

HELPFUL POINTS FOR WRITING SKETCHES

Introduction

The first thing to do before you sit down and try and write a sketch, is to watch and read as many other comedy sketches as you can. Go to the library, borrow books, videos, tapes, records, lock yourself away and watch sketches until they come out of your ears. Study examples of the art; Monty Python, Mel Brooks, *Mad TV*, *The Amanda Show*, *Mad TV*, *Saturday Night Live* and others. This will also help you see what has been done before - this is vitally important. What's the point of writing something new, unless it is *original*???

Research

While you're watching, make notes. If you experience an emotion to something, try and figure out why. What was it that triggered that emotion? Something visual? Something to do with the way words were used? Or was it because it reminded you of something in your own life? Start to watch sketches in a different way. Take them apart and put them back together again. You'll soon start to notice that some of the same tricks are applied again and again and again.

Getting Started

Never sit down in front of a blank sheet of paper. You'll never think of a darn thing. Carry a notebook around and write down anything you see or hear that triggers an idea or emotion. After awhile, pick the best 3 ideas from your notes, think of titles for them and start writing.

Write the titles at the top of three separate pages, and then, working on all three sketches at the same time, write down everything you can think of connected to each of the three subjects. Just lists of words, connections or related subjects. When all three pages are full, pick the one with what looks like the best and put it on the top of the pile. You are now going to start writing your first sketch.

- 1) Choose a setting. Avoid common set-ups like doctor's surgeries or "Man Goes Into a Shop". Think *original*. Only set the sketch in *one* location.
- 2) Don't make the sketch too long. Two minutes is a good length to start with.
- 3) If you're trying to sell your material to TV, don't put in anything too expensive like a helicopter. Most TV shows are on a tight budget.
- 4) Three characters is more than enough for a 2-3 minute sketch. Don't write for a cast of thousands.
- 5) Work *out loud*. Say the lines as you write them. You need to hear what the material sounds like.
- 6) Think about what is happening visually as well as the words. Describe the physical action in detail. What are the characters wearing? What do they look like. What are their

names? (Don't just call your characters FIRST MAN, SECOND MAN. It will help to bring them to life in your mind).

Brainstorming

Bounce ideas off the people around you. Don't work in isolation. If you don't have a writing partner (which I highly recommend for this type of writing), throw funny ideas at your friends, siblings or anyone who will listen. Even better would be to sit down in a room of around 6 people and brainstorm ideas in a group. Write down everything. Sift through it later. Hit tv shows are sometimes written by as many as 12 people.

Where do the Ideas Come From?

- For example, your sketch could be a spoof of: A western, a space movie, a historical romance, a war film, a Hollywood musical
- A news article or historical event
- personal experience or experience of a relative
- observations of the world around you.....

"Put a Spin On It"

There are literally hundreds of thousands of potential starting points for a sketch. But once you find a subject, try not to approach it in an obvious way.

Edit Your Work

When you have finished writing your sketch remember: *it is only the first draft*. Go back and look at it again. Improve it. Change it. Then "Sleep On It". Go to bed and look at your material when you wake up in the morning. If it's still as solid as you thought it was when you wrote it, great! If it isn't, *throw it away*. Don't waste your time trying to rescue an idea that doesn't work. Go onto writing a *new* sketch. Be brutal with your own work. Only try and sell work you are totally happy with.

Hit Rate

For every good sketch you write you should be throwing away about ten. Think of sketch writing as being a totally disposable art form. Don't be precious about your work. But remember: Whatever you do, keep scribbling.