

Humour Writing: Jest for Laughs

WRCR6203

Course Outline

Description: Do you think you're the next Dorothy Parker, Steve Martin or David Sedaris? Using a combination of workshops and lectures, this course will help you recognize your inner Woody Allen. Exercise your funny bone with weekly writing assignments that we will workshop in class. Discover what makes you laugh by encountering prominent humorists, develop your skills as a comedy writer by studying various forms of humour writing including anecdotes and observations, satire, parody and puns, and learn to recognize the level of craft needed for writing humour for the printed page and /or websites. Come prepared to laugh and learn each week with award-winning instructor Mark Kearney.

Course Goals: Discover what makes you laugh by encountering prominent humorists, develop your skills as a comedy writer by studying various forms of humour writing including anecdotes and observations, satire, parody and puns, and learn to recognize the level of craft needed for writing humour for the printed page and /or websites

Course Objectives: At the completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Identify the different aspects of humour writing through a blend of lecture and workshop.
- Write different styles of humour while gaining exposure to some published works that may tickle their funny bones.
- Have the opportunity to create something funny every week, get feedback from the class and instructor, and explore and evaluate potential markets for their work.

Attendance Requirements:

Students must miss no more than two classes to receive a completion for this course. A grade report can be printed from myWCS.

Code of Student Conduct:

The purpose of the Code of Student Conduct is to define the general standard of conduct expected of students registered at Western University, provide examples of behaviour that constitutes a breach of this standard of conduct, provide examples of sanctions that may be imposed, and set out the disciplinary procedures that the University will follow. For the complete Code of Student Conduct:

<http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/board/code.pdf>.

Course Schedule:

1. *Week One: Introduction – What Makes You Laugh*

We will discuss word play, funny sounds and names, and why some things make certain people laugh while others don't. Analyzing a piece of humour to see what makes it work (or not). Some in-class writing assignments and a discussion of humour writing in general. If you have a favourite funny piece that makes you laugh out loud, please bring it to a class. It can be your own work or one from a favourite writer.

Assignment: Writing your first humour piece without relying on personal experience (details to be given out in class).

2. *Week Two: Observational, Anecdotal Writing*

Reviewing the previous week's assignment. A lot of laughs can come from true stories and your own experiences. Some professional humourists make a living just writing about themselves. We'll examine some samples with an eye to finding the common ground and techniques that make most of us laugh. How to keep your eyes open for the quirky, strange, and weird that most people won't notice.

Assignment: Eavesdrop on a conversation to find funny lines. Write about a humorous personal experience or something that takes a humorous look at everyday events.

3. *Week Three: The Art of Parody*

Review of the assignment. Discussion on parodies, take offs, sketches, writing styles to be imitated, twisted, and ridiculed.

Assignment: Writing a parody – song, prose piece, comedy sketch, or some other form of your choice.

4. *Week Four: Satire/Journalistic Humour*

Reading and discussing previous assignment. Poking a stick at institutions that need deflating, how satire works, where to find targets. Writing funny non-fiction, journalistic pieces. A discussion of the boundaries of humour.

Assignment: Write a satirical or humorous journalistic piece that makes fun of someone or something in power.

5. *Week Five: Other Comedy Forms*

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Other comic styles such as lists, shaggy dog stories, definitions, poems, catalogues, and other formats.

Assignment: Try your hand at a writing style you've never tried before. Let your imagination go wild.

6. *Week Six: Humour Round-up*

A discussion of comedy styles and what form suits you best. Devising a personal comedy checklist that will help with future stories. A discussion of markets for your writing and tailoring your work to those publications. What you can do with your humour after this course? Is there money to be made or is that notion just too funny? Exit laughing.