

# **LAugh Support™ Strikes Back**

## **Comedy Writer's Workbook: Volume One**

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A Writing & Performing Workbook For Newcomers & Pros

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for comedians on the net today

# Comedy Writing Work Book

## Exercise One: Are You Funny?

Every beginning comedy book will give you a test to determine if you are funny. No quiz will ever tell you if you can or will be a comedian. Most of the time these quizzes look for dysfunction in your family. When they find that dysfunction, or signs of psychological distress, the quiz usually declares you're fit to be a comic. Then, after hearing what you want to hear in the first page of the first chapter, you throw down your money and buy that book.

I have a broader question. I assume anyone taking the time to read this has the potential to be funny. They just need to find a way to convey the things they feel passionately about with humor. So, let's work backwards. Below, list three topics that you feel strongly about. Why are they funny to you? And how would you make them funny to your audience.

<b>The topics I might like to cover are:</b>		
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Why it's funny to me:</b>	<b>How I make it funny to others:</b>
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Why it's funny to me:</b>	<b>How I make it funny to others:</b>
<b>Topic</b>	<b>Why it's funny to me:</b>	<b>How I make it funny to others:</b>

This exercise is only meant to show you where your mind will go before your body goes on stage. It's always best to discuss the things that you have a compelling interest in. Moreover, most of comedy is communicating what is funny about something. Therefore, if there's a gap between why you see something as funny, and why your audience will see something as funny. You probably would want to know that gap was there before you ever tried turning that topic into a joke.

## Exercise Two: Setting Goals

This book is about writing. Most comics fail for the same reason businesses do, they're unorganized with no specific goals. Set three goals for your writing, so that you can make the most out of this eBook.:

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## Exercise Three: Writing About Appearances

Fill in the blank with a celebrity name:

<b>This table will help you write about your appearance.</b>	
<b>I look like:</b>	
<b>I am as muscular as:</b>	Pee Wee Herman
<b>I am as tall as:</b>	
<b>My Hair Looks Like:</b>	
<b>My Eyes Remind People Of:</b>	A cyclops
<b>I dress like:</b>	
<b>In church, I dress like:</b>	

Take a look at your answers. If there are two celebrities who are complete opposites, is the audience going to see you as a cross between those two people? How is that affecting your chances on stage? If they think you dress like a slob, they probably think you're poor, either that or lazy. In my case it's lazy. That and the washing machine is too expensive. You would combine the two by saying, "*Okay maybe I dress like Steven Wright at a semi-formal church, but only because the washer takes too many quarters and my favorite guy at Super Cuts is in a coma.*"

## Exercise Four: What's funny about how you look?

## Exercise Five: Opposites

Many jokes come from combining two things that are rarely put together, like a sober Irish Man. So your goal here is simply to find two opposites that described four main characteristics of your body.

Try to pin down opposites that pin down your physical features.		
My Hands Are [Example]	Large	<i>But Feminine</i>
My Hair		
My Breasts/ Penis		
My Physique		
My Skin		

Obviously the joke is that while my hands are large, indicating everything else might be to. They have a feminine side, suggesting my penis might to. Therefore, at least on the rare occasion when I am a dick, I do it in a loving and sensitive way, which in itself can be kind of funny.

## Exercise Six: Writing About How You Feel

Fill in the blanks with a *unusual* attitudes:

This Table Will Help You Get Started Writing About Your Attitudes	
What do I really hate?	
What do I really love?	
What terrifies me?	Pee Wee Herman Naked
What makes me sad?	
What cause am I for?	
What cause am I against?	
What makes me sick?	
What makes me swoon?	
Looks sexy to me?	
I would I preach for?	Premarital Sex
I'd preach against?	Unconditional Love

When you originally start exploring your attitudes choose no more than three subjects. Write about a page on each of them. Combine that with the material you've already written about your appearance. When you narrow your scope to the best things you've written, highlight where you expect to get laughs. Don't try for huge laughs. Try for a clear sense of direction. When you stand on the first level as a comic you need to decide your start and end points. When it comes to what your writing now, your starting point should be learning about yourself and your attitudes. That will help you define an end point much more easily.

## Exercise Seven: Identifying Joke Types

This article comes from Chris Penny's article from Laugh Support. Try to match the joke up with the type of joke that it is.

