behavior of kicking to be imaginary and therefore, it is benign.

Then I say, "I don't know what event he was competing in, but boy is he winded." There's incongruity present along with benign retaliation and recognition with the smart-ass response I gave for doing such a crazy thing.

The important thing to remember is that the behavior is so exaggerated here that the audience intrinsically understands that I didn't really kick him. It, therefore, becomes an imagined scenario.

If they thought I really kicked a guy in a wheelchair, they would not laugh at the joke and they'd probably no longer like me, the performer.

VIDEO SAMPLE #2 – DAVE CHAPPELLE – 5 MINS.

Read the text first, then see it come together in the video below

"Oh, there's some rough, rough areas outside of D.C. Yeah, everybody should go to the ghetto. I was taken to the ghetto one time...that's the worst; when you're taken to the ghetto and you're not expected to go...usually you want to know when you're going to the ghetto, you're like, 'I'm gonna see some wild shit, I gotta prepare myself, because I'm gonna see something crazy. When you're taken it's different. I had a limousine driver...it was after a show. It was late at night. It was three o'clock in the morning...had a limousine driver, he was a nice guy...talking to me and shit (ACT-OUT driving and driver's voice): 'Aw, hey, where you from dawg? D.C.? Word! (laughs from incongruity a limo driver talking like this) 'That's a rough city, man.' And his cell phone started ringing...'Hold on, one second. (limo driver picks up the phone) 'Hello? Oh, wassup, nigga...what? What the fu—slow down! What the fuck?! No! No! Nooo! Fuck that, Nigga...fuck it! I'm on my way! Boop (hangs up the phone-still driving), Hey...I gotta make a stop, real quick.'"

"At three o'clock in the morning...I didn't know he was taking me to the ghetto at first...I started looking out the window; what the fuck? Gun store, gun store, liquor store, gun store! Where the fuck you taking me? This don't look good. He didn't say shit. He just pulled up in front of an old rickety building, that looked like a project. Now, I never been there before. I'm not sure if it was a project, but it certainly had all the familiar symptoms of a project; a fucking crack-head ran this way, (act-out). And then another one jumped out a tree and shit. (ACT-OUT). The driver said, 'I'll be right back.' And left me. Took the keys with him and just left me. At three o'clock in the morning, in front of a project, in a fucking limousine.

"This was not good...I was like, man, I gotta look around to see if I can see some landmarks...figure out where I'm at...might have to escape on foot...Now this is when I knew I was in a bad neighborhood...you

only see this in the worst neighborhoods. Remember, it's three o'clock in the mornin'. It's three o'clock in the mornin'. I look out the window...there was a fuckin' baby standin' on the corner!

...and the baby...the baby, didn't even look scared! He was just standin' there (ACT-OUT: SOMEONE STANDING THERE ALL COOL). I mean it made me sad...it made me sad really though. You know, cuz I wanted to help the baby...I'm like, "I don't trust you either, I'm sorry." Click, Click (ACT-OUT: LOCKING THE DOORS IN THE LIMO). "The old baby-on-the-corner-trick, eh?" Not gonna fall for that shit...

Where's this limousine driver, you know I start feelin' bad...as time goes by, I start feelin' worse, "Man, what is wrong with me, what the Hell's wrong, I am scared of a baby. I mean this baby could be in trouble; he might need my help...I gotta do somethin'! (PAUSE) But I wasn't gonna get out the car! I'm serious, man. I just cracked the window a little bit. (ACT-OUT: ROLLING DOWN A CAR WINDOW, MANUALLY WITH A CRANK) It was an old limousine...I could roll it down...(ACT-OUT: SHOUTING TO THE BABY) "Hey Baby! Baby, go home! It's three o'clock in the mornin', what the fuck are you doing up?!"

The baby said, "I'm sellin' weed, nigga!" I said, "Oh...shit... I wasn't expectin' that! "

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[CLICK HERE TO VIEW](#)

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BONUS

THE LISTING TECHNIQUE



Like the overwhelming majority of comedians out there today—both beginners and experienced—you are probably stuck sometimes with the common dilemma of what to write about and how to get going.

Where to start?

Even advanced comedians have trouble finding material to write about. Most wait for an inspiration or an idea to pop into their head they note it and just start writing. Sometimes the idea turns into something funny (a 'keeper,') sometimes it doesn't.

I am going to present you with a way to find the jokes in almost any topic by using a simple technique I call "Listing."

Gene Perret, the multiple Emmy award-winning writer and former head writer for Bob Hope suggests that a joke is a convergence of two or more ideas. I would like to clarify that by saying a joke is a convergence of two or more *clearly identifiable* ideas.

Once we have those two ideas we can begin to work on one of the most common joke formulas used in modern comedy.

It's called incongruity.

It's really just taking two different ideas and imposing the values of one of those ideas on to the other by association. I know, it sounds

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like a mouthful, but bear with me, it's really not that overwhelming at all.

A really simple way to do this is to use one's heritage or religious background or lineage and making a simple statement about it:

"I'm Irish and American Indian..."

Not funny is it? No, because it's not yet a joke. If we go back to the Basic Structure of a Joke, you know that a joke must have a set up and a punch line, otherwise known as a "straight line" and a punch line. The reason I say "straight line" is because a new writer needs to be sure the first line of the joke is just a statement. It's usually best if it's something that states a fact.

DON'T TRY TO BE FUNNY HERE!

So let's look at the sentence again:

"I'm Irish and American Indian..."

In this sentence, do we have a convergence of two clearly identifiable ideas?

YES! The two ideas are **Irish** and **American Indian...**

You might be saying, "Yeah, that's great Jerry. Now what?"

Well, when you have identified the two or more clearly identifiable ideas that can be juxtaposed, it's time to move on to the listing technique.

I basically make a table with two columns and I label one column with one idea, (in this case: "Irish"), and the other column I label with the second idea: ("American Indian").

Now think of everything Irish, remember to include:

- People
- Places
- Things
- Events
- Words
- Phrases
- Clichés (both similar and opposite if you really want to stretch)



[Here's a sample PDF](#) listing sheet that I use.

Click the icon to download it and print it so you can do your lists. Or use a legal pad or your computer like I did below.

You might come up with a list that looks like this:

IRISH	AMERICAN INDIAN
Like to drink	Drunk
From Ireland	From America
Fought the English	Welcomed the pilgrims
Oppressed by the English	Almost wiped out by the English
Drink Guinness	Drink anything
Celtic	Many tribes
Potato famine	Buffalo
Irish Stew	Bow and arrow
Red hair	Redskin
Hot temper	Tomahawk
St. Patty's Day Parade	Tee-pee
100,000 Welcomes	Peace pipe
Plaid	Thanksgiving
Kilts	Peace treaty

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Play soccer	Trail of tears
Trail of beers	Indian chief
Freckles	Last of the Mohicans
O'Reilly	Sitting bull
McGreggor	Running bear
Leprechaun brings Luck	We come in peace
Four-leaf clover	Casino You need luck
Lord of the Dance	Chief Dan George
Michael Flatley	Sitting Bull
Irish Republican Army	Squaw
Luck of the Irish	Wounded Knee
Irish dancing	Reservation
Usually Catholic or protestant	Names of casinos
Family Plaid	Redskin
I'll have a pint	Tomahawk
Pubs	Scalp
Soccer	Cowboys and Indian
Bad economy	Indian headdress
Red Hair – Fair skin	Rain dance

The lists are shorter than they could be. Usually I'll spend at least 20-30 minutes on each idea and really flesh out the lists, but for the purpose of this exercise, I've kept it much shorter.

Besides with what we have, I can just see the possibilities for jokes already coming together.

You see, what the lists have done is give us an overall idea (as broad and as stereotyped as they might be) about what comes to mind when we think of people who are Irish and what comes to mind when we think of people who are American Indian.

