



# EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO WRITE SKETCH COMEDY

SKETCHPAD COMEDY

# Sketchpad™ COMEDY

*Thanks for downloading the Everything You Need to Write Sketch Comedy Ebook*

In this guide you'll find:

[Sketch Idea Generator](#)

[Sketch Writing Cheat Sheet](#)

[3 Ways to Better Comedy](#)

[How to Format Your Sketch](#)

*When you're ready, let's get started!*

# How to Generate Ideas for Sketch Comedy Writing

This is a guide you can use to generate sketch ideas. Keep in mind that out of 10 ideas in comedy, maybe 1 is going to turn out great. But, using these methods you can pump out ideas very quickly and get to that 1 really great idea faster. Enjoy!

## Adjective/ Profession/ Location - Mis/Matching

This one is all about pumping out ideas quickly. Make 3 lists. First a list of adjectives. Second a list of professions. Third a list of locations. Then you just connect them in a way that makes sense or in a way that makes no sense at all. Here's an example:

<u>Adjectives</u>	<u>Professions</u>	<u>Locations</u>
Loud - A	Barista	Office
Quiet - B	Librarian - A	Art Museum -A
Brave	Actor - B	Truck Stop - C
Scared - C	Trash Collector	Library
Childish	Singer	Restaurant
Smart	Mechanic - C	Home
Responsible	Pope	Grocery Store - B

If this were on sheet paper by hand I would just draw arrows (i suggest doing it that way). But, for the sake of keeping this digitally coherent, here are some connections I could make:

A) Loud ---> Librarian ----> Art Museum

B) Quiet ---> Actor ---> Grocery Store

C) Scared ---> Mechanic ---> Truck Stop

*And so on...*

Then you look at your connections and you try to think of some situation that those make sense. Or you go the complete opposite and connect ones that are total rubbish to put together.

*For example, what if a librarian, who is forced to stay quiet in her natural environment (the library) made up for it by being loud everywhere else?*

Next, you would brainstorm that scenario.

*Here is another example, A mechanic is very comfortable working on cars, but we find out at a truck stop that he is deathly afraid of trucks. How would that play out?*

If you need help flushing out the idea you can check out our [Sketch Writing Cheat sheet](#) (<--- click there to go to the website where you can download it for free) or you can “Sketch Story Board” it.

The main point of this particular idea generating exercise is **Don’t Overthink It**. Go with whatever comes to you and whatever sounds fun to create. With this exercise you can pump out really quick sketch ideas really quickly and it’s all about getting that initial idea. Don’t go past those ideas until you’re ready.

## Use Music

Another great way to generate ideas that maybe you haven’t thought of is to listen to music. Hit random on Spotify or even pull up one of your favorite songs. Close your eyes and then picture in your head whatever that music inspires you to think of.

This exercise was taught at a workshop from Andel Sudik of *The Second City* and it sparked in me an idea of a guy who goes through a party high fiving, joking around with people and just going through the entire house.

It then lead to this sketch:

*On stage we see a bunch of people just standing around lethargic. One guy knocks on the door, it’s opened but the lethargic states continue with everyone on stage. There’s a guy pumping beer out of a keg slowly. There’s another person playing chess by himself. No music is on.*

*Enter our hero. He knocks on the door and when it opens the door person comes to life with a high five. Music starts playing. The hero passes through the stage bringing everyone to life with high fives, belly rubs, some type of handshake. Once he does that with everyone they all start dancing and having a good time.*

*Then, hero leaves the room to go to the bathroom. Music stops immediately. Everyone goes back to their starting positions and continue their zombie like states. Hero re-enters and the music starts again, high fives ensue and dancing/energy from everyone.*

*Hero takes a phone call, steps outside. Music stops. Everyone back to starting position and no energy again.*

*Hero comes back in - music starts, energy - everyone is alive. But, the hero announces he is leaving and then leaves. They're all sad and shocked and back in their starting positions.*

*Hero jumps back on stage and proclaims "Ah, I'm just kidding! Come on everyone" Then hero leads everyone off stage and around the theater while the music plays and everyone dances.*

*Blackout.*

It was fun, simple and a great way to get everyone on stage together for the final sketch of the night.

Music can be great inspiration. It's a great go-to when you feel like you've exhausted your options or you want a very visual sketch idea.

## Theme of the Day

The Theme of the Day is all about thinking about the hot topics or themes that are going on lately in the world, in your office, in your house - wherever.