1. Karen is the best thing to ever happen to me. And I find that very depressing.	A. Yes/ No
2. Last time I swam on the beach, someone yelled save Orca and tried to push me back in.	B. Similtude
3. Her eyes were a bright green because she stole a lot of cash from my sister and she liked to stare.	C. Simile
4. Last time I was at the doctor the nurse started drawing blood. And I find nerve racking when the person is about to stick me with a needle starts by drawing pictures of severed limbs.	D. Metaphor
5. My apartment was a pigsty before the Earthquake. Now even the pigs are complaining.	E. Literal Pun
6. I remember when I broke my arm and my dad signed my cast "don't misbehave again."	F. Aural Pun
7. My girl asked me if I'd eat a pear. I said a pair of what?	G. Hyperbole
8. I think Gary Coleman has an altitude problem.	H. Malapropism
9. My girlfriend asked me if she felt hot. I said, "if you're sick go home. I ain't catching it this time."	I. Euphemism
10. It rained so much yesterday that my backyard became a swimming pool.	J. Opposites

### **Answer Key:**

1. A
2. G
3. E
4. E
5. C, G, D
6. G
7. F
8. H
9. E
10. A

### **Reasons For The Answers:**

1. This is a simple yes/no. The set up indicates meeting Karen is a positive experience. The punchline negates it.
2. This is hyperbole. It is also a metaphor. The person resembles a whale (the metaphor). And, that is obviously an exaggeration.
3. This is probably a literal pun, even though it involves phrases more than words. The joke comes in the fact green has a double meaning. In our case, it isn't the color of her eyes, it's a reflection of the cash she's stolen.
4. This is a pun. In this case draw is taken to mean take blood. In fact, draw means, a sadistic nurse.
5. This starts with a similitude. It moves to hyperbole. It finishes with a metaphor.
6. This is Hyperbole. I'm seriously exaggerating the consequences of disobeying my dad.
7. This is an aural pun. Aural puns are considered a lower form of wit. This joke is better because it seems I'm intentionally being sarcastic and adding a sexual angle to this joke.
8. This is a malapropism. We expect the word attitude but get the word altitude. The joke comes from the fact that they're both appropriate. Not only that some shorter people make up for their lack of height with an attitude.
9. This is a literal pun. There are two meanings for hot. The one I mean is sick. The one my girlfriend means is sexual.
10. This is a similitude. The joke is comparing my backyard to a swimming pool.

## Exercise Eight: The Comedy Prompt

In the Comedy Process Brendan Corbet identified some questions that you can ask yourself in order to begin the comedy process. See if the following prompts help jump start your brain:

Why is it?	Why is it that all runners move counter clockwise?
What would you do if?	
What wouldn't you do if?	
Why is it that?	
Why does this?	
What's insane about?	
What's annoying about?	

Sometimes the comedy will come when you find an answer for the question that you asked. The question about runners was something that Corbet supplied. My answer, because I'm a writer, so it's obvious to me is, "because they're running against the clock."

Try to answer the following questions in ways that distort, displace and exaggerate reality.

**#1:** Why is it that women ask men if they know what they're doing wrong when clearly we don't?

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**#2:** What's annoying about telemarketers?

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**#4:** What would you do if you failed high school math.

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**#5:** What wouldn't you do for a Klondike bar?

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**#6:** What's insane about the insanity plea?

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## **Exercise Nine: Identifying Joke Types**

From the comedy process: To make it effective it needs to be at the right time and in the right situations and moments. Along with the timing, it also needs some suspense. Suspense usually happens through putting in a lot of details, building it up for release. If you read jokes you will notice the descriptions seem stretched out. Most jokes can be stripped down to the bare essentials - the scene, the dialog, the actions and the punch line. It all gives people a better feel through their senses of the situation. It helps people to visualize what is going on. Pauses just before points give it more of a build up to release the laughter. Letting the thought sink into people's heads before hitting them with it.

Now take one of the six questions you answered and try to add in suspense and timing, to actually create a story that might work on stage.


## **Exercise Ten: The Opposite**

Now take one of the six questions you answered and try to remove the timing and see how that affects the story as you try to share it.


## **Exercise Eleven: In Your Own Words**

What have you discovered about yourself and what would you like those revelations to become part of your act? Free write your answer in the space below.

