

Film 150 Screenwriting (M & F 10 am - 2 pm)  
Summer Session 1: June 26 - July 28  
Class Location: TBD  
Office Location: TBA

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Office Hours: M/F 2 pm +  
& b/4 class by appt (email request)

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This is an introductory course in which students learn some basic principles of screenwriting, in the context of a Sketch Comedy Workshop class. Emphasis this Summer is on Sketch Comedy Writing, and how Sketch differs from other types of comedy (Stand Up, Sitcoms, Comedic Feature Films, & Improv vs. Written Skits.)

Telling jokes is how we critique and understand the world, ourselves, and other people. Having a funny idea, and wanting to share it, is a deeply human impulse. Your job, as screenwriters, is to learn to write your sketches in the funniest, most effective way possible for an audience. You want to move people to laughter so they can understand something new and unique about life.

The main activity of this class is writing—you'll write at least TEN short comedy sketches, ½ - 4 pages in length each. ("Brevity is the soul of wit" - W. Shakespeare.) We will be primarily concerned with STRUCTURE, CHARACTER, and HUMOR, as key components in sketch writing. We will analyze television sketch shows and your own scripts in terms of their structure, characters, and comedic effectiveness.

Becoming a better writer is a journey, and we all learn by attempting things and growing beyond our limitations. We learn by WRITING, first and foremost. I will expect you to write MORE sketches than those you decide to present in class, and I expect you to revise your writing both before and after you present in class. Our final class meeting will culminate in a public performance with actors of our top sketches in an hour-long show that you should invite your friends to.

Comedy is one of the most challenging, and most elusive forms of writing to master. Often what's funny to one person doesn't "work" for another. I'm going to run this class like a Writer's Room at SNL. At the end of each class, we'll vote democratically and anonymously to determine which sketches are funniest or have the greatest comic potential. These Finalists will be culled down into our Final Hour-long Show.

### Assignments:

You will be writing a series of sketches to compete in the Final Show and to complete your personal portfolio of your TEN (+) BEST sketches. Let your imagination and creativity guide you toward the kind of sketches you want to write.

**Expect to do a lot of writing, at least 2 sketches per week.** Put all your assignments in a lightweight 3-ring binder, with your name and e-mail written on the inside cover. Number your pages. Label everything (i.e.: Title and Type of Sketch etc.) and keep it all in the one binder, including your revisions. You will also turn in this binder at the end of our 9<sup>th</sup> class, with everything you have written, for your final evaluation. Keep

it organized and date your revisions. Be neat & professional—appearances count in Hollywood! Back up your work on hardcopy or electronic source.

It is important that you write on a regular schedule, either daily or weekly. The goal to “pass” this course is a minimum of 10 Sketches, including at least ONE or more from each of the following types of Sketches: Satire, Parody, 2-Hander, Group, Ensemble, Bit, Blackout, Runner (running gag), & Collaborative -- plus Revisions. Keep a small notebook with you at all times, in which to jot down funny ideas, observations, snatches of dialogue, or blinding bursts of inspiration as they occur. Keep pen and paper by your bed, to note down dreams. These notes are to serve your creativity, imagination, and idea retention—you won’t turn these in. (Only *finished sketches* count toward your 10 sketch assignment total.)

### Recommended texts:

The Comic Toolbox: How to Be Funny Even If You're Not  
Paperback – July, 1994  
by John Vorhaus (Author)

You may find other helpful books on Amazon or online – use any that help you. There is no textbook to “teach” comedy. It’s a matter of trial and error, personal style, voice, and current tastes.

### Grading:

You will be given a grade each class for the sketch you bring in and present. At the end of the term, your grades will be added together and divided by the number of classes to determine your class grade. Grades will be assigned based on this formula: [F=0, D=1, C=2, B=3, A=4]

- F No sketch (either didn’t write or absent)
- D Incomplete sketch
- C Rough sketch, 1st draft but complete, w/ typos, format errors, or other signs of lack of effort
- B Reasonable sketch, not especially original
- A Reasonably funny sketch, feels fresh and original

Thus, if you earned: F, C, A, B, C, D, A, A, A, your sketch grade would be: C+ or B- ( $24/9 = 2.666$ )  
Your grade could go up or down depending on two other factors: attendance/class participation and REVISION work. You will submit your Portfolio in the final week and may include sketch revisions.

Remember, the challenge each class is to BE CREATIVE! To come up with something funny, fresh, and original! To get there, you’re going to have to come up with MORE THAN ONE idea, so that you can winnow out the chaff and select the best and funniest ideas to develop and present. The student who, each class, comes up with TEN different ideas for sketches and hones it down to the best one (perhaps by bandying ideas around with partner and friends) will do much better than the student who comes up with one idea and writes only that one.