How are people acting about this? How does what's going on make you feel? How can you represent it in a different/interesting way? Here are some examples of themes that you could pull ideas from:

- Big games in sports - ie, Superbowl, March Madness, fantasy sports, etc
- Weather - ie, snowstorm, rain, tornado, etc
- Politics going on -ie, Trump (obviously), presidential elections, News shows
- Something happens at your work - ie, guy making copies, lunches being stolen

Just think about whatever is going on in the world that seems important or affects the people around you.

These types of sketches do a really good job of relating to your audience and be their “mouthpiece” for an event or something odd that happens to each of us throughout our lives. Usually, an audience will give you bonus applause for it.

## The Character Sketch Idea

Developing a character sketch can seem really tough. But, it doesn’t have to be. Here are a few ideas that will help you develop the character first and then work on developing the sketch around them.

### Develop the Character

One of my favorite ways to develop characters is through human interaction with real people. Ever meet someone who has an odd tick, speech pattern or interesting mannerisms? Maybe it’s a subtle thing, but you noticed it about them once and now every time you talk to them all you can do is pay attention to it?

Or what about cashiers that you’ve run into at the grocery store. They seem to be an odd bunch at times, right?

Ever watch people at the mall food court?

Observing the people around you is key. It’s most noticeable through an odd physical movement or a unique voice.

For Bill Hader’s character *Stefon* on Saturday Night Live, him and John Mulaney combined a couple of characters based on people they knew. Mulaney’s inspiration came from a guy that would suggest parties and interesting things around the city to him. Hader’s guy was a barista who looked and talked like the character Stefon. One day, they combined the two and made comedy gold.

Not able to find someone in real life? Next time you’re together with your group you can do an exercise that will help you. Everyone stands in a circle. Now have one person get into the middle and start walking around the inside of the circle. Slowly, at first, have someone call out a special characteristic for the person in the center to take on.

For example, “drag your right foot.”

Then, other people start to chime in, with each suggestion the person in the center takes on the characteristics they are describing. Once you have a few (and try to limit this to just 3-4), the people in the circle can start asking the person questions about their personality.

Encourage the person in the center to “speak from the character.”

Have them answer as though they were a real person. How does someone with a limp and shoulder shrug talk in everyday life? What’s their favorite food or best memory of their dad? Keep it simple and give it time to develop.

If the character is fun, figure out where they work, what type of family life they have, or what situation they could get themselves into that would make a fun sketch.

## Add Life to the Character

Once you have a character (regardless of how it was created), then you can develop it further. You can do this by having a partner interview you as that character. All of a sudden you are answering questions no longer as yourself, but instead as this made-up character. It’s a great way to learn about the character and figure out what drives them in their life.

Questions like:

- Where do you work?
- How old are you?
- What do you do for fun?
- What drives you crazy?
- What’s your family life like?
- Who are you voting for?
- Why did you... [fill in the blank]?
- Tell us about the last time someone was nice or mean to you.
- And so on and on...

The point of this exercise is to get as much information about this character out as possible. It’s to help the actor really dig deep into what it’s like to be them. There are no wrong answers and you are just making things up as you go along. But, once those specifics are determined, it makes writing a sketch with that character so much easier.

## Add the Environment

In a way we are all characters in our own rights and we play those characters out depending upon what environment we are in. At work, I’m an employee and my boss controls what I can/can’t



do. At home, I can choose to clean up my house or not. I can play video games or watch a TV show. At a formal dinner with in-laws, I'm another character. Maybe one who doesn't lick the ketchup that fell out of his mouth onto his shirt.

We all play characters in our lives. Therefore, it makes sense that your characters would act differently in their different settings as well.

There are three elements comedy usually draws a scene from; home, work, and at play.

What is this character like at home? What about at work? Or what do they do when they play?

Then it's a matter of going through those three things and figuring out what is most fun. You can try each of them out to figure out the final direction you want to take your character sketch into.

Once you have all of those elements, creating a character sketch should be quite simple. And even better, by taking the time to really develop a character in that way, you can do follow up sketches, or show them in different scenarios.

Or just throw em away and build a new one.

## Developing Sketch Ideas Through Improv Comedy

Using improv to develop sketch comedy is a really great method. It's used this way at The Second City and many other comedy schools. It's especially helpful, in my opinion, to help generate dialogue.

If you or your group are already doing improv, you've probably played in scenes where you wish you could do more with a character that was created. Well, the good news is, you can! That's what sketch comedy is for. Take those fun scenarios or characters you created in the "make em ups" and turn them into something even better and more refined.

One note on using improv for sketches. It's okay during rehearsal, and some improv is okay during shows, but if you have a group member who is gung ho about "I'll just figure it out on stage," meaning they don't want to rehearse or write, then you should probably get rid of that person.