## Exercise Eleven: Identifying Joke Types, Part Deux

While writing for HeyLady Shayne Michael identified twelve types of joke structures, built of Chris Penny and Greg Dean's theories of comedy. This exercise ties into Shayne Michael's article, [Twelve Types Of Joke Structures](#).

Redefinition & Retitling	Definition Through Obvious Exclusion
Statistical Analysis	Inappropriate Suggestions For Safety
Not Using Euphemisms Where Appropriate	Bringing Euphemisms Home
Underplaying Damages With Understatements	Overplaying Damages To Get Your Way
Analyzing Errors In Sentence Structure	Inappropriate Personal Settings
Logical Mismatch	Asking The Obvious Questions

What category do the following five jokes fall under?

- 1.) **Shayne Michael:** "I know my ex girlfriend and I will meet again in heaven. I don't say that because I think she's a *saint*. I just don't think Satan could deal with the *bitch*."
- 2.) **Shayne Michael:** "There's an I can't believe it's not butter spray... Here's your first clue it's not butter... It's in a spray..."
- 3.) **Shayne Michael:** "A new survey shows 50% of college students binge drink, 20% do heavy drugs, and 10% are in some type of rehab program. The other 30% are just really bad at lying to the people who take surveys."
- 4.) **George Carlin:** Selling is legal; fucking is legal. Why isn't selling fucking legal?
- 5.) **Shayne Michael:** The warden told me, "We don't *punish* prisoners here. We *nurture* them." Good thing, that's what murders need. *encouragement*.

### Answers:

**#1 Retitling/ Renaming:** What makes the joke work is the plausible motion from the word *angel* to the word *bitch*. I imply that she's an *angel* who sadly passed away. Then I redefine her as a *bitch* that even Satan couldn't handle.

**#2 Asking The Obvious Question:** Most of the time, these are the remarks that leave you saying, duh.

**#3 Statistical Analysis:** What makes this type of joke work is not simply the fact that the numbers don't add up. It's the fact that the error tells you something new, whoever created the survey can't count.

**#4 Logical Mismatch:** If A causes B and B causes C, then A should cause C, unless the people who make the laws are morons and don't realize that's the way reality is suppose to work. Carlin was a master of this type of humor. It's the hardest type to write. It's the

hardest for the audience to follow. However, it's also among the most rewarding types of comedy to do well.

**#5 Bringing The Euphemism Home:** In this case the euphemism makes reality worse instead of lightens it up for society, because clearly murders and cut-throats don't need any encouragement. They need to be slapped more as a kid.

This has covered five of the type of jokes I dealt with in the essay: [Twelve Types Of Joke Structures](#). Now try writing five of your own.

**1: Write One Retitling Joke Here:**


**2: Write One Asking The Obvious Question Joke Here:**


**3: Write One Statistical Analysis Joke Here:**


**4: Write One Logical Mismatch Joke Here:**


**5: Write One Bringing The Euphemism Home Joke Here:**


## Intermission

Greg Dean speaks. Dean says all jokes require misdirection. Breden Corbet mirrors his position in the article [Direction and Expectation: Avoid Confusion](#). Part of good comedy is recognizing when a joke exists. Look at the two entries below. Only one contains misdirection. Highlight in yellow what causes the misdirection. Cross out the entry that isn't a joke, because there is no misdirection.

Potential Joke Entry One	Potential Joke Entry Two
<p>A stranger rushed into a bar and ordered a double whisky:</p> <p>"Tell me," he asked the bartender agitatedly, "how high do penguins grow?"</p> <p>"Oh, about so high," replied the bartender, placing his hand some two feet from the floor.</p> <p>"Are you sure?" asked the stranger.</p> <p>"Positive" said the bartender</p> <p>"Damn, I guess I just ran over a nun"</p>	<p>A stranger rushed into a bar and ordered a double whisky:</p> <p>"Tell me," he asked the bartender agitatedly, "how tall are nuns?"</p> <p>"Well, females are smaller so about two inches shorter than us."</p> <p>"Are you sure?" asked the stranger.</p> <p>"Positive" said the bartender.</p> <p>"Damn, I guess I just run over a nun"</p>

**Bonus Question:** Go back through the six questions you answered in exercise eight. Is there anything there that involves misdirection or lends itself to misdirection?