Wait a second! I heard students in Film 150 had to write a minimum of 75 pages to pass?! Yes, this was true in the past (and in the academic year.) This summer class is an experiment in student self-determination and collaboration. If you prepare for each class correctly, in fact, you’re actually doing a lot more work and writing for each class than the single sketch you present in each class. This sketch should represent a culmination of your ideas, rather than your first idea.

Please be aware: though the tone of this class is very casual and light, which is most conducive to good humor and laughter, I have high expectations of you as a student and writer. It’s not my job to police your output - if you don’t write, your grade will reflect this. Remember, this class is fun and creative, but you are receiving college credits for your work in this class - so I expect you to work hard!

**Class rules:**

In addition to turning in ALL writing assignments, you are expected to prepare ALL readings, participate in class discussions and workshops, join and use our online Google Group, and attend class regularly and on-time.

Class starts promptly at 10:00 am; 2 “lates” = one absence, in my gradebook.

If you miss TWO class meetings, you will ding your grade (downward half a grade). If you are absent for three classes, you will automatically FAIL the course.

Q: Does 2 absents + 2 tardies = 3 absents (and automatic failure)? YES!

If you cannot attend on time regularly, or don't think you can turn in at least TWO comedy sketches per week, you should DROP this course. One sketch is DUE every class meeting!

WARNING! This class requires self-discipline. Reread rule above. Students CAN and DO fail this class... I demand a LOT of writing in this class. Students learn only by writing and rewriting.

**Office Hours:**

I encourage and expect you to make use of my weekly Office Hours to develop your ideas. We can get a lot more accomplished in a short face-to-face meeting, than with workshop comments. I'm friendly and interested in your ideas, and students usually find the time they spend one-on-one with me to be extremely helpful! If you can't make my scheduled hours, we can work out another appointment time - I WANT to help you! Don't stay away if you feel scared or lost - I can help you “find,” as well as develop, your comedic ideas!

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**Film 150 fulfills the GE code of: Creative Process (PR-C code)**

Courses teach creative process and techniques in the arts (including creative writing), at an individual or a collaborative level.

**Practice: Creative Process (PR-C code).** Courses that carry the PR-C GE designation teach creative process and techniques in a context of individual or collaborative participation in the arts, including creative writing. For creative writing, students will publish an informal group collection or individual dossier of their successful writings. Courses may combine theory and experiment in the creation of a new artwork, or new interpretation(s) of an existing artwork. Creative Process courses include studies in individual or group creativity or improvisation, and/or ensemble rehearsal and performance. Students who elect to satisfy this requirement will take at least two credits of individual or group creative work; however, the requirement may be satisfied within courses of greater than two credits. Where appropriate, sponsoring units may require a sequence of two or three 2-credit courses with the PR-C designation assigned to the final quarter. For sequences culminating in a semi-professional public performance, an audition at which students demonstrate aptitude and a foundation of skills will be required.

**Disability Accommodation:**

NOTE: If you qualify for classroom accommodations because of a disability, please submit your Accommodation Authorization from the Disability Resource Center (DRC) to me during my office hours in a timely manner, preferably within the first two weeks of the quarter. Contact DRC at 459-2089 (voice), 459-4806 (TTY).

**Evaluations for Summer Quarter FDM courses:**

You will receive a notification from eCommons in your Slugmail/UCSC email account when online evaluations become available. If you are having trouble using eCommons, please send an email to [ecommons.help@ucsc.edu](mailto:ecommons.help@ucsc.edu). Please be thoughtful in your responses, as FDM take these evaluations very seriously. FDM uses the data collected from these evaluations in faculty personnel actions, which include re-appointments, promotions, merits, etc.

Additionally, evaluations help faculty gauge ways in which their instruction or the course material could be improved. Please give me as careful feedback as I have offered you all quarter.

Week 1  
6/26/17  
Monday

Class Overview. Syllabus, What is Funny? Sketch Structure, Terminology  
Quick comedy pitches & choose writing partners, exchange contact info.  
Generating ideas, lists, topics, settings, issues. Anger, currency, peculiarity. Types of sketches.  
Example screening: *Monty Python, Saturday Night Live, + others*

Assn 1 Do Partner Work: meet, bang around ideas, help each other.  
Write out/develop ten or so **premises/ideas** for your sketch. Select funniest.  
Write a 2-page Sketch. Any type. This is loose; be creative. Due next class.  
Title & Format your script – make enough copies for all actors +2 (narrator & teacher)

Read: *SNL scripts* (in rear)  
Course Reader: excerpts 1-6: Lamott & Ueland. Rabiger, AND Horton

6/30/17  
Friday

Set-Up: **Protagonist, Goal, Obstacle. Antagonist** (Who, What, Why?) Comedy is Conflict.  
Show, Don't Tell. **Genre, Setting, Tone** (When, Where, How?) Discuss readings.  
Workshop student sketches. Everyone presents their work. Anonymous vote.

