Syllabus

WRITING SHORT COMEDY  (K30.1510)
Monday 3:30-6:10  Spring 2015          INSTRUCTOR - D.B. Gilles
Office Hours By Appointment  Room 911 721 Broadway
Wednesday 12-4                  dbgillescript@gmail.com
Thursday: 3:30-5:30

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 short comedy which is very
difficult to master. In the assignments herein, students will be exposed to
thirteen ways of doing it.

(2) To help students understand the difference between humor, satire and parody.
All three are quite different. Humor is the quality of being amusing or comic.
Satire is the use of humor, irony or exaggeration to expose people’s stupidity,
particularly in politics or topical issues. Parody is the imitation of a particular
writer or genre with deliberate exaggeration for comic effect.

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

Work will involve a wide range of writing from NY Times Op-Ed pieces to
writing a parody of a person or event, to writing stand up comedy to writing a
10-minute play poking fun at a politically correct law or rule, to writing a short
comedic screenplay. Recommended reading: You’re Funny! Turn Your Sense
of Humor Into A Lucrative New Career and And Here’s The Kicker.

WORK BREAKDOWN

All assignments should be written in 12 Pt. Courier
WEEK 1
Overview of the course and an exploration into the world of short comedy writing. Lecture will focus on finding material and then deciding what to do with it. Discussion of next week’s writing assignment.

WEEK 2
Write a satiric opinion piece on something that bothers you. Examples will be discussed in class. 750 words. Lecture will focus on satire versus parody. Discussion of next week’s assignment.

WEEK 3
Write 3 pieces in the style of Reductress, sometimes referred to as the feminist Onion. Examples will be shown. Discussion of next week’s assignment.

WEEK 4
Write a 3-minute (or longer) stand up comedy act. Lecture will deal with the value of finding a persona. Discussion of next week’s assignent.

WEEK 5
Write a tongue in cheek article for The New Yorker along the lines of Mindy Kaling’s New Yorker piece “Flick Chicks.” Discussion of next week’s assignment.

WEEK 6
Write a 5-10 page scene for Zach Galifinackus’ Between Two Ferns. Choose the celebrity or personality of your choice and write something with him/her and Zack. Discussion on next week’s assignment.

WEEK 7
Write a humorous short story (fiction) in the vein of Woody Allen. Discussion of next week’s assignent.

SPRING RECESS

WEEK 8
Write a 10-minute play that pokes fun of a politically correct law or rule. No more or less than 10 pages. Format will be provided. Lecture will focus on the difficulty and challenge of writing a powerful 10-minute play with a beginning, middle and ending. Discussion of next week’s assignment.

WEEK 9
Write 5 pieces of humor for The Borowitz Report. Examples will be provided. Lecture will get into the approach to comedy that Andy Borowitz provides. Discussion of next week’s assignment.
Syllabus

WEEK 10
Write a humorous op-ed column for The New York Times in the vein of Maureen Dowd and Gail Collins Examples will be provided. Writing comedy for The Times Op-Ed Page is a challenge. Lecture will examine those who do it well. Discussion of next week’s assignment.

Also, bring in 3 ideas for a feature film comedy. A few sentences describing each.

WEEK 11
Based on one of your 3 ideas from last week, writing an Outline for your feature film comedy. Samples will be provided by Instructor. Lecture will focus on writing full-length comedies. Pixar’s 22 Rules of Storytelling will be discussed. Discussion of next week’s assignment.

WEEK 12
Write a scene from Portlandia. Discussion of next week’s assignment.

WEEK 13
Write your own obituary. HOWEVER, you have to live to be 90 years old and you must have an amazing life. Creativity and imagination really counts here. Discussion of next week’s assignment.

WEEK 14
Bring in 3 ideas of either 30-minute comedies or 60-minute hour-long dramas and be prepared to elaborate on them. Lecture will be on the difficulty of coming up with great ideas.

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: 70%
Class participation: 30%

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.