

How to...



Write a comedy sketch



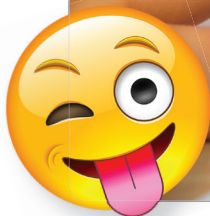
Holly King-Mand is a writer, presenter and campaigner for literacy (the ability to read and write) who has inspired thousands of children to learn English. She loves creative writing and here she shares her tips for writing a funny comedy sketch.

This year marks 40 years of Comic Relief, the charity that organises Red Nose Day (on 21 March). Comic Relief tackles poverty and injustice, and it is dedicated to using comedy as a way to raise money and awareness.

The idea of “comedy” – which is entertainment specifically designed to make people laugh – dates back to ancient Greece. Comedy performances became popular in Italy in the 16th century. Today, comedy comes in many forms, including cracker-style jokes, someone on a stage telling funny stories and situation comedies on TV. If it makes you laugh, it’s comedy.

A comedy sketch is a short, humorous scene that is performed by actors. It can be written like a script, which details each character’s dialogue and actions, and sometimes notes on costumes, props and the setting.

TOILET HUMOUR
The earliest recorded joke dates back nearly 4,000 years. It was a fart joke from Sumer (now Iraq).



Set the scene

Comedy can happen anywhere, even in locations that aren’t associated with laughter, such as a supermarket or library. Unexpected things in unexpected places can create laughs, like an elephant in a classroom. You could also set your sketch somewhere that is usually serious, such as a hospital operating theatre. Setting a silly scene in a serious place creates a contrast that can lead to laughs.

Slapstick, wit, or both?

Slapstick comedy is physical comedy, typically used by clowns. For example, someone slipping on a banana skin. Wit relies on the words in a script – the conversation between characters and the story told. You can play with words to create comedy. For example, homophones (words that sound the same but have different meanings) can create comic misunderstandings – did your character add flour or flower?



Create funny characters

Characters work well if an audience can relate to them, but giving them a flaw (fault) can create amusing problems. For example, a doctor who faints at the sight of blood. Laughs can also come from how other characters react to this. Exaggerating a personality or situation can make it funny. Perhaps your character is super organised but a series of absurd events makes them late for a school test.

Try improvisation

The word “improvise” means to try things out in the moment. Improvised comedy has no set script. Gather a group of friends and try it to see what is funny. Decide what the scenario is and where it takes place. Give everyone a character with a flaw, and see what happens. Maybe you are a group of firefighters rescuing a kitten from a tree – how will you all react and interact? If you all laugh, an audience might too!



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