Due: 2-page Sketch, + one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

Assn 2 Write another 2-page Sketch. Choose a different type of sketch than last week. Remember, you  
need to build your personal portfolio of sketches, and are required to include one or more of nine  
DIFFERENT types of sketches. Continue sharing ideas with your partner.  
Due next class. Prepare one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)  
Revise previous assignment, as needed.

Read: Reader: Brian Luff *Comedy Sketches that Sell* and Ed Toolis *Types of Sketches*.  
*Comic Toolbox* (read this book at your own pace, IF you want help. Not required.)

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Week 2  
7/3/17  
Monday

**Types of Sketches:** Satire, Parody, 2-Hander, Group, Ensemble, Collaborative +  
Bits, Blackouts, Runners. Subgenres and mixing genres.  
Workshop student sketches. Everyone presents their work. Anonymous vote.

Due: 2-page Sketch, + one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

Assn 3: Write three Bits, two Blackouts, or a Runner (3 part running gag). Bounce ideas off Partner.  
Prepare one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

Read: Reader: Henri Bergson + 2 pages from *Comedy Writing Secrets*

7/7/17  
Friday

Comedic Style: **Pacing & Brevity.** Set-ups and Pay-offs – Entertaining your Audience  
Writing Action and Visual Storytelling; **Screenwriting Style**  
Tip: Use Action Verbs! Present Tense. Punctuation!?!?!  
Workshop student sketches. Everyone presents their work. Anonymous vote.

Due: 3 Bits, two Blackouts, or a Runner, + one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

Assn 4: Write a 3-page Sketch (any type). Bounce ideas off Partner.  
Prepare one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

Read: Reader: Flinn (How NOT to Write) + Goldberg *Reading Aloud + Show Don't Tell*

Week 3  
7/10/17  
Monday

More Terms: **The Game, The Button, The Rule of Three, The Call Back.**  
Workshop student sketches. Everyone presents work. Anonymous vote.

Due: Write a 3-page Sketch (any type), + one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

Assn 5: Write a Call-Back (1-4 pages). Bounce ideas off Partner.  
Prepare one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

7/14/17  
Friday

Complications: **Raising the Stakes** – ticking clock, tension & release structure, repetition.  
The greater the obstacles/antagonist, the more your Protagonist is revealed.  
Complications: **Reversals** – expectations, cause & effect,  
Antithesis (audience expectation v. character expectation)  
Tip: Naming Characters for Clarity, Meaning, using Parallel Action  
Workshop student sketches. Everyone presents their work. Anonymous vote.

Due: Call-Back Sketch + one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

Assn 6: Write a 4-page Sketch (a “long” sketch). Bounce ideas off partner.  
Prepare one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

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Week 4  
7/17/17  
Monday

**Revision:** Editing, tightening, polishing. Beat order, word order. How to punch up the comedy.  
Workshop student sketches. Everyone presents their work. Anonymous vote.

Due: Write a 4-page Sketch (a “long” sketch) + one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

Assn 7 Write an Ensemble Sketch (a 6-character sketch). Bounce ideas off partner.  
Prepare one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

7/21/17  
Friday

**Depth:** symbols, deepening character and dialogue. How partners collaborate: different styles.  
Tip: Writing colloquial dialogue  
Workshop student sketches. Everyone presents their work. Anonymous vote.

Due: Ensemble Sketch (a 6-character sketch) + one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

Assn 8 Write a Collaborative Sketch, a sketch you write WITH your partner.  
Prepare one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

Prepare your Sketch Writing Portfolio with at least ONE of each type of Sketch:  
(Satire, Parody, 2-Hander, Group, Ensemble, Collaborative, Bit, Blackout, Runner.)  
Include Original Draft + all revisions. This is for your GRADE. No late submissions.

Week 5

7/24/17

Monday

**Resolution:** Structural parallelism – measuring growth, use of contrasts, pay-offs.

List of Finalist Sketches for the show.

Workshop collaborative sketches. Every pair presents work. Last anonymous vote.

Assn 9

Revise all Finalist Sketches in the running for our Public Show. Prepare these for Final Workshop, next class. Bring one copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor) for all Finalist Sketches.

