

WRITING ABOUT AMERICAN COMEDY

COURSE INFORMATION



Course ID:	ENC 1145
Instructor:	Pete Kunze
Semester:	Spring 2011
Classroom:	Williams 114
Time:	MW 5:15 to 6:30
Office:	Williams 313
Office Hours:	MW 12:00 to 2:00 & by appointment
Contact:	pkunze@fsu.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The word “comedy” comes from Greek word *kōmōidia*, a possible compound word combining “village” and “singer.” Why? Because comedy is about community and celebration. This course will really be two courses in one: a study of American comedy since the 1950s and an introduction to the fundamentals of college-level research writing. By studying and writing about American comedy, we will be able to see what beliefs, values and traditions can be traced throughout American culture. We will also see how treatment of issues has changed over the years, with particular focus on race, class, gender and sexuality. If comedy is a celebration of society, we shall ask, “What are those social values?” and “How does comedy help to identify, legitimize, and fortify those values?” By semester’s end, you will have a better understanding of the pluralistic American identity, the nature of humor and comedy, and the skills necessary to write and think critically at the college level.

FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION MISSION STATEMENT

First-Year Composition courses at FSU teach writing as a recursive and frequently collaborative process of invention, drafting, and revising. Writing is both personal and social, and students should learn how to write for a variety of purposes and audiences. Since writing is a process of making meaning as well as communicating, FYC teachers respond to the content of students’ writing as well as to surface errors. Students should expect frequent written and oral response on the content of their writing from both teacher and peers. Classes rely heavily on a workshop format. Instruction emphasizes the connection between writing, reading, and critical thinking; students should give thoughtful, reasoned responses to the readings. Both reading and writing are the subject of class discussions and workshops, and students are expected to be active participants of the classroom community. If you would like further information regarding the First-Year Composition Program, feel free to contact the program director, Dr. Deborah Coxwell Teague (dteague@fsu.edu).

COURSE TEXTS

Bruce Ballenger, *The Curious Researcher*
Gloria Kaufman and Mary Kay Blakely, *Pulling Our Own Strings*
Maimon, et al., *The McGraw-Hill Handbook*
David Sedaris, *Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim*
Neil Simon, *Lost in Yonkers*
Kurt Vonnegut, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- Develop maturity as a writer, transcending 5-paragraph essays, linear narrative, and stagnancy.
- Evaluate resources for their sophistication and relevance to your research.
- Incorporate research seamlessly to show authority and posit an argument.
- Demonstrate sophistication in structure, syntax and diction.
- Foster the skills essential to a liberal arts education: writing, close reading, and critical thinking.
- Understand humor, its utility, and how to use it in your own writing to engage readers.
- Hone rhetorical skills, particularly appealing to an audience.
- Come to greater understanding of American culture through American comedy.
- Realize that your world is composed of signs, which you must process and compose yourself.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Submit two papers, edited and polished, due when and as noted below. No papers, no passing!
- Complete weekly response journals.
- Internet access, including e-mail and Blackboard.
- Attend two one-on-one conferences, scheduled at your convenience.
- Read all assigned materials.
- Active and thoughtful class participation.
- Demonstrate command of research skills.

GRADING DISTRIBUTION

5%	Research Exercises Packet
10%	Participation Quizzes
10%	Radical Revision
20%	Joke Collection
25%	Weekly Journal Responses
30%	Film History Project

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Attendance in this course is integral to your success and education. Failure to attend deprives you of a chance to develop fundamental skills of reading, writing, and critical thinking. Attendance will be taken at the beginning of class. If you come in after 5:25, you are absent. Since this class meets

twice a week, you are allowed **no more than 4 absences**. These absences are for when you are sick, out of town, or otherwise preoccupied—unless it is properly document. However, even then, absences are at my discretion. Please do not email me to tell me you will be absent.

WORKSHOPS

Workshops are fundamental to your success in this course. When noted, bring a draft to class. You will exchange with someone in class. Each person will then read and comment on his or her peer's draft as well as fill out a comment sheet. Failing to complete a workshop or doing so late will result in a deduction of points from your paper's grade.

GORDON RULE

Successful completion of all writings in this course and a final course grade of C- or better will allow you to satisfy the Gordon Rule requirement. The University requires you to write 7,000 words, but you will be writing much more than that in any FYW course.

