

Strengthen Your Funny Muscles!

A FUN and Useful Workshop

With Comedian Dobie Maxwell

Madison, WI – 1/23/16

Welcome!

It is my distinct pleasure to have been asked to be a presenter for today's program and I am delighted that you are able to take part. I started teaching out of necessity in 1993, but it has grown into a true passion and I never grow tired of the process.

Since I started my standup comedy classes in 1993, more than 2000 people have taken various forms of it and I am proud and honored to call many of them friends. It never ceases to amaze me how many truly creative people there are in the world and if I can do anything to advance the cause I consider it a privilege. I'm all in.

I never claim to know everything, nor do I promise any miracles. I am here to be a mentor and a guide based on my lifetime of experience. Not everybody will agree with everything I say, and that's totally acceptable. Intelligent discussion about any subject is how we all learn. I still learn myself, and that's why I enjoy teaching.

If you have any questions at all at any time, please don't hesitate to ask. I am not one to ridicule or look down upon anyone and in fact your question just may be the very same one someone else would like to ask but is afraid. I'm here to be of help.

I realize most people are not looking to be full time standup comedians, but a big part of the basic program I teach is easily adaptable to speaking in public no matter what form that may take. Feel free to adapt and use what you can and discard what is not useful. There is never only one correct way to do anything. I just offer ideas.

I sincerely hope you get more than you expected today, and after today I can still be reached if you ever have a question in the future. I sometimes tend to fall behind in getting back to everyone but I promise I will. Be patient, and I will get to you.

Also, I host a growing Facebook group called "The Maxwell Method of Standup Comedy" which has some high quality people in the comedy game that generously give of their time to answer questions to new performers. Find it on Facebook and feel free to join. Thanks again for being here today, and let's make this a success!

Dobie

MY COMEDY GOALS

Stage Name: _____

By the end of this class level:

One year from today:

Lifetime:

QUESTIONS I WANT ANSWERED:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

My BIG dream in show business and/or my life is:

LESSON 1: Comedy Overview

The business of standup comedy is changing all the time. I have been doing it my entire adult life and have seen many changes and continue to see them. I want to show you some opportunities you might not know about so hopefully you can find your own personal niche. It's a big world and there is room for a lot of different styles of comedy. No matter what yours is there's room for it!

There are many facets to the comedy business and if you are going to get in it you need to know what your options are. Notice how I called it a business? That's what it is. From now on that's how it will be referred to. Businesses do not stay in business very long if they don't follow the rules. That's what we'll learn as we go along but for now let's look at the basics you'll need to know.

Here are three things we need to discuss right away and get them straight:

1. Comedy is MUCH more than you imagined it to be.

You are taking a big step by choosing to explore comedy. Whether or not you have been on stage before or are looking forward to doing it very soon it is a very difficult endeavor and can be extremely intimidating. I have done all you are about to do and can guide you through it but YOU are the one who is ultimately the deciding factor on how far you take it. It's a very long journey.

2. The definition of success is different for everybody.

People get into show business for different reasons. If you compare yourself to others it can lead to unnecessary frustration and disappointment. If a plan is in place that fits your talents you won't spend time worrying about what other people are doing. Having a plan and knowing yourself is the key to making it.

3. EVERYBODY has to pay their dues. NO exceptions.

This is pretty self-explanatory. The sooner you learn it the better you'll be. I have seen countless people wrongly think they don't have to pay any dues. It doesn't work that way. Relax and enjoy the ride, but you will have to earn EVERYTHING you get along the way but would you want it any other way? The feeling of accomplishment of earning every bit of your achievements is what true success is all about. Roll up your sleeves and go DO it!

Success comes before work in ONE place - a dictionary.

‘Dobie’s Dozen’ Things This Course Can Do For You

- Introduce you to both the art and business of standup comedy and humor.
- Provide tips, hints and secrets from a comedy pro that works for YOU.
- Give you useful experience and guidance in both writing and performing.
- Objectively measure and assess your personal strengths and weaknesses.
- Form a realistic and workable career plan of attack for yourself.
- Teach you to think like a professional entertainer both onstage and off.
- Teach you to think PERIOD. 😊
- Offer you actual stage time at one of America’s legendary comedy clubs.
- Show you what it takes to get paid for being funny in the fastest way.
- Provide personal attention as well as group interaction.
- Start you making valuable contacts both personally and professionally.
- Come out of your shell a little bit and have some plain old FUN!
- Give you more than you paid for this whole class in each session.

What This Course WON’T Do For You

- MAKE YOU FUNNY. Only God can do that. We can just improve on it.
- Guarantee you paid work. We’ll show you how, and the rest is up to you.
- Guarantee a career in show business. This isn’t a truck driving school.
- Substitute the fact that anything worthwhile is hard WORK. This is too.

Comedy Terms YOU Need To Know

Like any business standup comedy has a list of inside terms and phrases that need to be learned. I compiled a list for you so you won't be in the dark.

'COMIC' - The 'in the biz' term for a standup comedian or performer.

'JOKE' - A single idea with a setup and a punch line that gets a laugh.

'SETUP' - A line that begins the thought to establish it with the audience.

'PUNCH' - The end of a joke that has a surprise twist which gets the laugh.

'TAG' - An addendum to a punch line that is funny but not a joke in itself.

'CALLBACK' - A strategic later use of an earlier reference to get a laugh.

'SET' - A show or performance on stage, no matter how long. NOT 'skit'.

'GIG' - A planned engagement (usually paid) where a performer works.

'STOCK LINE' - An old joke that has been overused by many performers.

'HACK' - A derogatory term that implies one who relies on stock lines.

'HECKLER' - A person who interrupts from the audience during your set.