## Exercise Twelve: Writing About Relationships

In the article [Writing About Relationships](#) I suggested that one of the easiest ways to create humor when dealing with relationships is to play the blame game. List your bad qualities, tell me whose fault they are and then tell me why.

Negative Qualities	Who's Responsible	Why It's Their Fault
<b>Elaborate:</b>		
<b>Elaborate:</b>		
<b>Elaborate:</b>		

Now do the same exercise for someone you're close to. Tell me three things that are wrong with them, whose fault those issues are and why.

Negative Qualities	Who's Responsible	Why It's Their Fault
<b>Elaborate:</b>		
<b>Elaborate:</b>		
<b>Elaborate:</b>		

### Exercise Thirteen: Understanding Your Hook

Another word for *hook* is *persona*, or what makes you unique and stand out. I use the word *hook* because it's easier to relate back to other mediums. This pamphlet will consistently use the word *hook* alone. Just know, that a hook and a persona are basically the same thing.

#1: What makes you unique as a comic?

#2: Does anything that you've come up with for this eBook convey that uniqueness?

#3: Which line gets the big laugh in my act?

Joke One	Joke Two	Joke Three
I remember when I broke my arm and my dad signed my cast don't misbehave again or I'll break the other one.	I painted a naked model in art. Apparently, I was supposed to paint on the canvas.	My Grandmother mowed our front lawn in 15 minutes. We lived in Arizona at the time.

Answer: The big laugh is on joke one because it's the most closely tied to who I am, my pathetic, sad yet sometimes in a funny way life. Even though the second two jokes follow good joke structure, I eventually cut them from my act, because they were not closely tied to who I am.

#4: Find three jokes from the internet and fill in the following boxes.

Joke One	Joke Two	Joke Three
Enter a joke that reminds you of you.	Enter a joke that does not remind you of yourself.	Enter a joke that reminds you of a relative.

#5: Why does joke one remind you of yourself?

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#6: Why is joke two so far removed from who you are?

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#7: Why is joke three reminding you of that particular relative?

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#8: Rewrite joke two so it comes closer to representing who you are.

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### **Exercise Fourteen: Understanding Characters In Your Act**

One of the earliest tricks I learned in comedy is I couldn't deliver every joke I could write. However, that's only true when I'm speaking as myself. In each of our lives, there are a host of characters we interact with. Those jokes that aren't right for you, might be right for a character in your act that doesn't share all your personality traits. List all the characters you might talk about on stage here:

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Now take any one character and

<b>The Character Worksheet</b>	
Name Him/ Her:	
Is he/ she real, fictional, or a composite?	
How do they look?	
Are they fat, slim, or athletic?	

How do they feel about their life?	
How does the character earn a living?	
Who are their closest friends?	
Do they have a family?	
How does the character feel about his or her family?	
How does their family interact with yours?	
Why is that character important in your life?	
Describe the person's IQ.	

**Look back on any of these answers.**

**#1:** What is a source of anxiety for the character in your answer?

**#2:** Which answer might cause problems for you?

**#3:** Does this character have a persona/ hook or something that makes the person unique?

**#4:** How does that persona fit in with yours?

**#5:** If you could change one thing about the character, what would you?

**#6:** How would the character react to the fact you would really like to see that one quality changed?

**#7:** Is the character's personality compliment yours or contrast against it?

**#8:** Why?

## Exercise Fifteen: Deciding Clean Vs. Dirty

#1: Where do you want to perform?

#2: Do the places you've listed have any implications on whether you should work clean or dirty?

#3: When you do shocking material, are you just trying to be shocking?  
Or is there a deeper substance?

#4: Which material has a deeper sense of honesty to you?  
The clean or the dirty material you've delivered in the past?

#5: Which comedians do you enjoy the most and would most like to emulate?  
And what advice do you think they'd give you on this subject?

## Exercise Sixteen: Persona And Dress

Describe your character on stage:

<b>Attitude</b>	
<b>Dress</b>	
<b>Social Skills</b>	
<b>Extra Talents</b>	

How is this person different from you when you're not on stage?

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## Exercise Seventeen: Hack Premises

When you write off topics as "hack" you're acting lazy. To write about "hack" material you simply need more approaches to avoid the overdone ones. You need more angles and you need more original thoughts. If you can make a "hack" premise sound original, you show a real talent for writing. In the table that follows, list three hack subjects from your act, and then list what's original about your point of view.