ADA STATEMENT

Students with disabilities needing academic accommodations should in the FIRST WEEK OF CLASS 1) register with and provide documentation to the Student Disability Resource Center (SDRC) and 2) bring a letter to the instructor from SDRC indicating the need for academic accommodations. This and all other class materials are available in alternative format upon request.

PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is grounds for suspension from the university as well as for failure in this course. It will not be tolerated. Any instance of plagiarism (including self-plagiarism) must be reported to the Director of First-Year Composition and the Director of Undergraduate Studies. Plagiarism is a counterproductive, non-writing behavior that is unacceptable in a course intended to aid the growth of individual writers. Plagiarism is included among the violations defined in the Academic Honor Code, section b), paragraph 2, as follows: "Regarding academic assignments, violations of the Academic Honor Code shall include representing another's work or any part thereof, be it published or unpublished, as one's own." A plagiarism education assignment that further explains this issue will be administered in all first-year writing courses during the second week of class. Each student will be responsible for completing the assignment and asking questions regarding any parts they do not fully understand.

FIRST YEAR COMPOSITION COURSE DROP POLICY

This course is NOT eligible to be dropped in accordance with the "Drop Policy" adopted by the Faculty Senate in Spring 2004. The Undergraduate Studies Dean will not consider drop requests for a First-Year Composition course unless there are extraordinary and extenuating circumstances utterly beyond the student's control (e.g.: death of a parent or sibling, illness requiring hospitalization, etc.). The Faculty Senate specifically eliminated First-Year Composition courses from

the University Drop Policy because of the overriding requirement that First-Year Composition be completed during students' initial enrollment at FSU.

HOW TO AVOID BEING A TACKY COLLEGE STUDENT

- Class starts at 5:15. Arriving late is disrespectful to your classmates and me.
- Take responsibility when you fail to do something. It is not your printer's fault.
- All papers should be in black ink, on clean, white paper, stapled, and in MLA format.
- All papers must be handed in as hard copies. I will not accept e-mailed papers.
- You are responsible for maintaining digital copies of all submitted work.
- Papers are due whether or not you can make it to class.
- I will not review papers you email me. If you want help, let's schedule a meeting.
- All papers should be thoroughly proofread. You will lose two points for every spelling, grammatical and mechanical error. This is college: edit your work.
- Do not ask for an extension. The work is due as noted; plan accordingly.
- This class is no less important than any other class you're taking. In fact, it is arguably *the* most important class you're taking. I will not excuse you to meet with other professors.
- Late work loses a grade a day. Example: after 2 days, the highest grade you can get is a B+.
- Do not ask me if you missed "something important." Contact a classmate.
- If you come 10 minutes late or leave 10 minutes early, you are absent.

READING-WRITING CENTER

The Reading/Writing Center, located in Williams 222-C, is devoted to individualized instruction in reading and writing. Part of the English Department, the RWC serves Florida State University students at all levels and from all majors. Its clients include a cross-section of the campus: first-year students writing for composition class, upper level students writing term papers, seniors composing letters of applications for jobs and graduate schools, graduate students working on theses and dissertations, multilingual students mastering English, and a variety of others. The RWC serves mostly walk-in tutoring appointments, however it also offers three different courses for credit that specifically target reading, undergraduate-level writing, and graduate-level writing.

The tutors in the RWC, all graduate students in English with training and experience in teaching composition, use a process-centered approach to help students at any stage of writing: from generating ideas, to drafting, organizing and revising. While the RWC does not provide editing or proofreading services, its tutors can help writers build their own editing and proofreading skills. Our approach to tutoring is to provide guidance to help students grow as writers, readers and critical thinkers by developing strategies to help you write in a variety of situations.

During the fall and spring semesters, the RWC is open Monday through Thursday from 10 - 6 and Friday from 10 -2. Hours of operation vary in summer. Visit the RWC web site or call 644-6495 for information.

A satellite RWC location at Strozier Library provides tutoring to students where they congregate most often, and where writing and research can co-develop. This location includes more evening

hours to align with student needs. Late-night tutoring is also offered at this location during peak times in the semester when students are up late writing mid-term or final papers. The Strozier location serves only walk-in appointments on a first-come, first-served basis, but students can sign up in advance the same day they want an appointment at the tutoring area. Hours vary by semester, but are updated on both the RWC web site and the Strozier Library web site at the start of each semester. The Center is a great asset; please take advantage of it.