One of the important objectives the lists provides us with is that it forces us to focus on the simple. Rather than staring at a blank page

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trying to think of something funny we just start writing simple words and phrases related to the subject at hand.

Now comes the hard part: building a joke. Look over your list and start to think about how each of the items in each column could relate to the other column.

Look for opposites and similarities.

I can simply start with the statement I wrote at the beginning:
I try to make it conversational:

"I'm Irish and American Indian...yeah, that's my heritage; Irish and American Indian. You know what that means; I pretty much have V.I.P. seats waiting for me at any A.A. Meeting, quite frankly. Yeah, I walk into that meeting and it's like "Hey Running Bear-O'Reilly! We have a chair for you in the front row!"

You may have heard of the book, "I Left My Heart at Wounded Knee..." Unfortunately, 'Wounded Knee' was the name of a casino...and it wasn't my heart. It was my wallet!

That gives a whole new meaning to the term, "Trail of Tears."

They say if you go back to the Trail of Tears now, sometimes you can hear the haunting cries in the middle of the night: I think it's my brother: (Irish accent) "Put down the dice O'Reilly and let's get a pint!"

And Voila! From the list we made, we can write ourselves a nice comedy bit!

You can do this with virtually any two clearly identifiable ideas.

One of the problems most comedians have is they think the ideas have to be opposite. Or they have to be funny to begin with. Like Men and Women. Cats and Dogs, Husbands and Hookers—I mean, wives. That's a good place to start, but this exercise can be done with any two ideas.

**TRY IT YOURSELF. MAKE ONE SUBJECT "GOING TO THE GYM"
MAKE THE OTHER ONE "SEX."**

I chose sex because sex makes up the large majority of comedy material. One of the biggest reasons is that, as human beings, it is one of our biggest hang-ups. We are obsessed with it. It frustrates us. It fills us with anxiety.

And if comedy is about trying to get from point A to point B and encountering obstacles, then sex could be a huge obstacle for us.

When you make your lists, don't edit yourself. Editing is never the first step. It's usually the third or fourth. Make the lists as long as possible. Then find a statement to use as a set up:

Start with "Sex is a lot like going to the gym..." That's a good beginning, but sometimes if we make it more specific we can get the comedy engine revving more efficiently.

Comedy is a veiled attack. We are attacking something. Ourselves, Our ex's, our mothers-in-law, the bank, lawyers, the congress, the president, school...you get the picture. If we are more clear with who we are attacking, it gives us more of a reason to go for a joke.

What if you changed the set up to:

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"Sex with my 'ex' is a lot like going to the gym...": What if we got more specific on the gym side?

We might come up with a line like this:

Sex with my ex is a lot like the bench press at the gym... I always have to wipe it down first, because I know there were several guys there before me!

Is that joke attacking? You bet!

When I do this joke it will always get a laugh—well, except from my ex!

Here's the really cool part about writing using the listing technique and juxtaposing the ideas... sometimes the funny is in the simple coincidence of the similarity.

Let me explain...

If you set up the joke by saying, "Going to the gym is a lot like sex..." The audience is automatically curious. They are ready to hear you solve this puzzle. They are thinking, "Oh yeah? How so?" Then you simply point out the similarities...

"Sex with my husband is a lot like going to the aerobics class at the gym, there's never enough time to play with the balls."

"Sex is a lot like going to the gym. There's a lot of grunts, groans and sweat, usually followed by a shower and disappointment."

As you can see, I didn't try to be funny. I just wrote down, from my list, the coincidental similarities between the two!

Now it's your turn...

Have fun writing!

*Go to page 142 to see an example of how this exercise can be used to develop a sketch!



This is where you should be writing...Are you writing?



****IMPORTANT NOTE:**

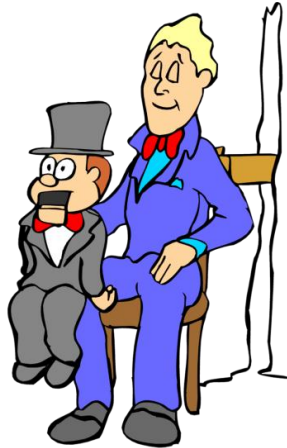
I know that earlier I said, "DO NOT TRY TO BE FUNNY!" And while that is crucial because what you are trying to do is simply come up with facts and truths that are associated with the premises and subjects we are listing, it is also CRUCIAL that IF something FUNNY comes to your mind, take a moment and **WRITE IT DOWN!**

You will hear me say that a lot! WRITE IT DOWN! We often think that great inspirations and ideas are easily remembered, but they are fleeting! So jot those ideas down in a margin or on another piece of paper so that you can use it later. Otherwise you will forget and I want you to remember those bits of comic genius that sometimes just seem to come to us!

EXAMPLE :

INCONGRUITY AND SKETCH WRITING:

MONK and DANNY
"Going to the gym is a lot like sex"



Monk is the Ventriloquist and Danny is the old, dirty Dummy.

DANNY: Been going to the gym, lately.

MONK: Really?

DANNY: It's a lot like sex, you know.

MONK: How's that?

DANNY: You work out; your muscles get bigger. . . I mean look at this forearm.

MONK: Wow, your right. How 'bout the other forearm?

DANNY: I don't work out the other forearm.

MONK: Why not?

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DANNY: Like I said, it's a lot like sex. (DANNY gloats...)

DANNY: You ever wake up and your sheets are poking up because you got wood?

MONK: Well, I...

DANNY: I'm like that 24 hours a day!

MONK: You know, in the commercials they say if you have that for more than four hours you should call your doctor.

DANNY: I did. She says she's comin' right over!

MONK: But you said you're like this twenty-four hours a day.

DANNY: Yeah, yesterday she came over six times... (DANNY cockily points out the math to MONK) See twenty-four divided by four is six...

MONK: Wow! Six times! That must be tiring.

DANNY: You think I should give the bitch a break?

MONK: (Scolding DANNY) Now, why do you say that?

DANNY: What? "Bitch"?

MONK: Yeah!

DANNY: Sorry...

MONK: That's better...a little contriteness is always good.

DANNY: So you think I should give that 'Ho' a break?

MONK: Now stop that! I don't like it when you call a woman that.

DANNY: What "Ho?"

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MONK: That's right. It's rude.

DANNY: You know who started that don't you? Calling women "Ho"?

MONK: No, who?

DANNY: Disney.

MONK: What! Disney started the whole thing about calling women...

uh...

DANNY: "Ho."

MONK: Get out of here...

DANNY: Yeah., it's true. Watch "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs..."

That bitch cooks and cleans for those little bastards all day long and

what's the first thing they say to her in the morning? "Hi Ho... Hi-Ho,

Hi-Ho, Hi-Ho." That's just wrong!

And there you have it! From the list of "Sex" and "Going to the Gym" I was able to develop about a 2-minute sketch. You'll notice in this sketch that at a point I seemed to deviate from the lists a bit. That may be true, but the fascinating thing about writing is that once you get started, you tap into your creativity.

I like to say that writing begets writing. Once you start writing, you sometimes find yourself on a roll. When you're rolling, new ideas will sometimes magically flow from the end of your fingertips. The more you write and apply the techniques, the more the magic happens!

Part 8

Using the “So” Formula To Create Comedy

It was so hot today...
It was so cold today...
My mother-in-law was so fat...
Your mama is so fat...

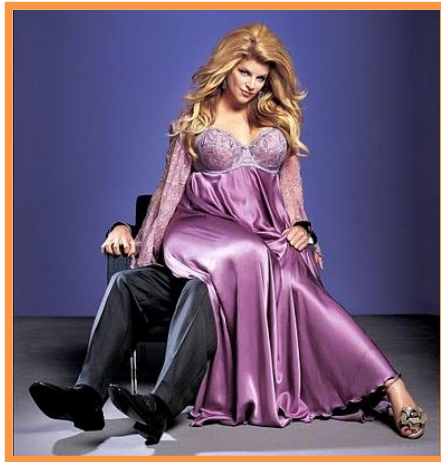
Your Mama's so fat, when she goes to the beach, she's the only one who gets a tan.