'ROOM' - A term for venue, usually a club but could be an auditorium etc.

'CONDO' - A usually hideous apartment where comics stay on road gigs.

'MIDDLE/FEATURE' - Position requiring 25-30 min. in comedy clubs.

'HEADLINER/CLOSER' - Last comic on a show. Usually 45-60 min.

'ROAD' - Any place where there is a gig that is not in your home town.

'BOMBING' 'TANKING' 'EATING IT' or any one of many terms for not doing well on stage. Comics love to watch it happen to someone else. That's because everybody who does comedy experiences it eventually. It's a bond.

10 things more important than just being funny:

If there is a bigger thrill on this earth than getting a huge pop from an audience I haven't found it. It's pure ecstasy. It's a feeling of euphoria and exhilaration and I wish everyone could experience it. It's an addiction. Unfortunately, in the business of comedy just being funny is not enough to guarantee success. There must be a whole package for success.

ADAPTABILITY – A performer needs to be able to work various crowds and entertain them well enough to be paid. This is a difficultly learned skill.

APPEARANCE – Being particularly tall, short, wide, thin, ugly, ethnic etc. can provide a comedian with a ready-made act. Do you have one? USE IT!

CHARACTER – A defined and well-presented persona or point of view can make up for a lack of distinguishing appearance or jokes. It must be created.

CONFIDENCE – Looking like you belong on stage can put an audience at ease and allow you to fool them into believing you're better than you are.

DELIVERY – A smooth polished delivery can make mediocre material and/or performance skills appear better than it really is to an audience.

DETERMINATION – Sometimes just wanting to be a comedian will allow you to keep working when others quit. Make up your mind and keep going.

LIKABILITY – If an audience likes the performer he or she can do anything on stage, funny or not, and the audience will enjoy it and be fully entertained.

MARKETING – If a business card, 8x10 photo, marquee, website and press kit say 'comedian' it must be a comedian. You have to SELL yourself always.

NETWORKING – If a booking agent knows you and what you do you may be able to get work simply because you're in the right place at the right time.

PERSISTENCE – This is THE biggest attribute you can have not only in the comedy business but in life too. Keep showing up until they HAVE to use you and never give up your dreams. A lot of people with minimal talent do ok just because they hang in there and keep themselves in the game. You can too.

**It's called 'show business' but the business is more important than the show.
Nobody has become a big star without mastering off stage skills.**

LESSON 2: Professional Presentation

If you learn nothing else from the entire class please pay attention now. The most important thing you can learn as a beginning comic is how to present the material you have to your audience. This is where most people make mistakes starting out and I was no exception. I have seen THOUSANDS of new comic performers blow their first time on stage because they didn't know what to do when they got up there. You don't have to be one of them if you'll listen now.

Basic Microphone Technique

This is a HUGE source of error for new comics. The mike should not be an issue but it constantly is. If nobody taught you to drive a car could you still do it? Maybe, but it would take some trial and error before you learned the ropes and by then it could have cost people their lives. After a while driving is not a conscious thought but at first it's not easy. The same holds true with the mike.

First and foremost, **KEEP THE MIKE IN THE STAND.** Period. There is no need to take it out for at least the first six months to a year of your performing career. I have discussed, debated and even vehemently argued this point for a long time to a lot of people and I stand by my argument more now than ever.

It frees up both hands for gesturing and it gives a newbie a point of focus to channel his or her energy during the set. Way too many things can misfire and mike problems is not something that needs to be an issue in a five minute set.

Basic Stage Technique

Being comfortable on stage can take a long time depending on the person. It was never difficult for me but I had other problems. Some people just aren't a natural when it comes to feeling at home on stage. If this is you, don't worry.

The main tip I can give is to **SMILE** when you're up there. Most new comic performers are trying so hard to remember their material that their face gets a look on it like they're suffering from terminal constipation. It's **COMEDY**.

Stage technique comes with time and practice and that has to be earned.

The #1 thing you need to have on stage is a PLAN.

Stage Success Secrets You Need To Know

Stage fright is the #1 obstacle most performers have to overcome to ever be successful. For some reason, it is still a huge fear in all of mankind. Do you have it? If yes, what can you do to overcome this needless fear? You CAN.

The main thing that causes stage fright is a lack of preparation. Your mind is warning you and produces a paralyzing fear of an unknown situation. Prepare. Many before you have had unnecessary anguish before a live performance.

HERE ARE SOME TIME TESTED TIPS TO HELP YOU PREPARE:

They are designed for comedy, but can be used in any public speaking.

BREATHE – Before you go on, take several very deep breaths. Breathe in, hold for a count of three. Then exhale slowly. It works and will relax you.

POSTURE- Shoulders back, stand straight but not rigid. Walk to the stage with confidence, and the audience will buy it. Look at ease even if you aren't.

SMILE – Surprisingly, this is one many people forget. You're an entertainer, not an inmate. Enjoy yourself, and the audience will too.

FOCUS – Before you start take a second to gather yourself. Smile, relax and get ready to have a great show. They WANT to like you!

ONE ON ONE – You are not talking to a big group; you are talking to ONE person many times. Does one person scare you? Of course not. Remember it.

SECRET WEAPON – Think about it, YOU have full control. The crowd is facing you and you have a mike. You're loaded to win! They want you to win.

REALITY- A true fact is, if you have a bad set, the audience doesn't care. If you have a good set, the audience doesn't care either. Relax, have fun and do always know that performance improves with practice. It's not life or death. I have eaten it on stage hundreds of times and the world is still spinning. You'll have good times and bad on stage but the good by far make it all worth it. It's a feeling unlike any other and besides - bombing makes some great stories!