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Why my take is original</b>	<b>Why my take is unoriginal</b>
EX: Airline Safety lectures	I talk about the 1 <sup>st</sup> class version of the lecture. And how they still look down on...	There are still some similarities to Carlin's take, though this angle holds promise.

### **Exercise Eighteen: Evaluating Your Internal Censor**

The censor is the part of you that keeps certain things from being spoken on stage. Sometimes that censor is a good force. Sometimes, it will prevent the most brilliant material you'll ever write from making it in front of an audience.

<b>Evaluating Your Censor</b>	
What material have you cut for reasons other than being funny?	
Why did you cut it?	
Do you believe that material is funny?	
If so, what are you risking by doing it?	
Assuming there's an answer to that last question, is the trade off worth the risk.	

### **Exercise Nineteen: Writing Political Humor**

While explaining how to write about politics, I talked about understanding the evolving cliché. In this sense, political humor comes in several forms. Sometimes your premise is

accepted wisdom, as it is in traditional comedy. But more often than not, especially with politics, the underlying premise has not been accepted as common wisdom. When it hasn't you not only have to write a clever joke, you have to become a persuader as well. What are your views on politics.

<b>My LIBERAL Political Views</b>	
My views on liberal politics are:	
What about my views is controversial?	
What about my views aren't?	
How can I use humor to persuade the audience to accept my most controversial views?	

<b>My CONSERVATIVE Political Views</b>	
My views on conservative politics are:	
What about my views is controversial?	
What about my views aren't?	
How can I use humor to persuade the audience to accept my most controversial views?	

**Exercise Twenty: Sample Political Premise Explored:**

In the table below explore some reasons that former president Nixon shouldn't appear on, *To Tell The Truth*.

<b>Why Nixon Shouldn't Appear On <i>To Tell The Truth</i></b>	
What's the obvious reason?	
Where else shouldn't Nixon be?	
Where would Nixon's political skills come in handy?	
What facts proved Nixon was a liar?	
How did being taped affect his personal life?	
How can you prove Nixon was honest?	

<b>Why Nixon Shouldn't Appear On <i>To Tell The Truth</i> – Possible Answers</b>	
What's the obvious reason?	Everyone would assume he was lying.
Where else shouldn't Nixon be?	The Vatican. He is probably right at home in Washington D.C.
Where would Nixon's political skills come in handy?	Lying to Hillary.
What facts proved Nixon was a liar?	The Nixon tapes.
How did being taped affect his personal life?	He probably hated leaving messages.
How can you prove Nixon was honest?	Compare him to bigger liars.

**Fill in the blanks**

Mr./Mrs, \_\_\_\_\_ should not appear on the game show \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_

Mr./Mrs, \_\_\_\_\_ should not appear on the game show \_\_\_\_\_

because \_\_\_\_\_

## Exercise Twenty-One: Tackling Taboo Subjects

What are your thoughts on comedy material the following subjects?

Racial Material	
The “N” Word	
Catholic Priests & Alter Boys	
Cancer, AIDS & Suicide	
Rape	
Abortion	

## Exercise Twenty-Two: Tackling Taboo Subjects Part 2

**#1:** What are the most shocking elements of your comedy act, if you have any.

**#2:** Do you think the audience sees the fact that you’re about to break the rules of comedy coming?

**#3:** If they do, and comedy is based on deception, what is so shocking about the place the taboo subject finally goes.

**#4:** If they don’t sense the rule breakage coming, what about your point of view makes the subject funny?

**#5:** Which subjects would you like to discuss but feel afraid to?

**#6:** What do you think is responsible for that fear?

## Four Rules Of Shock Comedy

- 1.) Don't use shock for shock value alone.
- 2.) Don't work up to your POV; start there.
- 3.) Offensive characters are more offensive if they're not funny.
- 4.) The technical skills of good comedy apply to shock comedy too.

## Exercise Twenty-Three: Choosing A Writing Partner

#1: Who is a good contrast to your personality?

#2: Who could best deliver the jokes you're good at writing but don't intend to keep?

#3: Why is that person a good choice to compliment your own writing ability?

#4: How exactly do you intend to write together, how often & where?