It was so hot today, I saw a dog chasing a cat; and they were walking.

We've heard these expressions and this joke form so much that it's considered hack. Those who consider it hack avoid it like the plague. (And if any of us saw the plague would we even know enough about it to avoid it?).

But is there a hidden gift in the “so” jokes? I think there is. In almost all old joke forms, there are hidden opportunities to discover new jokes that can be crafted so that they become stand-alone jokes with the same opportunity to create good laughs and not appear tired. Using these forms can create real, solid opportunities to write solid comedy...

*Kirstie Alley was on "Dancing With The Stars" the other night. She shook her ass so hard it wound up on the first ten minutes of "House."



This joke is solid enough to make it on any of the late night talk shows. I developed it originally by the joke form: "Her ass is so big..."

*In this joke we juxtaposed "big" with "Dancing with Stars."

Through multiple drafts, I eventually changed "her ass was so big" to "she shook her ass so hard." It still works

because the *bigness* of her ass is implied.

(Sorry Kirstie! I love you, and I personally think you're hot, but the joke was too good not to do!)

Even if you work this technique and you can't seem to come up with great new jokes, working this simple joke form as an exercise will help you become a better comedy writer, simply because it will help refine your comedic instinct and improve your ability to recognize opportunities to create humor.

It's almost the same thing as a musician who practices his scales and then uses those scales to practice improvising with chord patterns playing in the background, he will sharpen his skills and develop his instincts.

Earlier I argued that one definition of a joke **is the convergence of two or more clearly identifiable ideas**; or the **juxtaposition of contrasting elements**, (incongruity). It's taking two ideas that don't

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usually fit together and imposing the values of one idea on to the other.

The "so" jokes help you develop your ability to create associations between two or more different ideas.

What's so important about creating associations? Well, associations are where the jokes *are*. It's in the incongruous relationship between two different ideas that creates the surprise.

The listener, never imagining that those two things were ever relatable, hears or reads those two ideas come together while they simultaneously make sense, in an exaggerated way and that's where the funny is.

It's this relationship that creates the surprise and triggers the laugh.

Developing the Material

When I first started writing comedy, I used the "So" technique after a girl I dated broke up with me. She had a large nose and I thought it would be really cathartic to talk about the break up and attack her big nose. I know, "*classy*," right?

To get to the jokes, I decided I'd start with the "so" technique using the form: "*Her nose was so big...*" This is the list of jokes that I quickly came up with:

- Her nose was so big; it's like don't make any quick turns in a phone booth.
- Her nose was so big; when she had a runny-nose, they declared a flash-flood warning.
- Her nose was so big; when she broke her nose seismologists came over to investigate the fissure.

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- Her nose was so big; if it rained you could hide under it for shelter.
- Her nose was so big; when she flew on an airplane she had to purchase a companion ticket.
- Her nose was so big; she had to check it as luggage.
- Her nose was so big; Jimmy Durante sued for trademark infringement.
- Her nose was so big; a nose job would take a team of surgeons and an airline hangar.
- Her nose was so big; she needed approval from the Department of the Interior for a nose job.
- Her nose was so big; the State of California scheduled the bridge for seismic retrofitting.
- Her nose was so big it was recently declared a National Park.
- Her nose was so big; when she sneezed, they called it Hurricane Katrina.

With this example, do you see how we come up with associations? We associated many things related to her **nose** with things that are considered **big**. We did this by using the listing technique.

The great thing about writing is that writing begets writing. When you write, new ideas are generated. Just writing this list of jokes, using this simplified joke form of "so," helped me to generate a ton of raw material that I could use to write into a routine. I won't use it all in a routine but the material is now available to me. So if I was to write a routine, it might go something like this:

This girl broke up with me recently and it pissed me off, so I did the mature thing; I wrote some jokes about her. You know what they say, 'laughter is the best medicine,' but laughter at the expense of your 'ex' in front of a few hundred people, is 'free therapy.' And with therapy costing

about two hundred dollars an hour; right now, I'm making money!

Include the fact that there are about 300 comedy clubs across the country; I think I just put a dent in the unemployment figures. And they call the 'rich' the 'job creators.'

Anyway, back to my ex-girlfriend breaking up with me. I mean she had this huge nose so how dare she break up with me, right? Like, who else would want her? I know, how stupid! What I didn't think about was that she also had big tits, a great smile, and was smart and funny, so as it turns out there's a ton of guys who would want to take her out. Who's the stupid one now? But it's not stopping me from talking about her, because I'm still reeling in pain. When I say that she had a big nose, I'm not saying that just to be mean...okay, I am! But not 'just' to be mean. You see, it's science; like one time she broke her nose; seismologists came over to investigate the fissure!

One time we tried to go to Vegas, the flight was cost prohibitive because the airline said she had to buy a companion ticket for her nose... and in Vegas we had to get a suite, because they won't let you stay three to a King room.

*We're probably better off. One time we were in New Orleans and she sneezed; she was charged with two thousand counts of involuntary manslaughter. Yeah, she called it a sneeze; they called it **Katrina**.*

Even though this is just a first draft, it's got the workings of being a good, funny, routine; a routine written in just a few minutes because the raw material was already present. Notice that the beginning of the bit had nothing to do with the *big nose* jokes; or so it seems. In fact, it

was the writing of those *big nose* jokes using the "so" form that motivated me or *put me in the mood* to create more material.

It's exercises like these that can really help rev up your comedic imagination.

Working Backwards To Find The Joke

Sometimes you'll find that writing the story first is the best way to get to the comedy. After you write the story you might find that you'll have statements to which you can apply the "so" formula to develop jokes that will now fit within the story. But you have to be creative and work a little to recognize the opportunities. You might write something that seems like a simple statement about your life, but if you look closely you can see the opportunity to break it down and get to the humor. Usually this happens when you just start telling a story about you or your experiences.

"I'm a very analytical person..., "

"My wife always buys the cheapest stuff"

"I went to Palm Springs last weekend. It was a hundred and fourteen degrees..."

When you have statements like these, take a moment and do the "so" joke exercise...

I'm so analytical...

My wife is so cheap...

Palm Springs was so hot...

Taking these statements you can apply the techniques we use above with the *nose* jokes. This will help you develop the laugh points within your story and will help you turn your story into a comedy routine.

Try it yourself. Use the three "so" statements above or take three "so" statements from your own stories and break them down using the

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listing technique. Then write ten "so" jokes about each statement. Once you have the raw material craft it into a quick story and see what you come up with.

Have fun!

PART 9

Tags, Toppers and Act-outs

You ever watch comedian and they seem to get a running roll of laughter that doesn't seem to stop? You wonder how they do it?

Phyllis Diller, for example was famous among other comedians for getting 22 laughs in 1 minute!

Most of them use "tags" and "toppers." I used to think the terms were interchangeable, but a wise-man (or a birdie), not sure how to describe this fellow comedian and comedy writer, suggested to me that there is a difference.

He says that a **tag** is when the comedian does a setup and a punchline. Gets a laugh, then he tags the setup or premise with an additional punch word or phrase.

A **topper** is when after the comedian says the punchline, he tops the punchline with an additional word or phrase that is associated with the punchline. Without the punchline, the topper wouldn't make sense.

I know it sounds confusing but it's really not, once you see it in action.

Let's look at this joke that I did on A&E's "An Evening at The Improv."
I'll color code the elements of the joke so that we can identify them:

Setup = **BLACK**

Punchline = **RED**

Tag = **ORANGE**

Topper = **GREEN**

Act-Out = **BLUE**

"My name is Jerry and my wife's name is Jerry, so it makes answering the phone pretty frustrating: "Hello?" "Is Jerry there?" "Yeah, which one?" "Jerry Corley?" "Yeah, which one?"