Using improv as an excuse to never do the work needed to produce sketch comedy is not sketch comedy. It's improv. Let that person go off and do their one person show they've always dreamed of doing.



There are lots of ways to generate sketch ideas. These were just a few ways I've done it in the past and the ways I teach them in workshops. When you have to develop a bunch of sketches for an upcoming show, some of these may be more useful than others. But, it's important to have a big tool belt of idea generators in times of need.

# 3 WAYS TO **BETTER** COMEDY

JASON FLAMM



# 3 Ways to Better Comedy

The best comedy in the world is relevant to the human experience. So, be relatable to other humans.

The best writing, whether it's comedy, drama, or even teen vampire books are all about digging deeper to get past the stuff that anyone, anywhere could write on their first try.

Wasting dialogue is a mistake. You should only write dialogue that is needed and that helps explore the reason behind the piece in the first place.

People love patterns. Ever notice that a movie has a seemingly minor detail presented up front, then towards the end, that minor detail comes back to help save the day or put a button on the ending? It seems so clever and the audience eats it up. It's the same reason we love synchronized swimming and flannel.

For those that don't want to read any further, **thank you for your time.** For those that actually want to know how to accomplish these things. The rest of this book is for you. **Read on.**

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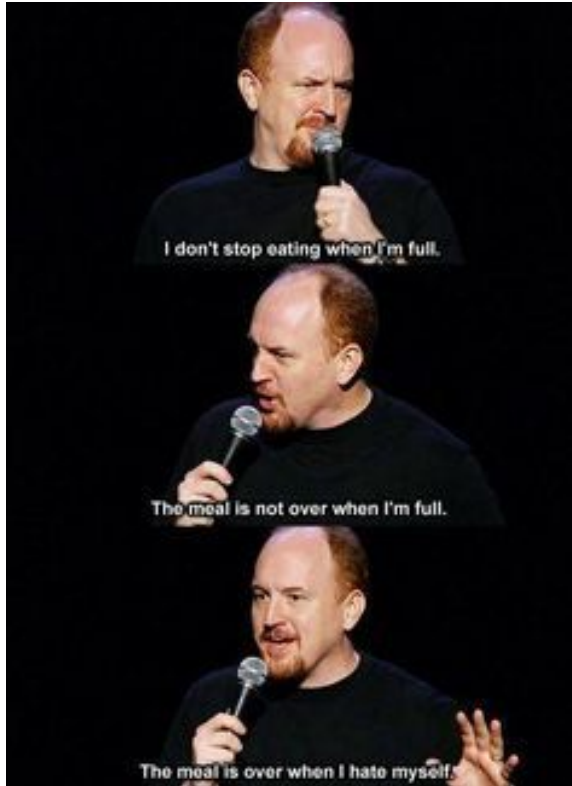
## 1. Make It Relatable

Why? Take a second to think of your **former** favorite (updated for 2019) comedian (I'm counting on 80% of you saying Louis CK).

2019 NOTE: I realize that talking about Louis CK is a sensitive issue now and that he has turned out to be another shitty white male. Truth is, we're dropping like flies these days. -sigh-

So, for this section, I hope you can forgive my outdated reference of Louie being the best ever. I kept it in because it's still a great explanation of how to make jokes and make them relatable. Apologies to anyone who is offended. Hopefully, the rest of this guide is valuable enough for you to forgive me. <3

Here is a quick joke from Louie in a meme, cuz who doesn't love memes?



(source: <https://www.pinterest.com/explore/louis-ck/>)

*That's funny. But, why is it funny?*

Mostly it's funny because it's true. At least it is true for *most people, most of the time*.

The greatest comedians and writers in the world are able to tap into what it is that makes us all human. And they usually do it through storytelling.

<p><b>Action Item #1 to make your comedy writing funnier:</b> <b>Make It Relatable</b></p>
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You can make it more relatable by thinking of situations you've been in. How did you act in that situation? What's real about it? How did you feel at the time? Have you ever eaten an entire pizza in one sitting and felt like a massive failure? Delve into human emotions on a regular basis. Judd Apatow has been quoted with saying:

***"Less semen, more feelings!"***

Which simply means to focus less on the "shock" and more of the feeling behind why it's shocking in the first place.

## 2. Dig Deeper

I come from an improvisational background. One of the lessons you learn in improv was taught by the late great Del Close. Here is an excerpt from *Poking a Dead Frog: Conversations with Today's Top Comedy Writers* - by Mike Sacks :

### **What did you take away from Del's improv teaching that you later applied to writing and directing?**

He had two key tenants: one was to always go to your third thought. Sounds really simple, but when you're onstage, your first thought is knee-jerk. Your second thought is usually okay, but not great. Del would make you stay in a scene until you found your third thought, which was a little above and beyond what most other teachers would suggest. Basically, he wanted your third thought for your character choice, your third thought for your premise or your scene, your third thought for your heightened move.

