

Film 150 Screenwriting (M & F 1 - 5 pm)
Summer Session 1: June 21 - July 23
Class Location: online, synchronous

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Office Hours by appt (email request)
Also, available after class most days

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 EIGHT 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 Show Bible of our class's top sketches in a PDF that you can keep.

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 Show Bible.

Note: taking risks, making mistakes, and attempts/failure are all part of how we learn. Often, we learn the MOST from our failures. I don't expect you to be expert or perfect - certainly, I'm not! Material in this class is student-generated and sometimes explores fraught topics or politically/socially edgy territories. Writers should try to be aware of their own social/historical context and consider their personal right to joke about any given topic. Here, we will assume "best intentions" from fellow writers and understand that mistakes are never fatal, but often learning experiences... As instructor, I do not police content or political correctness - students learn best from peer feedback. I focus on comedic writing strategies.

Assignments:

You will be writing a series of sketches to compete in the Final Show Bible and to complete your personal portfolio of your EIGHT (+) 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 (one is due each class). Upload all your assignments into our Google Drive, with your name and sketch title. Number your pages.

Label everything (i.e.: Title and Type of Sketch etc.) and keep all versions in your Personal Student folder, including your revisions. I will look for your Final Portfolio with everything you have written in your Student Folder for your final evaluation. Keep it organized and date your revisions. Be neat & professional—appearances count in Hollywood! The Google Drive is a good cloud backup for your work, should something happen to your laptop.

It is important that you write on a regular schedule, either daily or weekly. The goal to “pass” this course is a minimum of 8 Sketches, including at least ONE from each of the following types of Sketches: Satire, Parody, Call-Back, Ensemble, Collaborative, and Bit, Blackout, or Runner (running gag), Two-Hander, Group -- 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 8-sketch assignment total.)

Attention:

Students are responsible to UPLOAD their sketches into our Class Workshop folder BEFORE the start of each class to assist in our collaborative workshop. Class begins promptly at 1:00. Come to class with your work ALREADY UPLOADED & ready to go promptly at 1:00, please.

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!

Textbooks:

Required: Comedy Course Reader: available at no cost on our class Google Drive.

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

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.

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 online class regularly and on-time.

Class starts promptly at 1:00 pm; 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:

You can email me if you have any questions or concerns at any time.

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.

PROVISIONAL SYLLABUS: Subject to Change – Film 150: Screenwriting

- Week 1
6/21/21
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 – UPLOAD it into 6/25 Workshop folder
- Read:
Course Reader: excerpts 1-6: Lamott, Goldberg, Ueland. Rabiger, Horton + *SNL scripts* (“z” rear)
- 6/25/21
Friday
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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, UPLOADED into 6/25 Workshop folder
- Assn 2
Write another 2-page Sketch. Choose a different type of sketch than last week: either 2-Hander or Group (3-4 chars). Remember, you need to build your personal portfolio of sketches, & are required to include one of eight DIFFERENT types of sketches. Continue to share ideas with partner.
Due next class. UPLOAD it into 7/2 Workshop folder. Revise previous assignment, as needed.
- Read:
Reader: excerpts 7 & 8: 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

6/28/21 NO CLASS! Juneteenth Holiday

Monday

- 7/2/21
Friday
Types of Sketches: Satire, Parody, 2-Hander, Group, Ensemble, Collaborative + Bits, Blackouts, Runners. Subgenres and mixing genres
More Terms: The Game, The Button, The Rule of Three, The Call Back.
Workshop student sketches. Everyone presents their work. Anonymous vote
- Due:
2-page Sketch, UPLOADED into 7/2 Workshop folder
- Assn 3&4:
Write three Bits, two Blackouts, or a Runner (3 part running gag). Write a Parody Sketch.
Bounce ideas off Partner. Due next class. UPLOAD both into 7/9 Workshop folder
- Read:
Reader: excerpts: 9 & 10: Henri Bergson + 2 pages from *Comedy Writing Secrets*
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Week 3

7/5/21 NO CLASS! Independence Day Holiday

Monday

- 7/9/21
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!?!?!?

PROVISIONAL SYLLABUS: Subject to Change – Film 150: Screenwriting

Due: 3 Bits, two Blackouts, or a Runner AND Parody Sketch, UPLOADED into 7/9 Workshop folder

Read: Reader: excerpt 11 Flinn (How NOT to Write a Screenplay) + handouts on Portal Page

Assn 5: Write a Call-Back (1-3 pages). Bounce ideas off Partner.
Due next class. UPLOAD it into 7/12 Workshop folder

Week 4
7/12/21
Monday
Complications: **Raising the Stakes** – ticking clock, tension & release, repetition, reversals
The greater the obstacles/antagonist, the more your Protagonist is revealed.
Tip: Naming Characters for Clarity, Meaning, using Parallel Action
Workshop student sketches. Everyone presents their work. Anonymous vote.