Doesn't sound so bad, but if I told you about the time I spent an hour trying to convince the lady at my wife's doctor that the benign cyst was probably not on my uterus...

We're a pretty mathematical relationship. On our mailbox it simply says "Jerry2." We're pretty mathematical in bed, as well... we're reciprocal fractions; Jerry over Jerry or Jerry over Jerry, either way the results are the same.

Division is fun! How many times does Jerry go into Jerry... well that just depends on what night it is...and when she's yelling "Oh, Jerry, Jerry!" I don't know whether I'm good or she's getting into herself! And you know what they say about a number divided by itself. It winds up cheating on you, taking your house and marrying the accountant."

You get the idea. The point is whether it's a tag or a topper, it is a take-off or a comment on an existing joke. It's one way a comedian can get more mileage out of a joke. So, instead of getting one laugh on the punchline, he can get three or four laughs, or in the case of the above joke, eleven.

In my years of teaching comedy, inevitably someone will ask me why we should write so many jokes. One reason is the more punchlines you come up with for one joke, the more possibilities you have for tags or toppers to really get mileage out of that joke.

Let's take a look at this effort to build a joke:

Here's the setup:

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The body of a 40-year-old woman was found in a processing plant for McDonald's restaurants...

Earlier we learned that one definition of a joke is when you have two clearly identifiable ideas converging.

Clearly, with this setup line (which is an actual headline from a newspaper), we have two clear ideas; "*the body of a 40-year-old woman*" and "*McDonald's restaurants*."

After doing a listing technique for everything I can think of with regard to the body of a 40-year-old woman and McDonald's restaurants, one idea in each column immediately stands out:

McDonald's	Body of a 40-yr-old Woman
Chicken Sandwiches	Breasts

With this information, I can easily write this joke:

The body of a 40-year-old woman was found in a processing plant for McDonald's restaurants... McDonald's put a positive spin on this saying they can now claim that their chicken sandwiches are made with real breasts.

If we wanted to be like most comedians we could stop here and be satisfied that we have a joke. But you didn't get this e-book because you wanted to be just like most comedians. You got this book because you wanted to be better than that. In fact, I'm hoping your goal is to be the best comedian... Or at least the best comedian you can be.

So instead of being satisfied with one joke from this perfect set up to a joke let's dig deep and see what the joke would look like if we add tags and toppers:

The body of a 40-year-old woman was found in a processing plant for McDonald's restaurants... McDonald's put a positive spin on this, saying they can now claim that their chicken sandwiches are made with real breasts... 40-year-old saggy breasts, but real breasts, nonetheless... Would you like thighs with that?

This is all true! In fact, McDonald's is now featuring a new shake on their menu. It's called the 'McMammary.' It doesn't come with a straw; it comes with a McNipple.

They serve it in three sizes; medium, large and Double D... It's the only shake that comes with a label that says, "Caution: this bitch is hot!"

So from this bit right here, we are able to achieve **eight laugh points**, and possibly an applause break, where there may have been only one, if we resigned ourselves to be happy with one laugh.

So now can you see the value in putting the effort into doing the lists? When you work hard and you dig deep, you can be rewarded with a huge payoff.

An extension of the tag or topper is the "act-out." In standup comedy act-out is King. An act-out is a name used to label physicalizing and/or verbalizing a situation that you set up or alluded to in your comedy.

IE: "Imagine if you had to pee really bad while you're at the altar.

Some of the best comedians utilize the act-out to get huge laughs.

By its nature, the act-out combines two comedy structures; *incongruity* and *recognition*.

By acting out a joke you not only introduce a new element, you also introduce a new dimension and take a two-dimensional act and turn it into a three-dimensional act by making it come alive.

One of the best ways to see this come together is to watch some of the best act-out comedians at work. The ones that come to my mind first are:

- Brian Regan
- Robin Williams
- Louis CK
- Dave Chappelle
- Katt Williams
- Jerry Seinfeld

There are many many more comedians who utilize this technique. And you should seriously consider honing your act-out skills. Contemporary comedy today almost demands that you utilize act-outs. These days, an act can seem rather thin if it doesn't contain an act-out.

And act-out should be an organic extension of a joke. If it feels like it's forced, then the audience will feel like it's forced. And as a result, you would've surpassed the dynamic of heightened reality and gone out into orbit to complete absurdity.

When this happens, the audience will shut down and stop believing you. Few things can kill a comedian's act faster than an act-out that is not believable. So make sure you act-outs come from a place that is **real**.

One way I approach the act-out is to imagine the story I'm telling the audience. If I think they would get it better if I played it out, then I'll put in an act-out. The act-out can be one way of heightening the surprise.

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The act-out is beyond the scope of this e-book since this book deals mostly with writing and breaking down comedy structure and the act-out is a more advanced technique so we won't cover it much beyond this page.

But to really see the act-out in action, watch the comedians I listed above.

Bonus #2

My Secret – Top 10 Ways to Write a Joke

Other comedy writers often ask me how I am able to write so many jokes about one subject and then come up with multiple tags. I would never tell anyone...until now. Are you ready? Drum roll, please...

I used what I call a Top Ten List exercise. Now the Top Ten List is currently David Letterman's thing. It's one of the most popular segments on his show. But did you know that the Top Ten List is a joke-writing exercise that was used in writing rooms before the Joey Bishop Show (1961-1965).

The top ten list is very effective for helping the comedy writer develop a lot of jokes. How does it work so effectively?

First, the just starting to write a top ten list already has the writer shooting for ten jokes. Once you have that goal in mind, you will find that your brain doesn't fight you as much to create a bunch of material.

Secondly, the top ten list usually requires you to use a set up line that contains two clearly identifiable ideas converging. Once you have that you can utilize the listing technique.

IMPORTANT: Especially for comedians using the Top Ten List exercise to generate material is **NOT** designed to have you read a top ten list as part of your act, that's clearly Letterman's gimmick and most attempts to do a top ten list on stage would be seen as you trying to duplicate Letterman. It would be like a comedian performing "you know you're a redneck if..." and hoping that nobody recognizes Jeff Foxworthy.

You can, however perform a version of Top Ten by disguising it. For example, one of my students wrote a Top Ten List using the formula "Top ten ways to live in Los Angeles on a hundred and ninety-two dollars a week." But what she did was disguise it in 'chapters' by setting it up with: "I wrote a book on how to live in Los Angeles on a hundred and ninety-two dollars a week...it starts, Chapter One: Get a boyfriend who has a job. Chapter two: get a best friend who has credit. Chapter three: move in together..." And so on...

See how the "chapters" disguise the fact that she's using the Top Ten List as her mechanism for creating the humor?

So, if you're going to use the Top Ten list, be creative. The Top Ten list is how I can generate a ton of organic "stand-alone" jokes. I just use the technique as an engine to drive my creativity and imagination.

Let's take a closer look at the Top Ten Ways to Write a Joke...

The following exercise will demonstrate how to formulate the listing technique and get you on your way to creating your first bit.

Remember, in this exercise our goal is **not** to put together a segment called "Top 10". It is a way to grease those wheels in order to create independent jokes that can eventually be worked into a routine.

In fact the Top 10 will not be a Top 10 at all, you won't be finished until you come up with a Top 20 or Top 30. Out of that list you will probably be able to find 2 to 3 "worthy" jokes that you can tweak so that they can be told independently from the Top 10 structure.

The secret to making this technique work is coming up with a great setup line, a setup line that inspires an emotion that will give you point of view. Once you have a point of view or a way you feel about something, the easier it is to write about. A setup line is the line you are probably familiar with. "Top Ten Things not to say on a first date." "Top Ten ways to tell your girlfriend/boyfriend is a shop-a-holic"

I cannot emphasize enough how important the set up line is. The more leading the set up line the better the material. A great set up line has 3 important components.