(image courtesy of: <http://www.sandpapersuit.com/2014/10/adam-mckay-on-working-with-del-close.html>)

“...always go to your third thought...”

All great writing will go further than the first thought. If we all just wrote what exists at the very tip of our mind, then we'd have even more jokes about food, sex and toilet behavior. Not that there's anything wrong with jokes about food, sex and toilet behavior. There's just already an awful lot of it out there, why add to the noise?

Instead dig a bit deeper, to your third, fourth, or 18th thought. You will come up with things that are a bit more interesting and will probably touch someone on a deeper level. It will still make sense, because it's derived from the original idea, but it will be much more impactful.

**Let's try this out with the joke above:**

What might the first thought had been?

“I don't stop eating when I'm full.”

“The meal is not over when I'm full.”

*“The meal is over when I throw up everywhere as if I'm Caesar in a vomitorium.”*

There is a joke there, maybe it's not very funny, but it's a joke. It's sort of relatable. Most of us know what it's like to just shove food in our faces until we are ready to puke. But, unless you know about Roman culture, you may not get it or relate to it.

*Let's try again.* Here is a second thought.

"I don't stop eating when I'm full."

"The meal is not over when I'm full."

*"The meal is over when I have to cut the string at the waist of my sweatpants."*

Again, it's a joke. Maybe you think it's funny, maybe you don't. That doesn't matter right now. It's a little more relatable. We all know what it's like to wear sweatpants on the days we feel extra fat then have to take the waist of those sweatpants out a little bit by retying that string. Then we can't get the string out of the knot so we just cut it off. Everyone does know what that feeling is like, right? *Right!?*

*Then,* maybe we get to the third thought:

"I don't stop eating when I'm full."

"The meal is not over when I'm full."

*"The meal is over when I hate myself."*

## Now it's a good joke.

*How has this joke evolved?*

The first one above (that I made up) was a little clever, right? It's assuming the audience knows something about how the Romans would have these massive feasts and then puke their guts out so that they could keep eating and show everyone how rich they were. (You too can [Google Roman Vomit Collectors.](#))



(image % Life of Brian and the [Guardian](#))

It hits on the nerd level and but for most people, unless they have a deep affinity for roman history, wouldn't find it very funny or relatable.

The second one is more relatable. We all know about unfastening our belts after a big meal to make room. Then, we put in a twist. We're so fat that we even have to unfasten our sweatpants (which are already our fat pants). This becomes the joke. This will probably strike a few more people as cute and funny (maybe), but we can take it even further. We're heading in the right direction.

When Louie comes in to save the day with his joke (thanks Louie, I'm dying here!) he makes a joke that is on a much deeper level and strikes more of an emotional appeal. In fact, he is directly going into the emotion of overeating.

**This is how jokes evolve. Maybe it takes more than 3 rewrites and maybe it takes less. The point is, you find the one that fits the best through trial and error.**

<p><b>Action Item #2 to make your comedy writing funnier: Dig Deeper</b></p>
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### **3. Don't Waste Dialogue and Develop Patterns**

Most people aren't going to care about what you think or say in life. Think of your favorite comedian or celebrity or whatever. I promise you that there are more people in the world who DON'T know who that is, than do.

Whatever it is you are saying needs to be condensed and have a purpose. There should be no "throw-away" lines of dialogue in your writing. Especially in sketch writing where you are keeping things to just a few minutes. Every sentence should MEAN something. It should either move your story forward, make a joke hit harder, or **it should be cut**.

<p><i>"Many times, the best way to improve dialogue is to cut it. Once you've let a scene sit for a while, revisit it with a red pen and look for what could be cut. If a piece of information isn't essential, it should probably go. And a joke isn't worth it if you've had to break the scene to achieve it." - Scriptwriter John August (source: <a href="http://johnaugust.com/2007/how-to-write-dialogue">http://johnaugust.com/2007/how-to-write-dialogue</a> )</i></p>
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Find reasons to cut dialogue. It also helps your actors remember lines and have stronger performances.

**Which of these is more satisfying to look at?**

`_/?><][{}!@#$%^&*()`

or

`/_?/_!/_?/_!/_?/_/`

Unless you're a serial killer, it's the second one. Actually, you could argue that serial killers probably love patterns even more than regular people, so not sure that fits.