Taking Your Comedic Inventory

Who are your personal 5-10 all-time funniest people? They don't even have to be comedians. I want to know who YOU personally find funny no matter who it is.

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

What are your favorite all time funniest movies?

What are your favorite all-time favorite TV sitcoms?

Name 3 punch lines to jokes you've heard that you like.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

When do you remember laughing your very hardest?

Week 1 Comedy Class Homework (Continued)

Name 5-10 of the funniest names you've ever heard (Famous or not)

Name 10 of the funniest places on Earth (Cities, towns, countries, etc.)

Name at least 25 of the funniest words in the English language.

Write a funny sentence using at least three of the words you just listed.

LESSON 3 - What a Joke is and How to Write One

First things first. Let's get on the same page and define what we're speaking of when we use the term 'joke'. Comedians need something to talk about. It is presented finished as a 'show' which breaks down into 'routines' or 'bits' which are made up of individual jokes. Creating these takes hard work and there's no way around it. Let's make it a fun process.

'A joke is an idea or a train of thought that has a surprise twist at the end that gets a laugh from the audience.' No laugh no joke. No kidding.

Being a comedian is a lot of fun when it's going well but it can't go well if there aren't a lot of good jokes that come together to make a show. Jokes are the bricks that build every good bit. Bits are the chunks that build every good show. Good shows build career.

It's not necessary to write every joke you do as a performer. Most comedians do it now but it hasn't always been that way. Many old school performers hired writers or just stole the jokes they wanted without caring who they hurt. You can hire writers to write for you but NEVER steal a joke from another comic. It's disrespectful, distasteful and just plain WRONG on many levels. Learning the process correctly is a worthwhile skill for you to acquire as it can pay off for a lifetime. Pay attention and it could pay you back nicely.

Whether you choose to attempt writing your own jokes or work with writers you should know what a good joke sounds like and what style you think would work best for you. It's ultimately an educated guess as to what audiences will laugh at and each one's different. That can be a scary thought and it is but that's the reality of live standup comedy. They're the ultimate judges and they aren't always sophisticated or intelligent but they do pay the bills in the long run so they need to be respected and thought of as part of the process.

There are basic ingredients of a joke just as there are basic notes in music but the results are infinite just as music is infinite. It appears simple but the number of combinations that can be made are astronomical. Learn to appreciate good jokes from others so you can see how the process works. You will have your favorites as we all do but look at how they are constructed so you can see how different styles are put together and learn for yourself so you can use any or all of them and create something that's totally unique to you only.

Some jokes use exaggeration and some use misdirection while others use rhythm and/or alliteration to get the point across. The relationship between a setup and the punch line of a joke is also very important. There always has to be a surprise twist at the end but where does that twist go? There are several ways it can go and like a baseball pitcher you have a job to fool the person you're pitching to. If an audience figures out where you are coming from you will find out just how long five minutes can be. These are skills you can learn.

If you can write one good joke you can write 1000. But write ONE first.

A Randomly Assembled Starter Collection Of Jokes

- Lead us not into temptation. Just tell us where it is, we'll find it. – Sam Levenson
- I've got my own lie detector at home. I call her "honey". – Jason Love
- Divorce teaches you things...like fractions. – Buzz Nutley
- There's a fine line between true love and a stalking conviction. – Buzz Nutley
- I broke up with my girlfriend because I caught her lying...under another man. – Doug Benson
- I find that a duck's opinion of me is greatly influenced by whether or not I have bread.
Mitch Hedberg
- I like vending machines because snacks are better when they fall. – Mitch Hedberg
- They say men get sexier as they get older. No, sexy men get sexier as they get older. The rest of us get red sports cars. – Jeff Shaw
- They say the best exercise takes place in the bedroom. I believe it because that's where I get the most resistance. – Jeff Shaw
- They say that computers can't think, but I have one that does. It thinks it's broken. -Gene Perret
- If it wasn't for pickpockets and frisking at airports I'd have no sex life at all. – Rodney D.
- If her lips are on fire and she trembles in your arms, forget her. She's got malaria. – J. Kannon
- They've finally come up with the perfect office computer. If it makes a mistake, it blames another computer – Milton Berle
- I'm not a good cook. At Christmas my family all got together and bought me a stove that flushes. – Phyllis Diller
- If you want to get into the United States, you have to have legal documentation or a 95 mile per hour fastball. – David Letterman
- Crime is on the rise in Washington, D.C. It's so bad there, congressmen are afraid to walk around with their bribe money. – David Letterman
- I became a father. There's a lot to do with kids. I had to hold him, pat him on the back and burp him. Luckily, I've had a lot of practice on my mom. – David Letterman.
- What's a house without children? Quiet. – Henny Youngman
- I don't ski. I do not participate in any sport with ambulances at the bottom of a hill. Erma B.

Four Steps to Creating Jokes

There are four steps involved to creating comedy material. I have made it easier for you to remember by boiling it down to one word:

“C R A P”

Actually it's an acronym for four words and those words are:

Collect - Review - Assemble - Present

Let's look at these steps in a little more detail so you can learn.

1. COLLECT - When you arrive on a topic you want to develop, write down as many things as you can think of about that topic. It is important to take some time and come up with as many ideas as you can. Use words, phrases, pop culture references - anything that comes to mind that can be associated with that topic. Do not edit.

2. REVIEW - Look over your list and see what catches your eye as the best things to build jokes upon. They could be certain words or phrases, or just an idea you feel has some potential funny in it. Use your judgment and trust hunches. This is a skill that can only start to improve by doing it and at first it may not come to you easily.

3. ASSEMBLE - Now you've got some pieces to play with and it's like a jigsaw puzzle. What concepts fit where? Do they fit at all? It is this process that takes practice but once you master it can begin to get you paid the fastest. It is a skill that you can improve upon.

