

# IMPROVISATION - Sketch Writing

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## 1. *Comedy Diary*

Carry a notebook around with you for at least a week and write down anything you see or hear that makes you smile or laugh. Watch comedy in a different way.

When you laughed, was it at something?  
Why did you laugh? Was it something visual?  
Something to do with the way the words were used?  
Or was it because the joke reminded you of something funny in your own life?  
*(You may want to start working with a partner, before continuing with step #2)*

## 2. *Narrowing*

After collecting ideas, pick the 3 best ideas and throw all the other ideas in the trash.

## 3. *Titles*

Now think of a title for each idea and write the title at the top of three separate pages.

## 4. *Brainstorm*

While working on all three sketches at the same time, write down everything you can think of connected to each of the three subjects. List everything you can think of in relation to the ideas.

Words                      connections                      phrases                      related subjects

## 5. *Selection*

When all the pages are full, pick the one with, what looks like, the best comic potential and put it on the top of the pile. This will be the sketch you will write.

Before proceeding, choose a 3 settings, 5 characters, and 3 conflicts for this chosen idea.  
NARROW down this idea by then choosing 1 setting, 3 characters and 1-2 conflicts.

## 6. *Writing*

Now you can take the chosen sketch and begin writing. When writing, it is always best to work with a partner or a group of people to bounce ideas off one another. Don't forget to study the types of sketches (below) and include elements of comedy, farce, tragedy and melodrama into the sketch.

## 7. *Edit your work*

When you have finished writing your sketch remember.. it is only the first draft!!!! Go back and look at it again. Improve it. Change it. Make it funnier. If there isn't a big laugh at least every fifteen seconds, put one in.

## 8. *Sleep on It*

Go to bed and look at your material when you wake up in the morning. If it's still as funny as you thought it was when you wrote it, GREAT!!! If it isn't, THROW IT AWAY. Don't waste time trying to rescue an idea that doesn't work. Go onto writing a NEW sketch.

## **TYPES OF SKETCHES**

### 1. ESCALATION

ideas start small and get bigger and bigger, ending in complete chaos of ridiculous proportions

### 2. LISTS

when the bulk of the dialogue is a long list of funny items

ex: “Cheese Shop”, Monty Python

### 3. MAD MAN, SANE MAN

speaks for itself - don't go for obvious settings

### 4. DANGEROUS SITUATION

speaks for itself - ex: set on flight deck of aircraft

### 5. FUNNY WORDS

the sound of the language itself is funny - ex: “blobby” or “wobble” in Mr. Bean

### 6. OLD AND NEW

putting something modern in an historical setting - ex: Sir Walter Raleigh using a cigarette lighter

### 7. BIG AND SMALL

humor from large differences in scale - ex: a mouse trying to be romantic to an elephant

## **HELPFUL WRITING TIPS.....**

1. Write short, tight sketches... don't make the sketch more than 2 minutes
2. Don't include anything too expensive, like a helicopter... consider yourself on a tight budget
3. 3 characters is more than enough for a 2 minute sketch
4. Work backwards.... sketches should have a strong finish, so work backwards
  - think of the punch line first
  - if you can't think of one after 10 minutes, then there probably isn't one there... TRASH IT and go onto the next sketch
  - once you have the funny ending, work out how to get there
  - when you have worked out the whole of the last 10 seconds of the sketch, it's probably safe to go and think about the beginning.
5. work out loud... say the lines as you write them... you need to hear what the material sounds like
6. think out it visually....describe the physical action in detail  
(what are the characters wearing? what do they look like? what are their names?)
7. put a “spin” on it...do not approach the sketch in the obvious ways  
(ex: put a sketch about hairdressers set 1/2 way up Mount Everest)
8. Be Brutal with your work!!
9. Be persistent!!
10. Study other writer's work.

