Syllabus

WRITING FOR LATE NIGHT TELEVISION  UG 1508 – 001
(13822)
Monday 3:30-6:10  Fall 2014  INSTRUCTOR - D.B. Gilles
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Office Hours: Tuesday & Wednesday 2:00-5:00
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 the world of comedy writing for Late Night Television. We’ll study sketch shows like Saturday Night Live, Key & Peele, Comedy Bang Bang and Inside Amy Schumer. Work may include learning how to write opening monologues for Jimmy Fallon, John Oliver, Jimmy Kimmel and Stephen Colbert 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 involve writing sketches and bits. Students will also learn how to go from idea, to building it, 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, fake news items ala Weekend Update, Portlandia, Between Two Ferns 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.
STATEMENT OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Plagiarism is presenting someone else’s work as though it were your own. More specifically, plagiarism is to present as your own: A sequence of words quoted without quotation marks from another writer or a paraphrased passage from another writer’s work or facts, ideas or images composed by someone else.

WORK BREAKDOWN

All assignments should be written in 12 Pt. Courier.
Do not read assignments from your cell phone.

WEEK 1

Overview of the course and an exploration into the world of late night television. The difference between sketches and bits. Finding material. How every comedy writer draws from the same pool of information. Understanding the writing of a sketch. Sketch Pitfalls.

In Class Viewing: The SNL Best Commercial Parodies

Start thinking about the half hour spec or pilot script you’re going to write. 30 pages.

Assignment for Week 2: Write a Saturday Night Live parody of a TV commercial or Public Service Announcement. Format will be provided. 2-4 pages.

WEEK 2

Read and discuss the SNL commercial parodies. Why do some sketch shows succeed and others fail?

In Class Viewing: We’ll watch sketches and sitcoms TBD

Assignment for Week 3: Write a sketch in which somebody wants something from someone else, i.e., dating, a job interview, help from a clerk, etc.

WEEK 3

Read and discuss the sketches.
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**In Class Viewing:** Several episodes of Between Two Ferns and studying outline samples.

**Assignment for next week:** Write a 7-page scene for Between Two Ferns

**WEEK 4**

Read and discuss the Between Two Ferns exercise.

**Assignment for next week:** Write a 2-5-minute stand up comedy act. 3-4 pages.

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

**WEEK 5**

Listen to and discuss the stand up.

**Assignment for next week:** Write a monologue for John Oliver’s Last Week Tonight. Make it about something political or a current event in the news. 3-5 minutes. Watch the program several times. Count the jokes in the monologue. 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.

**In Class Viewing:** John Oliver sketches on You Tube

**WEEK 6**

Read and discuss the John Oliver monologues.

**Assignment for next week:** Create an original character and include him/her in a sketch that introduces him/her.

**WEEK 7**

Read and discuss the sketches with original characters.

**Assignment for next week:** Write a sketch for Inside Amy Schumer featuring Amy Schumer. Her show has a definite edge. We’ll watch several of her best sketches in class.

**WEEK 8**

Read and discuss the Inside Amy Schumer sketches.
Assignment for next week: 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 5 New Rules.** The last New Rule is longer than the others. 3-5 pages.

**In Class and At Home Viewing:** We’ll watch several episodes of New Rules

WEEK 9

Read and discuss the New Rules.

Assignment for next week: 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.

**In Class Viewing:** Watch several segments of Weekend Update.

WEEK 10

Read and discuss the Weekend Update exercise.

Assignment for next week: Write a 5-7 page sketch involving any character(s) on Portlandia.

WEEK 11

Read and discuss Portlandia sketches.

Assignment for next week: Write 10 Jimmy Fallon Thank You Notes.

WEEK 12

Read and discuss Jimmy Fallon Thank You Notes. Discussion will revolve around why the Thank You Notes has become such a successful bit.

Assignment for next week: Write an opening monologue for Late Night With Stephen Colbert.

WEEK 13

Read and discuss the Colbert monologues.
Assignment for next week: Write any of the above comedy writing exercises. Do the one you enjoyed most.

WEEK 14

Read and discuss what everyone wrote. Overview of the ground we’ve covered 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.