4. PRESENT - This skill isn't the same as creating but it's difficult to present material that is not strong. Take time to get good jokes. It's much easier to sell something that's been prepared properly.

LESSON 4 - Step by Step Creation of Jokes (Group Exercise)

This is a collaborative exercise for the group designed to teach writing fundamentals and a few tricks too that will be of use to you many years down the road. Watch and listen to all the other students and study their ideas and input as it will help you to create material in a team setting. There will be ideas flying around and usually the sum is greater than the parts in an exercise like this. Open your mind and join in with any ideas you may think of.

Name at least five current events that could be funny:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Name three subjects that are inappropriate for comedy:

Give your own personal definition of what 'dirty' is:

What do you think the term 'TV clean' would mean?

Rodney Dangerfield Jokes To Study:

A girl phoned me the other day and said... Come on over, there's nobody home. I went over. Nobody was home.

I came from a tough neighborhood. I put my hand in cement...and felt another hand.

I could tell my parents hated me. My bath toys were a toaster and a radio.

I drink too much. The last time I gave a urine sample it had an olive in it.

I found there was only one way to look thin, hang out with fat people.

I get no respect. The way my luck is running, if I was a politician I would be honest.

I had plenty of pimples as a kid. One day I fell asleep in the library. When I woke up, a blind man was reading my face.

I have good looking kids. Thank goodness my wife cheats on me.

I haven't spoken to my wife in years. I didn't want to interrupt her.

I looked up my family tree and found out I was the sap.

I looked up my family tree and found three dogs using it.

I met the surgeon general - he offered me a cigarette.

I remember the time I was kidnapped and they sent a piece of my finger to my father. He said he wanted more proof.

I told my dentist my teeth are going yellow. he told me to wear a brown tie.

I told my psychiatrist that everyone hates me. He said I was being ridiculous - everyone hasn't met me yet.

I told my wife the truth. I told her I was seeing a psychiatrist. Then she told me the truth: that she was seeing a psychiatrist, two plumbers, and a bartender.

I was so ugly my mother used to feed me with a sling shot.

I went to a fight the other night, and a hockey game broke out.

I worked in a pet store and people would ask how big I would get.

I'm taking Viagra and drinking prune juice - I don't know if I'm coming or going.

My father carries around the picture of the kid that came with his wallet.

My mother had morning sickness after I was born.

My mother never breast fed me, she told me she only liked me as a friend.

My psychiatrist told me I was crazy and I said I want a second opinion. He said okay, you're ugly too.

My uncle's dying wish - he wanted me on his lap. He was in the electric chair.

My wife and I were happy for 20 years. Then we met.

My wife is always trying to get rid of me. The other day she told me to put the garbage out. I said to her I already did. She told me to go and keep an eye on it.

My wife met me at the door the other night in a sexy negligee. Unfortunately, she was just coming home.

My wife wants sex in the back of the car and she wants me to drive.

My wife was afraid of the dark... then she saw me naked and now she's afraid of the light.

My wife's jealousy is getting ridiculous. The other day she looked at my calendar and wanted to know who May was.

On Halloween, the parents sent their kids out looking like me.

One year they asked me to be poster boy - for birth control.

Some dog I got too. We call him Egypt. Because in every room he leaves a pyramid.

This morning when I put on my underwear I could hear the fruit-of-the-loom guys laughing at me.

What a dog I got, his favorite bone is in my arm.

What a kid I got, I told him about the birds and the bees and he told me about the butcher and my wife.

When I played in the sandbox, the cat kept covering me up.

When I was a kid my parents moved a lot, but I always found them.

Comedy Questions That NEVER Stop

These questions are important to think about whether it's your first day in the business or you are a seasoned pro. Update your answers every six months or so and it will guide you to make steady improvement. I wish I'd have done it starting out but I didn't. You can.

Who...

- ...are the most important people in comedy to ME?
- ...are my biggest supporters? Detractors? Influences? Friends?
- ...are the people that I need to be in contact with RIGHT NOW?

What...

- ...are my reasons for being in the comedy business?
- ...are my greatest strengths? (and how can I improve upon them?)
- ...are my greatest weaknesses? (and how can I improve upon them?)

Where...

- ...do I go when I need advice, guidance or help?
- ...do I fit into the entertainment business - locally, regionally, nationally?
- ...do I see myself in 1, 3, 5 and 10 years from now?

When...

- ...will I start making some REAL money?
- ...will I be ready for the 'next step'?
- ...will I be treated fairly?

Why...

- ...am I at the level I am at?
- ...am I not getting the results I want?
- ...is that OTHER person getting what I want?

Identifying Your Stage Character

Every successful comic has an identifiable stage character. It is the persona that is presented by a performer to an audience. It is usually a pumped up or exaggerated version of the comic's own personality, but that isn't always the case. Once you find your own character it's much easier to perform comedy.

These Questions Will Help You Find Yours:

What are the top ten POSITIVE characteristics about yourself?

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

What are the top ten NEGATIVE characteristics about yourself?

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

What are the top ten NEUTRAL characteristics about yourself? (facts)

- | | |
|----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 6. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 7. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 8. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 9. _____ |
| 5. _____ | 10. _____ |

List any special hidden talents you may have that may be used on stage.

Week 3 Homework - Learn to Write Formula Jokes

Assignment: Write 5-10 new jokes to fit this format or come up with a new format and write your own list of 15-20. Extra credit to do both.

“For all those men who say, Why buy a cow when you can get milk for free? Here's an update: Now days 80% of women are against marriage. WHY? They realize it's not worth buying an entire pig just to get a little sausage.”

Men are like....