Target
Subject/Premise
Point of view or Angle

Target – The target is who or what we are going to talk about in our top ten list. A top ten list is usually a veiled attack on something or someone. So you choose a target, *any target*, then you try to find a relevant subject or premise in which to situate your target. Here's an example below from the Late Show with David Letterman:

Top Ten George W. Bush New Year's Resolutions

10. Fewer decisions based on wild, drunken hunches

9. Have N.S.A. find out what really happened between Romo & Simpson

8. Stop using Situation Room monitors to play X-Box 360

7. More C-SPAN, less "Yes, Dear"

6. Team up with leading scientists to make Cheetos even cheesier

5. To capture and bring to justice that pesky King Kong

4. Beat the twins at beer pong

3. Respond to reporters questions with, "Bitch, don't go there"

2. Scale back on grueling 12-hour work week

1. *"Who needs resolutions? Everything is fine"*

Let's break down the structure of the setup line:

Top Ten **George W. Bush** **New Year's resolutions:**

Target

Subject/Premise

The point of view or angle is usually implied with a joke like this. The simple fact that you are making fun of something or someone shows that you are attacking the target. Even if it is in *fun*.

In fact, your best jokes are usually the jokes that you have an emotion investment in. For example using your ex as a target can produce some very cathartic and very funny jokes because the target is presumed to have done you wrong in some way. This automatically makes the ex the antagonist and makes the audience root for the comedian. And an "ex" is something everyone has experienced and the premise will almost always fit into a similar experience for your audience as well.

If they can relate, not only to the structure of the joke but the emotional experience as well, then you will find that the joke will pack a serious punch.

But let's save that for more advanced joke-writing techniques. For now let's focus on the structure of the Top 10.

Right now, take the information above and come up with 10 set up lines. Don't stop until you have at least 10. Remember to pick a target and situate them in a premise. Below are some examples I've come up

with based on the idea that it is sometime around the Holiday season and I want to write some jokes about the upcoming Holidays:

- Top Ten signs you're at a bad New Year's Eve Party.
- Top Ten signs your wife is having an affair with Santa Claus.
- Top Ten gifts given when George W. Bush sings the 12 days of Christmas.
- Top Ten items on Nicole Ricci's Christmas wish list.
- Top Ten stocking stuffers you can buy for Mel Gibson.
- Top Ten signs you've hired a bad Santa for your Office Party.
- Top Ten Movie titles that weren't considered for the Holidays.
- Top Ten Christmas gifts to buy for your ex-wife.
- Top Ten rejected names for Santa's Reindeer.
- Top Ten Christmas Carols I'd like to sing this Christmas.
- Top Ten signs you're doing your Christmas shopping at the mall in Southern California.

Now that you have a nice list of ten possible Top Ten premises. It's time to narrow down the list to the one you are going to work with to find your jokes.

Since, at the time of this writing, I just got back from the mall doing Christmas shopping, I am going to go with:

Top Ten signs you're Christmas shopping at the mall in Southern California.

Valet parking.

The world's shortest skirts and the world's warmest Uggs.

Hey Santa, Nice Tank Top.

Hair bleach is sold as a stocking stuffer.

Breast Implant Kiosks

Santa's sleigh is on display and it has spinners

Nothing says Noel like a Mom wearing a festive Santa hat, a scarf and low-rise jeans that show her ass crack.

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There's a store where you can buy an official NFL jersey for every major city in the country except L.A. because they don't have a team! Fredrick's of Hollywood is having a sale on fishnet stocking stuffers. Instead of cookies and hot cocoa, you get warm sake and cold sushi. Bell ringers for the homeless...to raise money so they can get boob jobs too. Santa said "Ho, ho ho!" in Santa Monica and was arrested for soliciting.

These are just a few that I came up with in a very short period of time. The idea here is to keep repeating the phrase "Top Ten signs you are Christmas shopping at the mall in Southern California." The continuous repetition helps to remind you to think of everything Christmas and everything Southern California.

Start writing!



This is where you should be writing...Are you writing?

The next thing you know you have jokes that can stand alone.

Say that I was doing a show for a company Christmas party; I would do an exercise like this one to generate some jokes relating to Christmas, which in this case is the **subject**. The **target**, as you may have figured out by now is Southern California.

The funny thing about Southern California is that despite any occasion, it is always mired in a constant cosmetic competition.

How many did you come up with? Did you find it difficult or easy?

Now that you have your list, you can take each of these from the Top 10 and write it as an independent joke. You really want to stay away from doing a "Top 10" list because it is already staked out territory and it won't be a good reflection on you as a performer. Your audience will be so pre-occupied with the fact that they've hear the Top 10 before that your list won't be as funny.

Here's an example:

"It's hard to get into the Christmas spirit when you're shopping in the mall in Southern California. Everyone is so—well, Southern Californian. Their bell ringers are raising money so even the homeless can get boob jobs."

"And the way they dress, you'd think Santa brought extra toys to the naughty girls and did you ever shop at the Beverly Center during Christmas? Their mall Santa wears a red velour sweat suit and has a tan."

By now, I'm sure you're getting the hang of it. If you're not, don't be dismayed. There is a method to the madness of writing comedy and I'm sure that with a little effort and a more structured approach, you too will be writing funny lines in no time!

BONUS #3

Joke Writing 1-2-3!



Introduction

Say you're sitting down at your daily writing session (you are scheduling your daily writing sessions...right?), and you begin to put pen to paper or put your fingers on the keyboard and then nothing happens... you try to come up with ideas, but your brain seems to discharge them as not worthy of your time before you can write a single word. What do you do?

Wouldn't it be great to have a technique; a focused process that you can apply that can walk you all the way through from the seed of the idea to a completed joke or routine?

One of the most common concerns I hear from humor writers and comedians is that they have days and sometimes weeks where they

"can't think of anything funny." That used to happen to me. I still have moments like that, but they are fleeting.

I thought to myself that, lately I'm never without something to write or make jokes about. There's always something there, it seems. So I thought about how my mind comes up with stuff and I want to share it with you.

Keep in mind, this is just ONE of the methods I use to find and develop comedy material. Here's the process:

I broke it down into steps and I'm going to give you that process right now. I'm calling it **"JOKE-WRITING 1-2-3!"**

Start with stuff that is close to you. Look around you, think about your surroundings, situations, behaviors and ask yourself 3 questions:

1. What is new?
2. What has changed?
3. What have I acquired?

What's new? Every day is a new day. With all the holidays and special occasion days we celebrate in this country and worldwide, almost every day of every week gives us something to joke about.

Did you know March 1st is National Pancake Day? Of course it is immediately followed by National Maple Syrup Day!

This is not an amazing joke, but I guarantee you it's a joke that can keep the audience moving forward. Great for corporate, cruises and fund-raising events.

As you ask yourself these questions, don't leave anything out! Write it all down! Just looking in the mailbox, I'm sure everyone has acquired a cell phone bill, heating bill, water bill, cable bill, etc. You have a new

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pair of sneakers, let's talk about them! Don't think there's anything funny with that? Remember Jerry Seinfeld wrote an entire show about 'nothing,' that lasted for nine years and the only reason it went off the air was because *he* was ready to move on.

Too many comedians and humor writers stop too soon. They think, "there's nothing funny there!" They don't take the time to write out everything about their sneakers and use their imagination to develop material. Every comedian and humor writer should be able to take any logical grouping of words and make it funny. But it takes dedication and work.

PROCESS

Okay, let's get back to JOKE WRITING 1-2-3.

Let's look at a situation that happened to me recently. I asked "What have I acquired?" I just got a new **video poker** app for my Smartphone.