Due: Call-Back Sketch UPLOADED into 7/12 Workshop folder

Assn 6: Write a Satire Sketch (Political Satire or Social Critique). Bounce ideas off partner.
Due next class. UPLOAD it into 7/16 Workshop folder

7/16/21
Friday
**
Revision: Editing, tightening, polishing. Beat order, word order. How to punch up the comedy.
Workshop student sketches. Everyone presents their work. Anonymous vote.

Due: Satire Sketch (Political Satire or Social Critique) UPLOADED into 7/16 Workshop folder

Assn 7: Write an Ensemble Sketch (a 6-character sketch). Bounce ideas off partner.
Due next class. UPLOAD it into 7/19 Workshop folder

Week 5
7/19/21
Monday
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.
Due next class. UPLOAD it into 7/23 Workshop folder

7/23/21
Friday
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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: Prepare your Sketch Writing Portfolio with at least ONE of each type of Sketch:
(Satire, Parody, Call-Back, Ensemble, Collaborative, and Bit, Blackout, or Runner.)
Include Original Draft + all revisions. This is for your GRADE. No late submissions.
Deadline: 7/26/21 at midnight. You need all EIGHT Final Sketches in your Personal Folder.

Due: Collaborative Sketch UPLOADED into 7/23 Workshop folder

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 online or on phone 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. For the online class, the BEST program to use is a Google Doc – these are easiest to share and comment on with our Google Drive. While it’s possible to upload and comment on a Word doc or a PDF doc, the Google Docs really work best for our online workshopping. Past classes have tested all types of documents, and everyone prefers the Google Docs for what we need to do in this class. Please set up and format your Google Doc like the example below... (align everything hard left, note spacing and header info, use standard fonts, 11 pts.)

.....
Author initials – title – v. # – p. #

SKETCH TITLE

by Author

Sketch Type & 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. (directions to actor) Dialog line.

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

CHARACTER #2

Dialog line.

Etc...

(use 11 or 12 pt. easy-to-read font. Note the Action paragraphs are in brackets and italics.)

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)
Call Back	Bringing back a favorite character, situation, catch phrase for a "sequel" sketch

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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.

Important Summer Session Remote 2021 Deadlines:

Session 1:

Drop: Monday, June 28

Request for “W” or grade change option: Friday, July 9

Summer is unique. **You will not be dropped for non-attendance or non-payment.** You must drop yourself. Dropping before the deadline results in a full-tuition reversal/refund. Withdraw posts a W for the grade and full tuition is charged (no refund).

For all dates and deadlines, including ‘change of grade option’ (P/NP) and grades due, here is the summer academic calendar: <https://summer.ucsc.edu/studentlife/index.html>

For questions about dropping, requesting a W grade for a course, or withdrawing from the summer quarter, email summer@ucsc.edu.

DRC Remote Accommodations:

The Disability Resources Center reduces barriers to inclusion and full participation for students with disabilities by providing support to individually determine reasonable academic accommodations. Operations continue via remote appointments. If you have questions or concerns about exam accommodations or any other disability-related matter, email the DRC Schedulers at drc@ucsc.edu for an appointment.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic integrity is the cornerstone of a university education. Academic dishonesty diminishes the university as an institution and all members of the university community. It tarnishes the value of a UCSC degree. All members of the UCSC community have an explicit responsibility to foster an environment of trust, honesty, fairness, respect, and responsibility. All members of the university community are expected to present as their original work only that which is truly their own. All members of the community are expected to report observed instances of cheating, plagiarism, and other forms of academic dishonesty in order to ensure that the integrity of scholarship is valued and preserved at UCSC.

In the event a student is found in violation of the UCSC Academic Integrity policy, he or she may face both academic sanctions imposed by the instructor of record and disciplinary sanctions imposed either by the provost of his or her college or the Academic Tribunal convened to hear the case. Violations of the Academic Integrity policy can result in dismissal from the university and a permanent notation on a student’s transcript.

For the full policy and disciplinary procedures on academic dishonesty, students and instructors should refer to the [Academic Integrity page](#) at the Division of Undergraduate Education.

Title IX: The university cherishes the free and open exchange of ideas and enlargement of knowledge. To maintain this freedom and openness requires objectivity, mutual trust, and confidence; it requires the absence of coercion, intimidation, or exploitation. The principal responsibility for maintaining these conditions must rest upon those members of the university community who exercise most authority and leadership: faculty, managers, and supervisors.

The university has therefore instituted a number of measures designed to protect its community from sex discrimination, sexual harassment, sexual violence, and other related prohibited conduct. [Information about the Title IX Office](#), the [online reporting link](#), applicable campus resources, reporting responsibilities, the [UC Policy on Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment](#), and the UC Santa Cruz Procedures for Reporting and Responding to Reports of Sexual Violence and Sexual Harassment can be found at titleix.ucsc.edu.

The Title IX Office is actively responding to reports and requests for consultation. If you are not currently working with someone in the office and want to make a report/request a consult, you can expect the fastest response by using our [online reporting link](#).

For more information please visit the [Title IX Operations under Covid-19](#) page.