

Professor Jon Stahl

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Office Hours: T 5:00-6:00PM, W 2:00-3:30PM, W 6:15-7:00PM,
TH 3:15-4:00PM (hours subject to change)

COURSE OBJECTIVES

As *Reader's Digest* has long put it, laughter is the best medicine, and scientific studies have borne this out. Laughter helps us to forget, at least temporarily, our problems. Laughter helps us to expunge tension and anxiety. Laughter is a socially acceptable way to release latent aggressiveness or hostility. Laughter can help forge social bonds. Laughter can help us to learn about ourselves and about society. And laughter is just plain fun. For these reasons and more, film and television comedies should not be viewed as the lesser cousins of more "serious," dramatic fare; they are vitally important. This course is designed to build on your understanding of dramatic film and television writing and to help you to apply that understanding to the specific demands of writing screen comedy.

STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon successful completion of the course, you should:

1. demonstrate an understanding of the various sources of screen comedy;
2. demonstrate an understanding of the various types of screen comedy;
3. demonstrate an understanding of the technical and aesthetic issues related to writing film comedies and half-hour television comedies;
4. demonstrate proficiency in comedy writing by completing a half-hour television comedy script and a short film comedy script.

This course addresses CTVA Departmental SLO #2: research, structure, and write dramatic and non-dramatic scripts for cinema, television, and multimedia.

REQUIRED TEXTS

Laughing Out Loud: Writing the Comedy-Centered Screenplay, by Peter Horton. Available in the CSUN bookstore.

REQUIRED TEXTS (cont'd)

Two television scripts:

One *How I Met Your Mother* script (other than the pilot), and either a *30 Rock* script or an *Everybody Hates Chris* script (other than the pilots). These can be purchased from Script City (www.scriptcity.net).

RECOMMENDED TEXT

The Art of Dramatic Writing, by Lajos Egri.

ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATION

There will be several writing assignments. These are to be printed using the correct font (12-point Courier) on good-quality paper. You must proofread for typos and errors in spelling and/or grammar. The presence of such errors will affect your grade adversely.

It is strongly recommended that you use Final Draft. It is also strongly recommended that you back up your file(s) on an obsessively frequent basis, using CD-RWs and/or USB memory sticks.

All assignments must be written in the appropriate format and handed in on time. Do not use covers or binders; do use title pages when appropriate. Short assignments are to be stapled together; longer ones are to be printed on 3-hole punch paper and fastened with brads. I will expect you to apply your full effort, intelligence, craft and creativity to each assignment, and I will grade accordingly.

There will be two principal script projects -- the first act of a half-hour television comedy script and a complete, short-film comedy script. The TV project, written in collaboration with a partner, will be due in class on Tuesday, 10/20. The final assignment, a 5-12 page film comedy script, will be written individually and due in class on Tuesday, 12/8, the last session.

There will be a midterm exam, which will be based on readings from Horton as well as information covered in class. There will be no final exam. Prompt attendance is expected and class participation is encouraged. Each will be factored into your final grade.

Please note that this course requires strict compliance with the Academic Honesty Standards contained in the University Catalogue.

STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities must register with the Center on Disabilities and complete a services agreement each semester. Staff within the Center will verify the existence of a disability based on the documentation provided and approve accommodations. Students who are approved for test taking accommodations must provide a proctor form to their faculty member signed by a counselor in the Center on Disabilities prior to making testing arrangements. The Center on Disabilities is located in Bayramian Hall, room 110. Staff can be reached at 818-677-2684.

GRADING (unless otherwise amended)

Punctuality, attendance, class participation	15 points
Half-hour comedy outline	10 points
Half-hour comedy script pages	5 points
Half-hour comedy first act	20 points
Midterm Exam	10 points
Expositional film script pages	10 points
Short film script	<u>30 points</u>
TOTAL	100 points

I will use plusses and minuses for the final grades, which will correlate to the total amount of points earned during the semester. There is no extra credit available. I reserve the right to penalize excessive tardiness, absence or disruptive behavior beyond the allotted 15 points. Therefore, come early, don't miss any classes, and act professionally.

CLASS SCHEDULE (unless otherwise amended)

Tues.	8/25	Course introduction. Sources of comedy. Assignment: Read pp. 1-16
Thurs.	8/27	Comedic perspective. The joke. Assignment: Read Chaps. 1 & 2, prepare a short joke to tell in class.
Tues.	9/1	Joke telling. Assignment: Read Chap. 3.
Thurs.	9/3	Comedic tones and types. Assignment: Read Chaps. 4-8. Record and watch half-hour comedy (TBD).
Tues.	9/8	Comedic characters. Comedic dialogue.
Thurs.	9/10	Comedy sketches. Assignment: Read Chap. 10, read half-hour comedy scripts (purchased from Script City).

CLASS SCHEDULE (cont'd)

- Tues. 9/15 Half-hour television comedies. Select writing partners.
Assignment: partners decide which show to write.
- Thurs. 9/17 Half-hour television comedies.
Assignment: brainstorm half-hour comedy story,
prepare to pitch complete story.
- Tues. 9/22 Television pitches.
- Thurs. 9/24 Television pitches.
Assignment: half-hour comedy outline (complete story).
- Tues. 9/29 DUE: half-hour comedy outline. Writing exercise.
- Thurs. 10/1 Writing exercise.
Assignment: expositional half-hour comedy script pages
[first one or two scene(s)] -- one copy to be handed in,
PLUS copies for class readings (class set).
- Tues. 10/6 DUE: expositional half-hour comedy script pages.
Half-hour comedy script readings.
- Thurs. 10/8 Half-hour comedy script readings.
- Tues. 10/13 Half-hour comedy script readings.
- Thurs. 10/15 Half-hour comedy script readings.
Assignment: half-hour comedy first acts,
due Tues., 10/20.
- Tues. 10/20 **HALF-HOUR COMEDY FIRST ACTS DUE.** Film comedies.
Assignment: Read Chaps. 11 & 12, study for Midterm Exam.
- Thurs. 10/22 **MIDTERM EXAM.**
- Tues. 10/27 The comedy short.
Assignment: Read Chap. 9, begin thinking about short
film story.
- Thurs. 10/29 Screenings, discussion.
Assignment: prepare to pitch film story.
- Tues. 11/3 Film pitches
- Thurs. 11/5 Film pitches.
- Tues. 11/10 Film pitches.
- Thurs. 11/12 Film pitches.
Assignment: Film story outline (not handed in),
1st film script pages (handed in -- up to and
including inciting incident scene), PLUS --
copies of scene(s) for class readings (class set).
- Tues. 11/17 DUE: 1st film script pages. Film script readings.
- Thurs. 11/19 Film script readings.

CLASS SCHEDULE (cont'd)

Tues. 11/24 Film script readings.
Thurs. 11/26 NO CLASS -- HAPPY THANKSGIVING

Tues. 12/1 NO CLASS -- WRITING DAY
Thurs. 12/3 Film script readings.

Tues. 12/8 **FILM SCRIPTS DUE.** Conclusion.