So now we have a subject: Video Poker App.
How do we even start writing a joke for it?

Most jokes are a convergence of two or more clearly defined ideas.

So let's go to work.

Let's utilize the oldest tool known to writers and investigators. It's the maxim of the 5 W's...

Let's ask:
Who?



What?
Where?
When?
Why?
How?

Okay so it's 5 W's and an "H." ☺

No investigation is considered complete unless all of those questions have been answered. So if we go back to the Video Poker App premise and ask those questions we might come up with something like:

- **Who plays the video poker app?** Me
- **What is it?** Video Poker **or What happens when I play?** I can sometimes upset my wife
- **Where do I play?** I play at the airport, in line at the bank, on a plane, in the bathroom...
- **Why do I play?** To have some mental downtime, to get away from work. To have something to occupy me while I'm in the bathroom
- **When?** Whenever I have nothing else to do
- **How?** On my phone, by myself, with my thumbs

With this information we have all we need to develop material for the premise "video poker app." If you've read about the eight major laugh trigger earlier in the eBook, then you know the science of why people laugh.

Two prime reasons (especially with regard to commercially acceptable humor), are *surprise* and *embarrassment*. So let's ask ourselves how we can utilize a set up line that might present surprise or embarrassment.

The first thing that comes to me is "bathroom."

So, if I look at the entirety of the material I've collected I can put together a set up line that might go something like this:

"I just got a new video poker app for my Droid. I love playing it in the bathroom...."

Now we have two or more clearly defined ideas: Video-poker App and bathroom. If we were to use the listing technique, we could easily come up with phrases that we could combine to make a joke. The first one I came up with was:

I just got a new video poker app for my Droid. I love playing it in the bathroom.

My wife's feelings are mixed on that. She says she loves the fact that I found a new way to play with myself, but she gets a little irritated when I'm on the toilet and she hears me yell, "Full House!"

Just think of the possibilities with the phrases: "flush," "straight flush," "royal flush," "all clubs." Pinochle (pee-knuckle)," "Texas Hold-'em," and the list goes on.

If we really took the time and fleshed out all the possible plays we have with those two ideas, we could come up with an easy 10, 20 or 30 jokes on just the video-poker app premise alone. 20-30 jokes!

And just think we started the day thinking, "I can't think of anything funny to write about..."

Now it's your turn. Ask yourself:

1. What is new?
2. What has changed?
3. What have I acquired?

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This is just one of my many processes for writing jokes that I have used over the years to generate literally thousands of jokes. Now you can use it too.

Now you have another process for writing jokes. Enjoy!

PART 10

CONCLUSION

At this point you should now have at least fifteen different ways to write comedy material. And believe it or not there are a lot more!

I hope you have found this e-book useful in helping you break down comedy structure and formula and give you a vastly more comprehensive view on how to write and approach comedy.

By utilizing the structures found in this book, you should be able to begin to conquer your writing.

Start small. Start by focusing on one subject at a time. If you sit down to write 'funny,' you put an enormous burden on yourself. Instead, you should sit down to write the truth. When you do that you can start to apply the structures to turn those simple statements into something funny.

If you start writing strong structured comedy, your opportunities will multiply very quickly, but you have to do the work!

Walt Whitman said, "Actors must act, painters, must paint and writers must write..."

What he meant by that is get to work! Educating yourself and learning the fundamentals is one thing. Getting out and doing it is where the joy lies.

BONUS #4

10 WAYS TO BEAT WRITER'S BLOCK

1) **Ponderables**

Go to Google and use the search word "ponderables." Google will give you pages of sites that give you random thoughts that will get your mind thinking incongruously and creatively.

Here are a couple of links to sites:

<http://www.jwjonline.net/ponderables.php>

<http://www.britneyisdead.com/Ponderables.html>

2) **Watch Comedy**

This may seem pretty obvious, but you'd be amazed at how many comedians who write comedy just suffer the writer's block and don't utilize this technique. When I watch good comedians work, I get inspired... so use YouTube and watch some comedy, but set yourself a time limit, (say 15 minutes), otherwise you can wind up using all your writing time, not writing, but watching!

3) **Cliché Workouts**

Again, utilize Google for this. Use the search term: "Clichés" or "Idioms," and you will be taken to pages of these comedy gems. You can reform the cliché or do cliché take-offs. Or you can get whole bunch of clichés I've gathered and put on a pdf document by [downloading clichés here](#).

4) **Is that all Bob?**

"Is That All, Bob?" for me is a last-resort technique. If you are suffering one of those long, drawn out periods (two weeks), when you can seem to write anything funny, then have a comedy buddy over, set up a video camera, stand in front of it while it's recording and have your buddy throw you random items from the house or

garage. It's your job to sell these items to the viewers.

But here's the catch: you cannot sell it for what the item is... you must sell it as something completely different. For example, One time I was doing this exercise. I was in front of the camera, my comedy buddy says, "Is that all, Bob?" and I said, "That's not all! We'll also send you a..." then he threw me a catcher's mitt. I looked into the camera and sold it as an all-natural, organic diaphragm for the Statue of Liberty!

5) Pet Peeves

A pet peeve is a behavior or a trait that someone finds particularly annoying. It used to refer to behaviors that someone close to us would exhibit that one would find annoying that other people might not find annoying. (For example if your spouse has a tendency to put the toilet tissue roll on with the paper coming underneath the roll, as opposed to over the top of the roll) But the definition has evolved to include behaviors of strangers (ie: those that don't use turn signals when changing lanes, etc.)

We all have these little annoyances in life. You can start by writing them down and getting really specific. Before you know it you'll be writing down premises and ideas for routines.

6) Personality Questionnaire

One of the first assignments I give beginning comedy writers when I teach a course is to write 25 facts about themselves. What's interesting is many of them sit down to write and nothing happens. I have found a very interesting and fail-safe way for students to be able to do that almost automatically. You know the personality profile they have you fill out on online-dating websites like e-Harmony? They are perfect for helping the comedian develop straight lines or set ups for comedy. You can also use Google to search for "personality profiles." They all ask you questions about yourself. You answer them in full sentences and you will have set

ups for jokes.

7) Word Definitions

Just like the Double entendre exercise, sometimes just looking up definitions of words is a great place to start. Whenever I book corporate jobs and write five minutes of new material for the gig, that's where I start. For example I did a gig for a respiratory therapists' conference in Reno, Nevada. I found out that they were bowling the night before I got there and a lot of them were drinking and partying at the bowling alley. So I said, *"Before I did this gig, I looked up 'respiratory therapist in the dictionary, it said, 'A respiratory therapist is a person that is licensed and skilled in managing the techniques used in treating those with acute and chronic respiratory diseases...' but I think they need to refine that after I heard what took place at the bowling alley last night."* I was the definition that inspired the joke. Simple, huh?

8) Quotations

This is one of my absolute favorites and never lets me down! I just go to a quote website like www.quotationspage.com and I can find tons of quotes. I take the quote and I reform it or do a take off on it. For example the first quote on the above website is from Aesop: "Slow and steady wins the race." So the joke I came up with was "Slow and steady may win the race, but deeper and harder makes her call out your name!"

Using quotations as a primer can have me writing 10 jokes in as little as 15 minutes!

9) Photo or Picture Captioning

Here's another no-fail technique for getting out of writer's block. Download or collect pictures and photos from magazines or newspapers; the more random the better and write 2-3 captions for each one. The photograph helps 'light up' the visual centers of your brain. This will help you to use a different part of your brain

for your creativity. Instead of just looking at words, you're looking at images and triggering new inspirations for humor.

10) Factoids

Another winner! It's the truth, audiences love facts. If you can inject facts into your routine, it gives the audience a place where they can participate mentally. If you tell them something like "Every twelve and a half seconds some woman in the U.S. gets pregnant." It's a perfect setup for a joke, because it comes from truth. Then you can do a take-off on it and the joke might go something like this: "Every twelve and a half seconds some woman in the U.S. gets pregnant...someone should find her and stop her!"