## Exercise Twenty-Five: Protecting Your Material

<b>Tie Your Material To Your POV</b>	
Which material, from your act, could anyone else have thought up too?	
What would you do if someone else stole the joke?	
What material is so closely tied to your personality that if anyone stole it, it would be obvious it wasn't theirs.	
Which of the two types of material tends to go over better on stage?	

## **Exercise Twenty-Six: True or False**

You can sue someone for copyright infringement if you haven't registered the work?

Find The [Answer Here](#):

## **Exercise Twenty-Six-B: True or False**

Registering with the WGA will protect your work?

Find The [Answer Here](#):

## **Exercise Twenty-Seven: The Chris Rock Checklist**

Ever wonder how your act compares to Chris Rock's, who is arguably the best comic of our time. Answer the following questions and get an objective idea. You'll need a separate piece of paper to do break down your act by answering the following questions.

### **Analyze The Foundation Of Your Act:**

1. How many basic truths in my act?
2. Are these truths insightful or just interesting?
3. Can I use strong bits to back up weaker bits?
4. Have I put the set list in the correct order?

### **Keeping In The Family:**

1. Is material so specific to my culture that I might lose another?
2. If so can I present it so it doesn't seem so?
3. Am I bogged down with historical information to explain setups?
4. Can I use historical information to illustrate premises, rather than simply restate them?

### **How Good Are You At Communicating It:**

1. If I have assertions, can I state them simply, and act them out vividly?
2. Can I draw a parallel line to today's culture?
3. Can I draw a parallel line between movies, music, and today's heroes & villains?
4. Is this bit strong enough to be discussed after my show ends?

## Act Outs & Parallel Structure:

1. When I act things out, am I simply repeating the premise over & over?
2. Does each new remark add a new problem and a new solution, related to the original premise?
3. Can I act things out so that I always add new information?
4. When I draw parallels, does it point out flaws in everyday thinking or accepted wisdom?

## Exercise Twenty-Eight: Beyond The Basics *One*

When writing about headliners I broke down which each of the top ten comedians of our time will be remembered for.

- George Carlin will be remembered for tackling current events in an open honest way that would make politicians cringe.
- Steven Wright will be remembered as the best one-liner comic of our time.
- Johnny Carson will be remembered as the most graceful bomber in history.
- Jerry Seinfeld will be remembered as the man who made an entire act out of nothing.
- Bob Hope will be remembered for service to our men and women in the uniform.
- Drew Carey will be remembered for his take on the dead-end job.
- And, Tim Allen will be remembered as the one who made it okay to talk about men in a time when it was only politically correct to talk about women.

What is the one skill in comedy that you seem to do better than anyone else?


Why does that part of comedy come so easy to you?


Can you hone that skill and make it better?


## Exercise Twenty-Nine: Beyond The Basics *Two*

The comics that I have come to love and respect will always be those that make me confront the reality our society is afraid to face, like James Garner who Politically Correct Bedtime Stories, an entire series of books that challenge the destructive effects politically correct speech has put on our society.

Where does your act do this?

## Exercise Thirty: Beyond The Basics *Three*

In the article [Nine Principals of Writing Comedy Well](#), I listed several steps to a quality comedy act. What do you think each subheading means.

Principal	What it means?
There is never a shortage of jokes.	
Keep the punchlines last.	
Write to grow.	
No topic is off limits.	
Write for other comics.	
Show and tell.	
Don't be afraid to rewrite	
The letter K ain't funny.	
Don't share everything you create.	

# Comedy Rehearsal Work Book

## Exercise One: Setting Goals

This book is about writing. Most comics fail for the same reason businesses do, they're unorganized with no specific goals. Set three goals for your rehearsing, so that you can make the most out of this eBook.:

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### Practicing The Set List – Summary

I usually rehearse a set three times before going up. The first time I rehearse I use my set list. My first rehearsal is a quick run through, and I don't start over no matter how many mistakes I make. Usually I make a lot. But those mistakes gives me a good idea how much practice I need and where I need it the most. Next, I go back and start over. When I get one topic right, I don't go back to the beginning and start over. Then I wait for about ½ an hour.

The second rehearsal I still use the set list, but only when I need it. I do one quick run through. I evaluate any part that needs work. Then, I work on those parts separately. After I finish with each part, I run through the whole thing again without stopping. If I think it sounds good I pause for about an hour.