1. ...LAXATIVES... they irritate the crap out of you.
2. ...BANANAS...the older they get, the less firm they are.
3. ...WEATHER...nothing can be done to change them.
4. ... BLENDERS...you need one, but you're not quite sure why.
5. ...CHOCOLATE ...sweet, smooth, &they usually head right for your hips.
6. ...COMMERCIALS...you can't believe a word they say.
7. ...DEPARTMENT STORES...their clothes are always 1/2 off.
8. ...GOVERNMENT BONDS...they take soooooooooo long to mature.
9. ...MASCARA...they usually run at the first sign of emotion.
10. ...POPCORN...they satisfy you, but only for a little while.
11. ...LAVA LAMPS...fun to look at, but not very bright.
12. ...PARKING SPOTS...the good ones are taken the rest are handicapped.
13. ...SNOWSTORMS...you never know when they're coming, how many inches you'll get or how long it will last.

Homework is like...WORK. At home. Or wherever. It isn't easy and requires effort but that doesn't mean it can't be a lot of fun. DO this.

Enjoy the process!

LESSON 7 - Pre Performance Checklist

- Be ABSOLUTELY SURE of when the show starts.
- Be sure you know how to get to the club and park.
- Leave time for a flat tire, construction or getting lost.
- Bring cell phone, directions, club phone number.
- Arrive at least 30-45 minutes before performing.
- Introduce yourself to the MC, staff, manager, owner, etc.
- Know EXACTLY how much time you need to do. Do it.
- Know EXACTLY how much money you get paid, if any.
- Test stage, lights, sound and entrance path if possible.
- Have your simple intro ready for the MC on a 3x5 card.
- NEVER use drugs or alcohol before the show.
- Finish bathroom duties early - check for stains too.
- Check your hair, teeth and especially fly before going on.
- Pay attention to the show and be ready when called.

Stage Success Secrets & Professional Presentation Procedures

Stage fright is the #1 obstacle most performers have to overcome. For some reason it's still a huge fear in all of mankind. Do you have it? What can you do to overcome it? :Picturing an audience in their underwear isn't the way.

The main thing that causes stage fright is lack of preparation. Your brain is warns you and there is a fear of an unknown situation. Prepare.
Many people have had unnecessary anguish before a live performance.

HERE ARE SOME TIME TESTED TIPS TO HELP YOU PREPARE:

They are designed for comedy, but can be used in any public speaking.

BREATHE – Before you go on, take several very deep breaths. Breathe in, hold for a count of three. Then exhale slowly. It works.

POSTURE- Shoulders back, stand straight but not rigid. Walk to the stage with confidence, and the audience will buy it. Look at ease.

SMILE – Surprisingly, this is one many people forget. You're an entertainer, not an inmate. Enjoy yourself, and the audience will too.

FOCUS – Before you start take a second to gather yourself. Smile, relax and get ready to have a great show. They WANT to like you!

ONE ON ONE – You are not talking to a group; you are talking to ONE person many times. Does one person scare you? Of course not.

SECRET WEAPON – Think about it, YOU have full control. The crowd is facing you and you have a mike. You're loaded to win!

REALITY- A true fact is, if you have a bad set, the audience doesn't care. If you have a good set, the audience doesn't care either. Relax, have fun and always know that performing improves with practice. It's not life or death. It's only a show. It's supposed to be FUN.

Advanced Performing Tips

These techniques are for people who have had some experience on stage. True stage mastery takes years of hard work and is a learned skill.

AUDIENCES VARY FROM NIGHT TO NIGHT, TOWN TO TOWN, SOMETIMES FROM SHOW TO SHOW ON THE SAME NIGHT.

READ YOUR AUDIENCE – Before your show look around and get a feel for the crowd. Are they young? Old? Friendly? Hostile? Drunk? How are they dressed? Tailor your material accordingly. Remember, you are there to entertain the audience, NOT to please yourself.

MIKE TECHNIQUE – Many good laughs have been lost due to poor mike technique. Get used to working with a microphone, and a good rule is to keep it about 3-6 inches from your mouth. Like a good sports referee, a microphone should never be noticed during a show.

WORK TO EVERYONE – Especially important in a larger venue. Don't just talk to the front row, acknowledge the people in the back, on the sides and balcony too. Also, don't work to other comics. They don't pay your check, and it's easy to fall into a bad habit of doing it.

LOCAL REFERENCES – This is a fantastic way to bond with your audience and has NOTHING to do with talent. Just mentioning a local restaurant, newspaper, cheesy car dealer or the hick town a few miles away can make you look like royalty to a crowd. It's worth it.

WATCH THE WHOLE SHOW – Many times something happens in a show and you need to be aware of it. Someone could have added a fact that you could call back later in your set. Many comics are too lazy to do this and miss out on golden joke opportunities. Don't do it.

REPEAT FOR EVERYONE – If someone says something to you in the front row or asks a question etc, repeat it in the mike so everyone can hear what it is before you answer. It's a technique most people do not know, but it is one more subtle thing to make you look like a pro.

Beginner's Biggest Blunders

You need to be a student of comedy. I've either done these myself or seen them done over and over by others. You can look like a professional by avoiding these common mistakes.

PREMATURE EJOKEULATION

Don't just launch into jokes. An audience needs at least a few seconds to adjust to you. How you look, how you sound, how comfortable you are on stage all come across to an audience. Let them get a feel for you first.

INDIAN SCOUT DISEASE

Nothing screams 'amateur' more than shielding your eyes from the stage lights. Yes, they're bright. Deal with it. Look under them and pretend to be looking at the audience, even if you can't see anyone at all. Fake it.