So there you have it! 10 Sure-Fire ways to beat writer's block.

Again I hope you found this e-book useful and it's getting you to write jokes like never before.

If you did find this useful, please go back to the page you downloaded it from and leave me a comment. The comment section helps me to reach out to other people and help them with comedy writing as well.

Thanks so much and enjoy writing!

PART 11

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

1. **Act-Out** – When a comedian physicalizes the material, by showing an audience what he/she is saying. It's an added way to get a laugh and usually very effective because the incongruity of the situation be played out becomes more visual for the audience.
2. **Beat** – Once referred to as a breath. Taking a break or a pause; for the purposes of timing, also a joke or a laugh.
3. **Being Present** – Having the state of mind to be keenly aware of everything around you while on stage while remaining focused. It allows you to respond instantly to unexpected stimuli or impulses.
4. **Bio** – a paragraph or several paragraph description of the comedian's experience and personal history. Can be written humorously.
5. **Bit** – A part of your routine that may run on a certain (same) theme for a several jokes.
6. **Blue Material (Working Blue)** – Any material that is sexual or laced with profanity. Sometimes it's also considered blue if you work racial material or scatological (poop) material.
7. **Bomb (Bombing)** – When a joke doesn't get laughs, it is often said that the joked "bombed." If a comedian is on stage and his act doesn't pay off, it if often said that the comedian

"bombed," or is "bombing."

8. Booker – A business person who is responsible for being the entertainment coordinator for a venue (comedy club, bar, nightclub) and the comedian. He "books" the comedian into the venue and arranges payment.

9. Book Joke – a joke that a comedian performs that is an old joke from a joke book.

10.Branding – A comedian who develops a brand is recognized for that one outstanding trait. Carrot Top with his hair and his props. Larry The Cable Guy for his sleeveless shirts and "Git 'er done!" Jeff Foxworthy with "You know you're a redneck if..."

11.Callback – A word, expression, or joke that is a reference back to one performed earlier in a comedian's act. It could be referred to by the same comedian or another comedian who's performing in the same show. A callback utilizes the recognition laughter trigger so it can elicit a powerful response from the audience.

12. Character – could be a cast member or certain traits developed by a performer that can be recognized by a distinctive nature or behavior. (i.e.:Larry The 'Cable Guy').

13.Clean (Working "Clean") – Comedy material that uses no profanity or no references to sex or bodily function humor. Think of material that you could do for a crowd of senior citizens or 10-year olds.

14. Closer – The final joke or bit of a comedian's act. Should elicit a big laugh or applause. "Closer" is also used to refer to the comedian who goes on last. Some people call that person a "headliner" but if he doesn't draw a crowd at the door then I

prefer to refer to him as a closer.

15. College Gig – A booked job performing at a college or university; usually a well-paying gig.

16. Comedian – A performance artist who performs stand-up comedy

17. Comic – Someone who performs stand-up comedy

(Note: it was once not “cool” to call comedians “comics.” It was said that a comic is someone who would run across the football stadium naked for a laugh. The comedian was the person who told him to do it!)

18. Cruise Gig – A paid booking on a cruise ship.

19. Dark Humor – Jokes about cancer, child abuse, rape or other topic that are usually not considered happy.

20. Dead Pan – A facial expression where the performer takes a beat to several beats and stares at the audience; sometimes it can include a little nod or the raise of an eyebrow. (Watch Seth Meyers on SNL's Weekend Update.)

21. Emcee – (M.C.) Master of Ceremonies (Mistress of...) Usually introduces the show by performing a short set; keeps the audience warm by moving the show along and introducing the other acts in the show. (Sometimes called the “host”).

22. E.P.K. (Electronic Press Kit) – a promotional package that is stored on a CD or DVD or other digital device. Usually contains video or audio clips with a resume and bio.

- 23. Fallout** – a comedian cancels a booked gig and has to be replaced. A booker may call you to say he “has a fall-out.”
- 24. Feature Act** – Usually the middle act of a 3 comedian formatted show. Typically the middle act will perform 25-30 minutes.
- 25. Flop Sweat** – when a comedian is bombing, he/she can start sweating profusely.
- 26. Gig** – A scheduled performance. Could be paid or unpaid.
- 27. Hack** – an overused word in the comedy industry usually referring to material that is over-used and un-original. One comedian might call another comedian a hack if they tend to use cheesy or unoriginal material.
- 28. Headliner** – the last comedian on the bill. The headliner is expected to be a draw at the club, (which means his name attracts an audience). He's commonly more experienced and is expected to perform 45-60 minutes or more.
- 29. Headshot** – A photograph of the comedian or performer. Usually this is shot in a studio and should always be hi-resolution and an 8"x10".
- 30. Heckler** – A heckler is someone in the audience who shouts out something to the performer usually to get attention or because they feel they are contributing something to the show. (Read more in this short article [about hecklers](#)).
- 31. Hot Mic (Mike)** – when the 'gain' on the microphone is high and the performer has to adjust the distance from his mouth so it isn't too loud and/or certain enunciations don't modulate making a 'poppin' sound or over distortion of the sound.

- 32. Intro** – Is what a comedian has the emcee say to bring them up on the stage.
- 33. Joke** – Anything that is designed by words or actions by the comedian to get the audience to laugh. It could be a couple of lines or it could be a story.
- 34. Jokey** – Something that is 'punny' or obvious to the audience.
- 35. Joke on the way to the joke** – If the comedian is telling a story and inserts laugh points (other jokes) to keep the audience laughing while he works his way to the ending, that's calling using jokes on the way to the joke.
- 36. 'Joking' the Joke** – when a comedian tries too hard to make a line funny before he gets to the punchline. Often a comedian will do this by using silly or whacky metaphors to set up the joke. By the time we reach the punch line there is no surprise because you were trying to 'joke' us the entire way. (Different from a joke on the way to the joke).
- 37. Killing (To Kill)** An often overused phrase meaning to really have a great show. Some comedians get a few laughs and they say they "killed." I don't think I kill until I get a standing ovation. (But every comedian should be able to celebrate their victories how they see fit).
- 38. Laughs Per Minute (LPM's)** the number of laughs a comedian receives from the audience per minute. In many clubs' showcase guidelines, they look for a laugh every 18-20 seconds, or around three laughs per minute.
- 39. Laugh Point** – anywhere in a comedian's 'script' where he/she crafts a surprise to get a laugh from the audience; usually contained within the body of a comedic story. (see: a Joke on

the way to a joke).

- 40. Light (Minding your light; don't go over your light)** – usually a show producer or showroom manager will signal a comedian that their time is winding down by using some kind of light as a signal. Many Comedy clubs will have a light that's mounted on a wall, but some managers will use a flashlight, a cellphone, a candle or even a lighter. The performer would be wise to wrap up their set and get off the stage. Few things can anger a manager more than a comedian who runs the light. Most clubs give a minute light as their default. However, if you have a closer that is a bit that lasts five minutes, it might be wise to ask for a five-minute light.
- 41. Line** – used in writer's rooms a lot, the term "line" often means, a joke. The executive producer or star might say, "write me a couple of lines about the election." He means a couple of jokes.
- 42. Line-up** – Like the lineup of a baseball team's hitting roster, but with comedians. The line-up shows what position each comedian is working and how many comedians are scheduled for the evening's show.
- 43. Malapropism** – An intentional misuse of a word for comedic effect. (i.e.: Orange you glad I didn't say banana again?)
- 44. Middle Act** – just like it says, the middle (also known as the "feature act," performs second in the three-act format. The feature is usually expected to perform 25-30 minutes.
- 45. Misdirection** – use of words or actions to mislead the audience into anticipating a conclusion, when the comedian is already preparing to do or say something completely different.

