Syllabus

WRITING FOR LATE NIGHT TELEVISION  WRTNG-UG 1508 (13822)
Monday 2:00-4:45  Fall 2011  INSTRUCTOR - D.B. Gilles  dbg3@nyu.edu
Office Hours: Thur: 11-3, Friday 10-1  Room 911 721 Broadway

Satire is a lesson, parody is a game.
Vladimir Nabokov

Parodies and caricatures are the most
penetrating of criticisms.
Aldous Huxley

This course introduces students to writing for the world of Late Night Television. Every talk show host has a unique voice and style. Work will include learning how to write opening monologues for The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, Chelsea Lately, Conan and Jimmy Kimmel among others. Understanding the difference between a sketch and a bit. How to structure a joke and find material. Work will also involve writing sketches ala Saturday Night Live. Students will learn how to go from idea, to building the sketch, to completing it and rewriting it to make it funnier. Writing assignments may include creating original on-going sketch characters, a Letterman Top Ten List, fake news items ala Weekend Update and writing short film parodies. Recommended reading: You’re Funny! Turn Your Sense of Humor Into a Lucrative New Career

WORK BREAKDOWN

All assignments should be written in 12 Pt. Courier

WEEK 1
Overview of the course and an exploration into the world of Late Night Television, specifically the various types of comedy writing Late Night shows require. The difference between sketches and bits. Finding material. How every comedy writers draws from the same pool of information.

WEEK 2
Write 2 types of Letterman Top Ten Lists: One topical and the other generic. However, the actual assignment is to write 20 for each list. Examining the different styles of talk show hosts, present and past.

WEEK 3
Write a Saturday Night Live parody of a TV commercial or Public Service Announcement. Format will be provided. Why do some talk shows succeed and others fail?
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WEEK 4
Write a monologue for John Stewart of The Daily Show. Watch the program several times. Count the jokes in the monologue. He usually concentrates on one topic in the news. He often uses visuals, so you should too. Indicate what they are. Time how long it goes. After you write yours, read it out loud and time it. Try to get as close to his length as possible.

WEEK 5
Write a Saturday Night Live sketch on any topic you like. Ideal length is 4 pages, but if you need to go longer do so. Never stifle your creativity. The first draft can always be cut later.

WEEK 6
Write a monologue for Chelsea Handler of Chelsea Lately. Watch the program several times. Count the jokes in the monologue. See how much is topical or involving pop culture or a specific person. Time it. After you write yours, read it out loud and time it. Try to get as close to her length as possible.

WEEK 7
Write 10 ideas for bits for the Late Night Talk Show (s) of your choice.

WEEK 8
Write a Saturday Night Sketch in which you create an original character that would ideally become a recurring sketch character. Note: Don’t just create a character, you must also write a sketch introducing the character.

WEEK 9
Writing a monologue for Stephen Colbert of The Colbert Report. As stated previously, watch the program several times. Count the jokes in the monologue. See how much is topical or involving pop culture or a specific person. Time it. After you write yours, read it out loud and time it. Try to get as close to his length as possible.

WEEK 10
Write a New Rules segment for Bill Maher for Real Time With Bill Maher. If you’re not familiar with New Rules go to Youtube and type in Bill Maher New Rules. As with most Late Night Comedy almost everything he comments on are political. Come up with 8 New Rules

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Write a Saturday Night Live Weekend Update report. This entails fake news jokes about current events. Watch a few Weekend Updates, count the number of news reports they do and duplicate it. Bring in visuals to accentuate your jokes if you like.

WEEK 12

Write a monologue for any of the following Late Night hosts: David Letterman, Jimmy Fallon, Craig Ferguson or Conan O’Brien. These are 4 distinct personalities with their own Points of View, so study the person you decide on.

WEEK 13

Write a second SNL sketch using the original characters you created OR write an SNL sketch on anything you choose.

ATTENDANCE

Do not miss classes. If there is a class that you know in advance you must miss, let me know early on.

Lateness will not be tolerated. If you show up late a half a grade point will be deducted.

Short comedy pieces: 60%
Class participation:  20%
Attendance: 20%

On the rare occasion where you know you will be late e-mail me and inform me of this. Each absence will reduce your final grade by one step. So, if you would have received an A and I find upon reviewing my attendance records that you've been absent twice and late twice, your grade will be lowered to a B.

Remember this: When you miss classes you lose out on the interplay that happens.