On the final rehearsal, I go through the set until I don't need the topic list. It usually takes me two or three tries. This is also when I start timing myself to cut out things if it looks like the set list that may bring me over my time limit. I will also try to vary my wording here a little with each new practice so I'm never to pinned to one story and can more easily adapt to inevitable changes that always happen during a live show.

Why do you think I always wait in between rehearsals?

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Answer: I have found, sometimes overdoing things backfires. If you have a rehearsal that ends on a good note, let it sink in, enjoy like & come back an hour later. It usually will be a much better second time around.

## Exercise Two: Six Common Open Mic Mistakes

For your last open mic, did you?	
Prepare	
Carefully choose which material to do?	
Refer to the show at the expense of your material?	
Ask yourself how your act would play elsewhere?	
Disrespect the room in any way?	
Follow up on your original goals?	

## Exercise Three: Put These Steps In Order

Cut What Doesn't Work	
Judge What Works	
Rehearse	
Write	
Cut	
Add three minutes of things that work	
Judge material again	
Go to a club where they've paid to see you	
Repeat	
Test in front of comics	

## Answer Key

1. Write
2. Cut
3. Rehearse
4. Test In Front Of Comics
5. Judge What Works
6. Cut Out What Doesn't
7. At Three Minutes of "Stuff That Works"
8. Go to a club where they've paid to see you
9. Judge Material Again
10. Cut: Return to Step On

## Exercise Four: Open Mic Etiquette

Label all these as true or false. When you find an open mic you should:

1. Find a seat and listen quietly: **T / F.**
2. If you need to rehearse, leave the room. **T / F.**
3. Refrain from heckling: **T / F.**
4. Remain professional at all times: **T / F.**

If you answered false to any of these, please quit. Or, at the very least, let me know where you're playing, so that I can book myself somewhere else.

## Exercise Five: Open Mic Goals

With each set is to become a better, more compelling comic. And just trying to get the most laughs will not necessarily accomplish that. My goal for that night was a much better goal than trying to win, because developing a skill like writing better tags will make me more likely to win every forthcoming contest in the future.

How can you use an open mic to become a better comic, without focusing on being the funniest one in the line up every time?

## Exercise Six: Creating A Professional Introduction

Greg Dean suggests putting introductions on a 3 X 5 card. He suggests keeping them funny and using credits sparingly. He also suggests spelling your name phonetically so the emcee will be less likely to get it wrong. My standard introduction is, "The next comic has played 40 cities, in Montana." It does everything Dean suggests. On the mock 3 x 5 card below, write how you'd most like an emcee to introduce you during the show.

Our next comedian...

## Exercise Seven: Comic vs. Comedian

In an early issue of Laugh Support, Rob Twohy asked: Do you know the difference between a comic and a comedian? A comic says funny things, a comedian says things funny. A comic is MORE the writer; a comedian is MORE the performer.

**1A:** Which one are you? And why?


**1B:** How can you become a better comic?


**1C:** How can you become a better comedian?


## Exercise Eight: Rehearsing 101

ORBITER was an acronym I came up with to help writers organize the steps of rehearsing for a show. The six steps it refers to are Organizing Thoughts, Rehearsing, Before The Show, Improv, Timing, Evaluation and Restructuring.

<b>ORBITER Card For: Show At:</b>	
<b>Date</b>	
<b>My Goal Is:</b>	
<b>Organizing:</b> How did you organize your set? Key words? Note cards? Or did you have the whole thing written word for word? What worked and what didn't?	
<b>Rehearsal:</b> Describe your rehearsal before the actual show. What really helped? What could you have improved?	
<b>Before The Show:</b> When you got there, how did you handling mingling, politeness and the basics like giving the emcee your introduction?	
<b>Improv:</b> How did you adjust when the show took an unexpected turn? Do you think you handled it well, or did you just plow through the material you wanted to do?	
<b>Timing:</b> Did you pause for the laughs? Did you get intimidated by silence? Did you occasionally pause to long, expecting and hoping for more?	
<b>Evaluation:</b> What should you keep? What should you drop? What gets good laughs, but you're not comfortable with and why? How do you want to change what you did to make it better?	
<b>Restructuring:</b> What is the new set. Go back to your original goal. Do you believe the adjustments you made will get you, at the very least, to your original goal.	