Edit, tighten, shorten! Invite your friends to attend our Sketch Comedy Show on Friday.

Due:

Submit your Sketch Writing Portfolio with at least ONE of each type of Sketch:

(Satire, Parody, 2-Hander, Group, Ensemble, Collaborative, Bit, Blackout, Runner.)

Include Original Draft + all revisions. This is for your GRADE. No late submissions.

Also: Collaborative Sketch, WITH your partner + copy for each actor + 2 (narrator & instructor.)

7/28/17

Friday

Portfolios Returned. Finalists Round Showdown Workshop and Vote.

Final Show Sketch Order and Rehearsal.

Due:

Everyone should plan to bring friends to attend our

Public Reading of Student Comedy Sketches.

## PARTNER WORK

Getting together with someone else and “brainstorming” ideas or just making lists of possible topics, funny lines, ideas, pet peeves, etc. is going to help you become both a better and funnier writer. I expect you to make time to get together with your partner every week to bat around ideas and stimulate each others’ thinking.

## ONLINE GOOGLE DRIVE

You will be invited to join our class on Google, where we can SHARE sketches and documents with each other and you can co-write with your partner.

## SKETCH PAGES FORMAT

You can use any text program, you don’t need special software. Each class, you need to print out or Xerox enough copies of your script to supply: one for each Actor, one for the Narrator, one for Instructor. So, a Two-Hander Sketch would demand FOUR copies (two for the two actors, one for the narrator, one for me.) Students are responsible for bringing their copies to class each week – all copies are due at the START of class.

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Author initials – title – v. # – p. #

## SKETCH TITLE

by Author  
Version #  
Date

## CAST:

CHARACTER #1: brief description  
CHARACTER #2: brief description  
CHARACTER #3: brief description (as needed...)

[Location: brief description

Scene Set-Up: Where are we? What do we see? Who’s on screen? Doing what?]

CHARACTER #1  
Dialog line.

CHARACTER #2  
Dialog line.

CHARACTER #1  
Dialog line.

[Description of any action the characters perform, etc.]

CHARACTER #2  
Dialog line.

Etc...

List of Sketch Comedy Shows

Random -- you're likely to find others, but this is a start for those of you who want to do some viewing or research.

*Monty Python's Flying Circus*  
*Saturday Night Live*  
*Mr. Show*  
*Chappelle Show*  
*Key and Peele*  
*Portlandia*  
*Inside Amy Schumer*  
*Mad TV*  
*Funny Or Die Presents*

*Your Show of Shows*  
*The Carol Burnett Show*  
*Kids In the Hall*  
*In Living Color*  
*The Muppet Show*  
*Rowan & Martin's "Laugh In"*  
*SCTV*  
*The Richard Pryor Show*  
*The Smother's Brothers Comedy Hour*  
*The State*  
*The Dana Carvey Show*  
*The Ernie Kovaks Show*  
*The Ben Stiller Show*  
*Upright Citizens Brigade*  
*The Jonathan Winters Show*  
*The Andy Dick Show*  
*The Chris Rock Show*  
*The Colbert Report*  
*French & Saunders*  
*The Red Skelton Show*  
*A Bit of Fry and Laurie*  
*Human Giant*  
*The Benny Hill Show*

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List of Types of Sketches for this class

Parodies	Mockumentary, TV, movie, arts, music parody, (spoofing, imitation, & mockery)
Satires	Political satire, Socioeconomic satire, Sex/gender satire, (ditto, but more pointed)
2-Handers	usually structured upon Oppositions, contrasts, opposed Objectives
Group	3 or 4 characters: triangles, factions, fish-out-of-water, etc.
Ensemble	6 characters (whole cast) 3 M and 3 W. Snowballing.
Bits	Interstitial, might be a one-liner Joke or non sequitur
Blackouts	Slightly longer jokes, with Punchlines – needs a bit more set up, triplet
Runners (running gag)	Returning to the same scene, topic, characters repeatedly (3x)

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Bibliography of Recommended Print Books (focus on Comedy in general, not necessarily Sketch.)

Sypher, Wylie. *Comedy*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956.  
Helitzer, Mel and Shatz, Mark. *Comedy Writing Secrets*. Cincinnati: Writers Digest Books, 2005.  
Carter, Judy. *The Comedy Bible*. New York: Fireside/Simon & Schuster, 2001.  
Sedita, Scott. *The Eight Characters of Comedy*. Los Angeles: Atides Publishing, 2006.  
Vorhaus, John. *The Comic Toolbox*. Los Angeles: Silman-James Press, 1994.