MICROPHONE MAULING

This is a big one, done over and over. There is no need to take the mike out of the stand your first few times on stage. Too many things can and have gone wrong, you have enough other things to think of without that.

WANDERLUST

There is no need to cover more than three topics in five minutes. Period.

DIHARREA OF THE MOUTH

It's easy to get wordy and avoid punch lines. Trim fat wherever you can.

DR. BLANKENSTEIN'S MONSTER

If you forget your act (and it happens a lot) ALWAYS know your closer.

SALAD DRESSING SYNDROME

'Russian' Slow down-**'French'** Watch your language-**'Vinegar'** Be nice
'Italian' Talk with words, not hands- **'Thousand Island'** avoid rambling

Post Performance Checklist

Here are some things to do after every show.

Say 'thank you' and your name again before leaving stage.

Make yourself accessible to the audience. 'Get your cheese'.

Have business cards ready to hand out to network for work.

Network with any and all comics you can, it's good business.

Have a pen handy to write down ideas, phone #s, etc.

Turn off your tape recorder. (This implies you need one)

Check club for any items you may have left behind.

Tip the server who brought you drinks, even if it's water

Thank the owner and staff for having you.

Get any money you may have coming to you promptly.

Make sure the money is what was agreed upon.

Be VERY careful to take a check from anyone. Get CASH.

If you have cash, be very careful getting to the parking lot.

Listen to your tape on the way home or that night if you can

Overcoming Stage Fright

Without a doubt I'd have to say stage fright is THE biggest obstacle most new comedy performers have to overcome. The very thought of going up on stage for five minutes has been a source of untold angst and misery for as long as I've been a comedian and I'm sure it didn't start there. It's as old as performing itself. Ever since the first caveman had to get up in front of the tribe and explain his idea for the wheel or show them what fire was it has been a source of mental anguish and torture. Let's look at a few ideas that may help.

-Stage fright is actually a good thing.

I mean it. It's a tightness in the stomach that forces undivided attention to the upcoming task at hand which in this case is performing your act to an audience. Palms sweat and other things too. Knees are weak and the feeling of wanting to be anywhere but on stage is very common. Human nature is very resilient and when backed into a corner can be a time when amazing results occur. I've seen it happen again and again. You can do it!

-Even big time performers have it.

I've heard lots of stories about comedians having stage fright even after they've made it. Bob Newhart is known to throw up before going on stage. I've heard that many times. I don't know if it's true but I've heard it so much there must be something to it. Different people have different doses of stage fright but I still maintain that a little bit of it does not hurt. It focuses you and makes you respect how difficult comedy is and also respect your audience too and give them the best show you can give. Don't let it get you down if you have stage fright. It's not only you and never will be. Do it more and it will lessen.

-It can't control you unless you let it.

This sounds easier said than done but it's very true. If you make up your mind to not let ANYTHING stop you from pursuing your dream in comedy you will find a way to just go up on stage and get started. Those who really want to do it - DO it. Stopping to think too much can throw a bug in the whole program. Stop thinking and DO. Get up on that stage.

-The best way to overcome it.

Again, go on stage and do it. I keep saying it but that's what will overcome stage fright the best. That and preparation too. Take time to learn your jokes and memorize them so it won't throw you off when something unexpected happens. That will happen anyway and if you're not prepared you'll be up there alone with nothing to say and that IS frightening so work to avoid it. Also, remember the audience has NO idea how much experience you have and they don't really care. They're there to see a show and they want to enjoy you.

Handling Hecklers

Next to stage fright getting heckled is the major source of fear for most new comedians. Personally I have never understood that because I enjoy matching wits with a heckler. It's a no lose situation when handled correctly but most people never get any pre training. The first time it happens can be overwhelming and cause pain that isn't necessary. Let's look at a few facts about unwanted audience interaction and how you can defeat it every time.

-Why do people heckle?

There are a lot of reasons why some idiot will pipe up during a comedy show but a few are constant. Mostly the person who heckles is a frustrated performer him or herself. That person is jealous of you getting the spotlight and attention that they want and they will get into the act any way they can. Many times this is a warning sign for deeper problems but it still has to be dealt with during the show. Another reason is the consumption of alcohol.

-Not everything somebody says during a show is a heckle.

Many times someone talking during a show is a good thing. Your material brought out a memory or struck a nerve in someone and they want to add to the show. This isn't easy to discern at first but it does come with experience. Many times the one that talks out during a show has something to contribute that you can use in future shows. Listen up.

-There is no need to get mean.

The time you'll be doing starting out will only be a few minutes. I've seen situations get really ugly in a short time and there's no need for that. If somebody hollers something you don't even have to acknowledge you heard it. Nobody says you have to get into a fight for your life over one idiot making a stupid comment. Think about your act - not the heckler.

-You are born to win against hecklers.

The good thing you'll come to know in time is that it's an unfair fight between a comic and heckler. You have a working sound system and a lit stage and in time you'll have an arsenal of prewritten lines to haul out and appear spontaneous. Once or twice is usually all you'll need to vanquish any babbling idiots and the crowd will be on your side to stay.

-Newbies have a special weapon.

You have the sympathy card to play and by all means play it. 'Hey buddy I'm new at this and don't have anything to come back at you with. I hope you're happy you did that.'

LESSON 8 - What now? One Year Comedy Checklist

These are things you should do in your first year of standup comedy. If I had done these I'd be a lot farther than I am today. You don't have to make the same mistakes 99.9% of all beginner comics make. Be different! The first year is important so I hope these help.

ALWAYS record your performances

Audio or video is acceptable but try to record every time you perform. Even if you don't watch it right away it's good to have it to refer back to. You may be firing off ad libs and want to remember them. The best way is to have a tape.