## **Exercise Nine: Adjusting For Failure**

Assuming you have a show that fails answer the following five questions.

What was your goal?	
Why didn't you reach your goal?	
What could you have done better?	
What can you learn from your mistake?	

## **Exercise Ten: Maintaining A Professional Attitude**

When I ran the Novel Café in Santa Monica, you'd be surprised how rare a professional comedian was. In three years, two people called me to say thanks for having me on the show. You want to know what a booker thinks about you, answer the following five questions and then you do the math.

Did you show up on time?	
Did you run the light?	
Did you support the show?	
Did you say thank you before leaving?	
Did you email to say thanks one last time?	

## Exercise Eleven: Professional Attitudes: Part #2

In the character of comedy, I gave readers a set of questions to answer when asking themselves why they are where they are, and if they deserve to be further. Use this opportunity to answer some of those questions. Nobody will read your answers.

Why should I pay to go up anywhere?	
Why is he on TV, when I'm not?	
Why am I the first in the line up?	
Why won't the booker let me structure the list?	
Why should I stay to support the show?	
He said to be here at 8:00. But it's 8:45 and I'm the last person on the list. What's the big deal?	
<b>What do you answers here say about your character?</b>	

### Eight Basic Rules Of Professionalism

- 1.) Show Up
- 2.) **Don't open your act by bragging about the full rooms you always play.**
- 3.) **You can't call yourself a pro and act like an asshole.**
- 4.) **You don't get to bring a friend.**
- 5.) **Don't use notes because you want to use my room to rehearse.**
- 6.) **Pros should give more cancellation notice than amateurs.**
- 7.) **If you're the headliner don't ask, 'Do I have to go up last?'**
- 8.) **You are replaceable, even if you're a celebrity.**

## Exercise Twelve: Do You Deserve To Be Famous

In an article, of the same title, I devised a few questions meant to answer that question. Answer the following six questions honestly to see if you deserve to be on national TV right now.

#1: Are you a draw?	
#2: How much time do you spending slamming other comics?	
#3: Why do you stand out amongst 1000 other comics?	
#4: Why will you make the networks rich?	
#5: How much time are you truly putting into your craft?	
#6: How decent of a person are you?	

Based on you answers, would you give yourself a sitcom deal if you had the means, why or why not?

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Which of your answers would you most like to change and why?

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Which of your answers surprised you and why?

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## Exercise Lucky Thirteen: Preparing For Hecklers

Joe Braza divides hecklers into four categories.

The office guy, the bachelorette party girl, the drunk guy/ girl, and the hot sexy girl. Without defining these types of hecklers, what would you say to stop them from ruining your set?

<b>Who They Are</b>	<b>What I'd Say</b>
<b>The Office Guy</b>	
<b>The Bachelorette</b>	
<b>The Drunk Guy/ Girl</b>	
<b>The Hot Sexy Girl</b>	

Bonus Question: Sometimes your own material can be turned into a clever comment on a heckler. For instance, just about any insult joke you've written can be assigned to a heckler. List any stock heckler lines you know below. Beneath that, try to invent some original ones.

Stock Heckler Lines:

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Original Heckler Lines:

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## Exercise Fourteen: Your Listening Skills

Bad comics are usually described as tone deaf. This means, when their fans don't agree with their material they second-guess the audience's reaction. Evaluate your listening skills now.

Do I listen to the bookers?	
Do I listen to the other comics?	
Do I listen to the audience?	

## Exercise Fifteen: Half & Half

In February of 2007, I wrote an article called being a comedian is only ½ about being funny. Well, without reading that article, what do you think that other half is and why?

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## Exercise Sixteen: Evaluating Your Goals

What was your goal for each section of this book:

<b>The writing section</b>	
<b>The performing section</b>	

Did you accomplish those goals?

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Where do you go next to improve?

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About half the exercises were taken from exercises in HeyLady's original comedy library. At the time, heylady was the only online database that featured any such exercises. Hopefully this free addition to Laugh Support Strikes Back will aid a few comics on their quest to become better writers.

I would also highly recommend Greg Dean's book, [Step By Step to Stand-Up Comedy](#), if you want a place to go from here. Thanks for your time.