DIGITAL STUDIO

The Digital Studio provides support to students working individually or in groups on a variety of digital projects, such as designing a web site, developing an electronic portfolio for a class, creating a blog, selecting images for a visual essay, adding voiceover to a presentation, or writing a script for a podcast. Tutors who staff the Digital Studio can help students brainstorm essay ideas, provide feedback on the content and design of a digital project, or facilitate collaboration for group projects and presentations. Students can use the Digital Studio to work on their own to complete class assignments or to improve overall capabilities in digital communication without a tutoring appointment if a work station is available. However, tutor availability and workspace are limited so appointments are recommended. To make an appointment e-mail us at fsudigitalstudio@gmail.com or visit the Digital Studio in Williams 222-B. Hours vary by semester and are updated at website.

JOKE COLLECTION

Your first writing assignment will require you to demonstrate skills of quoting and citing researched material. I will provide you with the theories of laughter. You will then find 10 jokes. In 150 words, you will analyze how the theories of laughter can be used to explain why we might laugh at that joke. Each analysis should apply two of the four theorists, and you should quote selections from their theories. I will be judging the paper on its command of MLA, its use of research, and the strength of its analysis. Word Count: 1,500.

FILM HISTORY PROJECT

This paper is your formal introduction into research writing. You will write a five-part research project on the film you selected. Each part needs to be at least 600 words long. Pay close attention to what each part entails. I expect you to find sources in the library and online, as well as show me that you understand how to properly integrate research and cite your sources using MLA formatting. Feel free to use pictures to enhance the text. All five parts must be handed in together. It is due on Monday, April 4 at 5:15 PM.

PART ONE: HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Give me an overview of what was going on in the United States (NOT the world, unless it's a worldwide event like World War II) during the year your film was released. This history should consider several of the following: politics, economics, society, culture, and science/technology. For example, since *Superbad* was released in 2007, I would want to talk about things like George W. Bush, the War in Iraq, the Virginia Tech shooting, the end of the Harry Potter series, and the

introduction of the iPhone. Give me an idea of what was going on in the country, what was important. Cite at least three PRINT sources.

Requirements: 600 words; at least 3 magazine or newspaper articles from the period

PART TWO: PRODUCTION INFORMATION

What information can you find about how the movie was produced? Who directed it? Where was it filmed? Who produced it? Who starred? Who was originally going to star? Any behind-the-scenes information you can find? For example, if I were writing on *Superbad*, I would want to talk about director Greg Mottola, screenwriters Seth Rogen and Evan Goldberg, and stars Jonah Hill, Michael Cera, and Christopher Mintz-Plasse. Tell me what each had accomplished professionally up to that point (major films, awards, etc.).

Requirements: 600 words; at least 2 sources

PART THREE: CRITICISM

OPTION ONE: Find three reviews of the film written at the time of its release. How did critics feel about it? What did they say? Quote from each of the reviews—what did the critics like and dislike? Were the reviews favorable or dismissive? What did the critics agree about? Where did they differ from one another?

Requirements: 600 words; cite 3 reviews from magazines or newspapers (No Internet reviews, unless it's an online version of a review that appeared in print).

OPTION TWO: Find one critical piece written by a scholar—college professor, postdoctoral fellow, researcher—that is at least 8 pages long. The “piece” may be either a peer-reviewed journal article or a chapter from a scholarly monograph. Journal articles can be accessed via the library search engines. The article must have been peer-reviewed. If it is a book chapter, the chapter must be focused on the film exclusively (or perhaps your film and one other), not just mentioning it in passing. Remember: scholarly monographs are published by university presses or companies like Routledge, Blackwell, and Methuen. Read the article. Write a detailed summary (about 350-500 words) and then respond to it (about 150 to 300 words). Your response, whether you agree or disagree, should refer to specific examples from the movie.

