Syllabus

WRITING FOR LATE NIGHT TELEVISION  UG 1508 – 001 (13822)
Monday 3:30-6:10  Fall 2014  INSTRUCTOR - D.B. Gilles dbgilles@gmail.com
Office Hours: Tuesday & Wednesday 1:00-4:00
By Appointment  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 objective of this course is three-fold:

(1) To introduce students to writing for the world of Late Night Television. Every talk show host has a unique voice and style. Work may include learning how to write opening monologues for The Daily Show, The Colbert Report, Chelsea Lately, Conan and Jimmy Kimmel among others.

(2) To help students understand the difference between a sketch and a bit. A sketch is a tiny story with a beginning, a middle and an end filled with humorous conflict and resolution. A bit, at its simplest level, has no conflict or resolution.

(3) To instruct students on how to structure a joke and find material. The best comedy writers understand that ideas are everywhere. Students will be introduced to the best ways to find material.

Work will also involve writing sketches and bits ala Saturday Night Live. Students will also 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, Jimmy Fallon’s Thank You notes, #hashtagwars, 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 and The TV Writers Workbook.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

I expect that you will not plagiarize work from other sources and that you will be honest with each assignment in representing that the work is entirely yours.
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 writer draws from the same pool of information.

In Class Viewing: The SNL Best Commercial Parodies

WEEK 2

Write a Saturday Night Live parody of a TV commercial or Public Service Announcement. Format will be provided. 2-4 pages. Why do some talk shows succeed and others fail?

Read: How To Write A Character Sketch
http://www.scribendi.com/advice/how_to_write_a_character_sketch.en.html

WEEK 3

Write a 2-5-minute stand up comedy act. 3-4 pages. In class, we will view and discuss you tube videos of up and coming stand ups

Read: YOU’RE FUNNY! Turn Your Sense of Humor Into A Lucrative New Career
STAND UP: Pages 131-144

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. 5-7 pages.

Read: How To write A Joke: The 7 Basic Forms
http://www.jimrichardson.com/write.shtml

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 (up to 7 pages). Never stifle your creativity. The first draft can always be cut later.
Read: How To Write For Saturday Night Live
http://blog.larryweaver.com/2008/05/how-to-write-for-saturday-night-live.asp

WEEK 6

Write 7-10 Thank You Notes ala Jimmy Fallon. Length depends on how you do them. If you write them on 3-5 cards, one card per note. If you type them on a sheet of paper, 1-2 pages.

In Class and At Home Viewing: Watch several shows with Jimmy Fallon writing Thank You notes.

WEEK 7

We’re going to play #HashtagWars, from Chris Hardwicke’s After Midnight. Based on topics decided in class, write as many #hashtags as possible in the time allotted.

In Class and At Home Viewing: Watch several shows of After Midnight.

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. Ideally 4 pages, but if you need to go longer, up to 7 pages.

WEEK 9

Writing a Funny or Die type video. 5 pages. Use screenplay format.

At Home & In Class Viewing: Watch the best Funny or Die videos of 2013
http://www.funnyordie.com/videos/playlists/344983

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” and check him out. As with most Late Night Comedy almost everything he comments on is a current event. Come up with 8 New Rules. The last New Rule is longer than the others. 3-5 pages.

WEEK 11

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. 3-6 pages.
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In Class Viewing: Watch several segments of Weekend Update.

WEEK 12

Write a Webisode series. Come up with a premise and write 3 episodes. Each should be 3-5 pages in length.

In Class Viewing: Pick one or two of your favorite Webisodes which we will watch in class.

In Class Reading: SCRIPT MAGAZINE Writers On The Web
http://www.scriptmag.com/features/writers-on-the-web-writing-for-web-its-time-to-write-but-wait-part-1

WEEK 13

Write a second SNL sketch using the original characters you created OR write an SNL sketch on anything you choose. Ideally 4 pages in length, but go up to 7 if you need to. Overview of what we’ve done in the class.

GRADING & ATTENDANCE

Completion of assignments: 80%
Class participation: 20%

Do not miss classes. Attendance is taking very seriously. If there is a class that you know in advance you must miss, let the Instructor know early on.

No cell phones, iPads or laptops on during class. You can use them when we take our break.

Lateness: If you show up late a half a grade point will be deducted. 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.