- 46. On the Road** – when a comedian leaves his home town to perform at a comedy club. A comedian is usually considered on the road when he/she has to spend the night away from home.
- 47. One-liner** – A joke that is made up of a simple set up and a punch line. Usually contains one or two sentences.
- 48. One-Nighter** – A one night gig, usually at a bar, casino or hotel.
- 49. Open-Mic** – A show where any performer can get on stage. Sometimes a performer has to arrive earlier than the show time to get a slot by signing up.
- 50. Opener** – refers to the first joke a comedian does in his act or the first comedian of the night. The opener can be the emcee, but isn't always.
- 51. Opening Line** – some call this the most important part of a comedian's act. It's the first joke of the set. It should contain a crisp laugh and help to define the comedian.
- 52. Owning the Material** – the step past memorizing the material. Owning the material means that the performer has honed and polished the material to the point where he/she doesn't miss a beat and can express themselves through the material. The general rule of thumb is that it usually takes about eight hours of rehearsal to own five minutes of material.
- 53. Package** – Also known as a promotional pack. It is a sample of the comedian's or writer's work.
- 54. Panel (Doing panel)** – usually on a talk show where a comedian sits at the desk of the host to be interviewed.

55. Persona – Another way to identify or characterize a comedian by style, voice or character.

56. P.O.V. (Point of View) – a comedian's unique perspective about a joke, or an issue being used in a comedian's material. Usually this is demonstrated using emotion so that the audience can connect with the comedian.

57. Premise – The topic of the joke or bit.

58. Promo pack – A sample of the comedian's or writer's work. Usually includes a video (of the comedian) a bio, resume and headshot.

59. Punch line – This is where (in the material), the audience's expectation is shattered after the set up and misdirection. It usually results in laughter.

60. Rant – this is when a comedian picks a topic or several topics and allows his/her stream of consciousness and emotion drive the material forward. Usually laced with a strong emotional point of view. Some comedians will use this technique to discover or create the material while on stage.

61. Reformation – utilized in a writing technique called "cliché reformation," it's where the comedian will use part of a cliché, idiom, colloquialism or other common phrase and switch the anticipated ending with something edgy, dark, or sometimes sexual to give it a surprise ending. (i.e.: "My sister just had a baby, because evidently whatever happens in Vegas, comes out of your vagina.").

62. Regulars – comedians who have passed an audition at a particular club and now appear regularly as part of the club's schedule. Mostly in larger cities where the clubs tend to be

showcase clubs.

- 63. Reveal** – the final word in the joke that gives up the punch line. This could also be done with a comedian's expression or action.
- 64. Routine** – a planned out or written piece of material that lasts a certain amount of time. It's what a comedian has planned to do with his time on stage. Usually this is the core of his act that he can repeat on stage on any given night.
- 65. Running Gag** – A recurring joke in a set that can either be words or actions; Bill Engvall's "Here's your sign," or Larry The Cable Guy's "Git 'er done!"
- 66. Set** – a collection of jokes or bits that a comedian plans on doing while on stage.
- 67. Setup** – The introduction, or first sentence in a joke, sometimes referred to as the straight line, because it is usually based in truth.
- 68. Segue** – The transition between one joke or story to another.
- 69. Showcase** – Performing stand up at a venue for the purposes of being seen. You are "showcasing" your act. Hopefully to be seen by a booker, producer, manager or casting director.
- 70. Sight Gag** – In stand-up comedy, it's where the performer physicalizes the comedy. It's a visual comedic bit.
- 71. Sit on it** – a term used to describe where a comedian should take several beats to allow the audience to solve the puzzle. (Usually requires the comedian to do the dead pan a slow burn or a take).

- 72. Sketch** – a comedy routine that usually contains dialogue (conversation). Can have multiple cast members.
- 73. Slow Burn** – a head movement where you react to a joke said by yourself or someone else by looking at them for a beat, then slowly looking away, at someone else, at the audience, to the heavens, etc. Another technique that some consider 'old school' but mastered by the cast of "Friends" and by cast members on SNL.
- 74. Stage Time** – it's the time a comedian spends on stage in front of an audience. Also referred to as "mic-time."
- 75. Tag** – a tag is like another punch line that follows the first punch line. It uses the same set up and is a comment or a take-off on the initial set up. It could be verbal or it could be physicalized. An act-out is also a form of a tag.
- 76. Take** – a take is a quick look to the left or the right with using your head. It's sometimes looked at as 'old school' but is still commonly used by comedians like Robin Williams, Dave Chappelle and Seth Meyers.
- 77. Take-off** – a take-off is a comment on a straight-line, cliché, idiom or factoid. (i.e.: Whatever happens in Vegas, stays in Vegas...unless it gets stuck in your crotch hair!).
- 78. Tanking** – Another way to say you are bombing!
- 79. Throw-away** – also known as an "aside," it is where the performer says something out of "the side of his mouth," or under his breath as a comment to something else he just said.
- 80. Time** – the number of minutes a comedian is supposed to perform.

- 81. Topical Material** – material about current affairs; usually based on celebrity culture, sporting events, or politics.
- 82. Voice** – The style or manner with which a comedian or writer expresses themselves. It's what makes the comedian unique.
- 83. Warm-up Gig** – a job for a comedian where he/she keeps the studio audience entertained and interested during the taping of a sitcom, game show or talk show.
- 84. Web Presence** – A web page or blog on the internet where a writer or performer's work can be found. Essential for the modern-performer or writer.

Part 12

A FINAL WORD



Wow! What a ride, huh? If you made it this far, if you read the whole book, then you legitimately have around 15 different and unique ways to write or approach comedy as well as having a commanding understanding of what triggers human laughter.

Believe it or not you're already ahead of 99 percent of the comedians who are working today. That's right! A huge majority of comedians are lazy.

I'm talking about me as well. I understand the laziness. I was one of them once. Then someone close to me lit a fire under my butt and I started setting goals and making things happen. I learned and studied with the best writers in the business. I went out and got books on comedy writing from teachers who had real credentials. Then I took

what I learned from them and I went out and performed stand up and applied my skills both in writing and performing. I've had a successful career as a comedian and continue to perform.

Now I've put all my experience into educational materials so I can truly help other people accomplish the same thing I did.

Now that you have the tools to write, it's up to you to put in the work. There is hard work involved but the rewards are overwhelming joy and financial success doing what you love to do...so is it really work?

My Dad, a successful character actor, gave me one of my best reminders about what I do for a living.

I was on the road. I was stuck at the airport on a layover that was scheduled to be an hour. The flight was delayed and it wound up being five hours.

My Father called me and asked how my day was going. I whined and complained about the layover delay and he said, "Oh yeah that's terrible. What an awful predicament. This morning you got to wake up and say, 'today I get to write jokes.' Life sucks doesn't it?"

I thought about it for a moment and said, "You're right. Life's great!" and I got a cup of coffee, sat down, opened my laptop and wrote jokes.

I love what I do and even in my earlier years, I was making a great living doing comedy. I mostly focused on corporate comedy. In one year, I built a business and turned my comedy writing & performing skills into a full-time career earning upwards of \$250 thousand a year!

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You can be in the same place. What you do after this book is up to you. You can further develop your career. You can seek out work as a writer or comedian.

You can book jobs, get paid and turn your comedy into a full-time business with you as the CEO of YOU!

Although that is beyond the scope of this E-book, if you're interested in furthering your career as a comedy writer or comedian, contact the website where you purchased this book and we'll help you from there.

It's a funny thing about life, if you refuse to accept anything but the best, the best is very often what you get.

If you liked this book please [visit this link and leave a comment](#).

I would love to hear from you!

Here's to making it funny and making it a career!

Kind regards,
Jerry
jc@standupcomedyclinic.com