Try to get on stage at least once a week

Not always doable and that's fine. Life gets in the way but if at all possible do try to stay current and go up as much as you can and as often as you can. It is the only way to see if your jokes actually work. The audience are the judges.

Don't get too 'up' over a good show

It can feel euphoric to go up and have a hot show or what YOU perceive was a hot show. Many times it wasn't as good as you thought it was or a matter of the audience being in an extra good mood on that night. Don't get too cocky.

Don't get too 'down' over a bad show

Not too many things on earth can compare to bombing at a comedy show. It's a feeling of rejection and loneliness and I wouldn't wish it on anybody. You'll feel it too eventually and when that happens know that you will bounce back.

Work to the audience, NOT the comics

This can be an easy pitfall to get into on the way up the ladder. Comedians in the audience are the target of a performer's jokes and not the people who paid to see the show. The comics will think you're hip but they don't pay the bills.

Have a written copy of your whole act

This is a good habit to get into for many reasons. When you're starting out for the first year you'll be growing and changing at a rate too fast to keep up. You should have a record of your notes so you can look back later and mine jokes.

Find a 'comedy buddy' for support

Having someone to share the process of comedy with is something every one of us needs. It would be good to have someone that's on your level of comedy and someone you enjoy talking to. It's a good way to support each other too.

Become a student of the game

Hopefully you see comedy now like you've never seen it before. Continue the process of watching and observing all you can. Watch comedians of all levels. I still do and I still learn. Enjoy the process and open yourself up to learning.

Don't put undue pressure on yourself

Comedy is supposed to be FUN. Putting unrealistic deadlines on yourself and always looking to skip ahead without earning it is the source of much pain for both you and everyone around you. Enjoy the process and put in the WORK.

NEVER invite your friends to a show

Especially in the first year, turn down any requests for friends to come watch you perform. The only possible exception is a Zanies graduation show. That's a safe and controlled environment and even then only invite them ONE time.

I have seen this mistake made over and over again. This is WORK. You're in the process of learning a craft and you need to focus on the craft and not your Aunt Fanny with the flatulence problem and wondering if she's having fun.

If you were learning to be a dentist you wouldn't invite your family to watch you fill teeth. The same holds true with standup comedy. Learn the craft first.

Dobie's Favorite Quotes:

“Nothing in this world can take the place of persistence.

Talent will not; nothing is more common than unsuccessful people with talent.

Genius will not; unrewarded genius is almost a proverb.

Education will not; the world is full of educated derelicts. Persistence and determination alone are omnipotent.

The slogan ‘press on’ has solved and always will solve the problems of the human race.”

— *Calvin Coolidge, 30th American president (1872-1933)*

**Character
is how you
treat those
who can do
nothing for
you.**

"There are
undiscovered
geniuses too
many to count,
but very few
undiscovered
marketers."

“Everyone who has ever taken a shower has had an idea. It’s the person who gets out of the shower, dries off, and does something about it that makes a difference.”

- Nolan Bushnell

"Capital isn't so important in business. Experience isn't so important. You can get both of those things. What is important is ideas. If you have ideas, you have the main asset you need, and there isn't any limit to what you can do with your business and your life. They are any man's greatest asset- ideas."

Harvey Firestone

SUCCESS; TO LAUGH OFTEN AND MUCH; TO WIN THE RESPECT OF INTELLIGENT PEOPLE AND THE AFFECTION OF CHILDREN; TO EARN THE APPRECIATION OF HONEST CRITICS; TO APPRECIATE BEAUTY; TO FIND THE BEST IN OTHERS; TO LEAVE THE WORLD A BIT BETTER WHETHER BY A HEALTHY CHILD, A GARDEN PATCH OR A REDEEMED SOCIAL CONDITION; TO KNOW EVEN ONE LIFE HAS BREATHED EASIER BECAUSE YOU HAVE LIVED. THIS IS TO HAVE SUCCEEDED.

~ RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Advice For Beginners

“Nobody tells this to people who are beginners, I wish someone told me. All of us who do creative work, we get into it because we have good taste. But there is this gap. For the first couple years you make stuff, it’s just not that good. It’s trying to be good, it has potential, but it’s not. But your taste, the thing that got you into the game, is still killer. And your taste is why your work disappoints you. A lot of people never get past this phase, they quit. Most people I know who do interesting, creative work went through years of this. We know our work doesn’t have this special thing that we want it to have. We all go through this.

And if you are just starting out or you are still in this phase, you gotta know its normal and the most important thing you can do is do a lot of work. Put yourself on a deadline so that every week you will finish one story. It is only by going through a volume of work that you will close that gap, and your work will be as good as your ambitions. And I took longer to figure out how to do this than anyone I’ve ever met. It’s gonna take awhile. It’s normal to take awhile. You’ve just gotta fight your way through.”

[Ira Glass](#) - host and producer of ‘This American Life’

Artists

“Artists are some of the most driven, courageous people on the face of the earth. They deal with more day-to-day rejection in one year than most people do in a lifetime.

Every day, artists face the financial challenge of living a freelance lifestyle, the disrespect of people who think they should get real jobs, and their own fear that they’ll never work again.

Every day, they have to ignore the possibility that the vision they have dedicated their lives to is a pipe dream. With every role, they stretch themselves, emotionally and physically, risking criticism and judgment.

With every passing year, many of them watch as the other people their age achieve the predictable milestones of normal life - the car, the family, the house, the nest egg.

Why? Because artists are willing to give their entire lives to a moment - to that line, that laugh, that gesture, or that interpretation that will stir the audience’s soul.

Artists are beings who have tasted life’s nectar in that crystal moment when they poured out their creative spirit and touched another’s heart. In that instant, they were as close to magic, God, and perfection as anyone could ever be.