Humans love patterns. We want to be led down a path. Further. Further. Then BOOM! The payoff. Even if you plan on breaking the pattern at some point, you have to actually take the time to create it.

*So, how do you develop these patterns in your own writing?*

Look for connections throughout your piece. Look for something that you've repeated or could repeat over and over again. But, don't overthink it during your first draft.

Mainly, this is something you want to focus on in the second draft. If you try to do it on the first one, you may never finish writing. Instead you'll just sit there with a blinking cursor and eventually give up. If a pattern doesn't reveal itself right away, just focus on finishing the piece without judging it. The pattern that makes the most sense will become clear when you revise it.

**Action Item #3 to making your comedy writing funnier:  
Don't Waste Dialogue and Develop Patterns**

Even in quick jokes with a few lines, there could be a pattern that develops. If it's a joke that starts with information that everyone knows about, you could call it a pattern. It's so common in our world that people generally know what you're talking about with just a little bit of information.

In the joke above he says the same thing twice, but in a different way. It's not wasted dialogue or a nervous tick. It's careful and calculated. He also doesn't waste any words, each sentence is

short. The more you can say in the fewest words possible, the bigger an impact the sentence will have.

*Speak less, mean more.*

Audiences are always looking for a reason to stop paying attention to you. Long drawn out lines of dialogue or sentences that twist and turn make it real easy for them to hop on Snapchat instead.

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*There you have it.*

### **3 Ways to Better Comedy**

I hope this helps you in your comedy writing career and I hope that you learned something valuable.

If you'd like more comedy writing tips and advice visit [sketchpadcomedy.com](http://sketchpadcomedy.com).

*Keep creating. Keep writing.*

-Jason, Sketchpad Comedy

# How to Format Your Sketch

AWESOME SKETCH TITLE

By Name of Person writing this

Date (Version #)

CAST

Bob - 40s

Jane - 40s

Barista - 20s

(This is the setting of your scene.  
Something simple, such as: a coffeeshop.)

JANE

My name should be written in all caps. It's not a character choice, but part of writing

BOB

Yes, yes. We get it your name is in caps. I should also point out that the dialogue runs all the way across the length of the...

JANE

...page. Yeah, Bob.

BOB

(upset)

Well, how dare you!

(Jane calls over the barista.)

BOB

What do we need him for?

(The barista walks over.)

BARISTA

Can I help you?

JANE

What font do you write in?

BARISTA

Courier. It's always in Courier.

JANE

Really? No Comic Sans? Times New Roman? Nothing fun?

BOB

Seriously? Can we get with the times, there's so many other options...

JANE

Don't be rude Bob!

BARISTA

Courier is neat and clean. Easy to read.

BOB

And borrrrrringggg.

JANE

Bob!

BARISTA

It's okay. We get this a lot. It's even more, boring as you put it, when it's in twelve-point size. As all scripts and writing should be.

BOB

But, that wastes so much paper! The trees!!

JANE

I'm on Bob's side on this one, actually.

BARISTA

Sorry. Hate the game not the player.

JANE

Do you feel like something's watching us?

BOB

Yeah.

(points up to the corner of the ceiling)

BARISTA

It's a page number. They made us install them. Sorry, something about recording and things getting lost.

JANE

I think it's time we get lost.

BOB

Yeah. I'd say are work here is done.

(they high five 90s sitcom style.)

(Blackout.)

# Sketch Writing Cheat Sheet

Idea/Summary of sketch: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Characters/Actors:

- |    |    |
|----|----|
| 1. | 4. |
| 2. | 5. |
| 3. | 6. |

Location/Mood of sketch: *(ie. bank, at night, on Mars, etc)*

\_\_\_\_\_

Format/Design: *(ie. Call in radio show, town hall meeting, interview, etc.)*

\_\_\_\_\_

Main theme of Sketch: *(ie. morals, good vs evil, shifts n giggles, etc)*

\_\_\_\_\_

What changes by the end? *(ie. someone's opinion, hope fails/lives, something is revealed?, etc)*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What happens in Beat 1? *(lines of dialogue, what game begins?, important pieces, etc.)*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Escalation - Beat 2 *(make it bigger or more important or more absurd)*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Escalation/Turn - Beat 3 *(make it even bigger, even more important, even more absurd)*

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

How does it end? *(joke "button", someone changes, turn it on its head, etc)*

\_\_\_\_\_

Quick tips: \*If a character isn't necessary cut it \*When in doubt, throw more gas on the fire \*1 page equals 1 minute (generally) \*Get into the action as quickly as possible, back story is unnecessary in sketch \*You should be able to fit your idea in one or two sentences