And in their own hearts, they know that to dedicate oneself to that moment is worth a thousand lifetimes.”

– David Ackert

Lesson of Time – Karma

When a bird is alive it eats ants.

When a bird is dead, ants eat the bird.

Time and circumstances can change at any time.

Don't devalue or hurt anyone in life.

You may be powerful today, but remember time is more powerful than you!

One tree makes a million matchsticks. Only one matchstick is needed to burn a million trees...so be good and do good.

QUOTES:

"We will receive not what we idly wish for but what we justly earn. Our rewards will always be in exact proportion to our service."

Earl Nightingale
1922-1989, Author and Syndicated Radio Commentator

"I live by this credo: Have a little laugh at life and look around you for happiness instead of sadness. Laughter had always brought me out of something to laugh about if you try hard enough."

Red Skelton
1913-1997, Comedian

"I studied the lives of great men and women, and I found that the men and women who got to the top were those who did the jobs they had in hand, with everything they had of energy and enthusiasm and hard work."

Harry S. Truman
1884-1972, Thirty-Third U.S. President

"The one important thing I have learned over the years is the difference between taking one's work seriously and taking one's self seriously. The first is imperative and the second is disastrous."

Margaret Fontey
Author

"Things may come to those that wait, but only the things left by those that hustle."

Abraham Lincoln

"Focus more on your desire than on your doubt, and the dream will take care of itself. You may be surprised at how easily this happens. Your doubts are not as powerful as your desires, unless you make them so."

Marcia Wieder
Speaker and Author

“Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.”

Japanese Proverb

"Never let your head hang down. Never give up and sit down and grieve. Find another way. And don't pray when it rains if you don't pray when the sun shines."

Leroy "Satchel" Paige
1906-1982, Baseball Player

"Picture yourself vividly as winning and that alone will contribute immeasurably to success. Great living starts with a picture, held in your imagination, of what you would like to do or be."

Harry Emerson Fosdick
1878-1969, Minister

"We act as though comfort and luxury were the chief requirements of life, when all that we need to make us really happy is something to be enthusiastic about."

Charles Kingsley
1819-1875, Author and Clergyman

"Comedy is the last refuge of the non-conformist mind."

Gilbert Seldes

"Pretend that every single person you meet has a sign around his or her neck that says. 'Make me feel important.' Not only will you succeed in sales, you will succeed in life."

Mary Kay Ash
1918-2001, Founder of Mary Kay Cosmetics

"Really big people are, above everything else, courteous, considerate and generous - not just to some people in some circumstances - but to everyone all the time."

Thomas J. Watson
1874-1956, Founder of IBM

Story Telling Secrets

By Bill Gorgo

Perhaps the quickest way to start doing comedy is to get up and tell a funny story. There are definite advantages to this approach. You already know the material; it's completely original; it fits you perfectly. You could probably tell it successfully right now—but hang on. I'm going to share a 4-step process with you that will increase your chances of success immensely.

Think of this process as decorating a Christmas tree. You pick a well-shaped tree, just the right height and width. You drag it home, stick it in that annoying stand, turn it around until the “bad” side is against the wall. That's all hard work—but it's still only a POTENTIAL Christmas tree. Now you have to decorate it: lights, ornaments, tinsel and garland; the star or angel on top; the ice skaters or manger scene beneath. And then something amazing happens: if you've done a good job, you leave that beauty up for weeks until the tree itself has dried into kindling. Turns out, it never was about the tree; it was always about the love and effort put into the decoration. The tree was a template for what was really important.

Same with your story...unless you simply want to be a story teller. If you want to be a comedian, you'll need to do a little decorating. Let's get started.

1.) CHOOSE YOUR STORY

Everyone has a few stories that they have told 10 times or more: their go-to cocktail party, first date, chatting on a plane repertoire. This is the collection you need to choose from. Why? Because these tales have already started their slow journey from eye-witness testimony to successful story and, while they are still resting on a foundation of honesty, they are no longer “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.”

Your audience is looking for honesty, but they fully expect you to trade fact for funny. They demand it!

I suggest avoiding stories that depend for success on a surprise ending or big finish. Instead, think of one that has many smaller moments or one that gets progressively worse or one in which you are the victim. Your worst date, job, vacation, mistake—good places to find your perfect “tree.”

2.) WRITE IT OUT

If your smart phone or computer takes dictation, this step is super easy. Just write out your story, **SKIPPING A LINE AFTER EVERY SENTENCE.**

3.) EVALUATE

Let's see what we have to work with. Read your story through, putting a check mark by every line that you think is funny—or potentially funny.

Now read it again, putting an “N” by any line that you think is absolutely necessary to the story itself. Now read it a third time, crossing out any line that has neither a check mark nor an “N.”

4.) TIME TO DECORATE!

First take a look at the funny lines. Can you make them funnier? Some of the ways you might try:

A) Put the sentence in joke form—sometimes that's as simple as rewriting the line so the funny part is at the end!

B) Try to use funnier words, names, places than the ones that you used because they were “true.” Nobody in the audience knows what's true—and they don't care!! Aunt Matilda is funnier than Aunt Mary and Aunt Mary won't mind.

C) Exaggerate, exaggerate, exaggerate.

D) Shorten the “unfunny.” Unfunny details are unwanted details. Make them funny or make them disappear. Get to the funny fast!

Now take a look at the “necessary” lines. Can you make them amusing, at least? Can you shorten them? Are you SURE they're necessary? (Remember— the more laughs you get, the less important the story itself becomes.)

There you have it: Four steps to get your story prepared for the comedy stage. Good Luck!

From “The Maxwell Method of Standup Comedy” archives.

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