Requirement: 600 words; one peer-reviewed journal article from a library database OR a chapter from a scholarly monograph

PART FOUR: “AMERICAN-NESS”

How is the movie “American”? Think about some of the ideas we’ve gone over in class: can we connect this movie to other American comedies? Does it discuss social mobility? Feminism? The individual? What American values are celebrated in the movie? What American values are challenged? Does the film criticize American society—or just reinforce it? For *American Pie*, I would discuss how it portrays the American high school, masculinity, friendship, and attitudes toward sexuality—as well as the conservative way it emphasizes relationships over hook-ups. What does your film suggest one needs to be happy?

Requirements: 600 words; cite a source (perhaps one that discuss American movies or American culture); use three vocabulary words we discussed in class and put them in bold text

PART FIVE: TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Approach your film as a text no different from *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*. You have two options here:

OPTION ONE: Discuss how a film uses a symbol OR a theme. For example, in *Harold and Maude*, the hearse, daisies, and the banjo are all symbols. Themes would include life, death, love, youth, old age, and “seizing the day.” After you select a symbol OR a theme, talk about how the film uses it. How does it contribute to the meaning of the film? What is the point? Is the movie trying to make a point about American culture, people or life?

OPTION TWO: Discuss how the film treats a personal or social issue. This is similar to theme, but I want you to think about how the film offers a commentary on something of social importance. For example, *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater* offers commentary of the rapidly changing 1960s, capitalism, Christianity, masculinity, homosexuality, and marriage. What does your film have to say on the issue you’ve selected? What scenes discuss this issue and lead you to that conclusion?

Requirements: 600 words; no sources needed, but you should make frequent references to your film

Total Word Count: 3,000

RADICAL REVISION

For your final project you may choose from the following:

—Create a radical revision of one of the studied texts, transforming it into another form—a video production, skit, painting, photo collage, scrapbook, poster, power point presentation, etc. You have the option of working on this project in small groups of 2-3 if you can find others in our class who wrote on similar topics.

—Work in a small group with 2-3 other students to create a zine—a magazine in which you include the feature articles you wrote for Paper #2 (formatted for a magazine), along with a magazine cover, table of contents, and several ads suitable for your publication. You have the option of creating a print zine or an online version.

—If you have other ideas for your multimodal final project, talk with me and I’ll consider them.

No matter which project you choose, you will need to complete the following:

—a presentation to the class during the last week of the course;

—a 300-500 word, double-spaced process memo that explains why you chose your particular project, your part in the project (if you worked in a group), how you went about completing the project, changes you would make if you had more time, and what you learned as a result of completing your project.

WEEKLY RESPONSE JOURNALS

Every week, I will post a topic on Blackboard. You are to respond to this topic in 250 words. Each journal is due by midnight, Friday. If you hand it in a minute later, you will receive half-credit. Do not overlook this vital component of your grade. I will grade on a pass/fail basis. These responses should be fun and informal; as such, grammar and spelling do not count, but relevance does.

RESEARCH PACKET

I will give you a packet of exercises regarding selecting and evaluating research. There will be worksheets on making a bibliography, determining what kind of source a citation is, and judging the merit of a source. This packet is to be completed and returned on Wednesday, January 19.

CLASS SCHEDULE

MONDAY	WEDNESDAY
January 3	January 5
	Course Introduction Theories of Laughter
January 10	January 12
Research Review Plagiarism Exercise	<i>The Honeymooners</i> Workshop – Jokes One to Three
January 17	January 19
NO CLASS Conference Week: Jokes Four to Six	<i>I Love Lucy</i> Research Packet Due
January 24	January 26
<i>God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater</i>	<i>God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater</i> Workshop – Jokes Seven to Ten
January 31	February 2
<i>God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater</i>	View <i>Harold and Maude</i> Joke Collection Due
February 7	February 9
<i>Harold and Maude</i>	<i>All in the Family</i>
February 14	February 16
<i>Pulling Our Own Strings</i>	<i>Pulling Our Own Strings</i> Workshop – Section One
February 21	February 23
<i>The Cosby Show</i>	<i>Lost in Yonkers</i>
February 28	March 2
<i>Lost in Yonkers</i> Workshop – Sections Two and Three	Class Cancelled for Conferences Sections One to Three
March 7	March 9
SPRING BREAK!	
March 14	March 16
Class Cancelled for Conferences Sections One to Three	<i>Seinfeld</i>
March 21	March 23
<i>Sex and the City</i> Workshop – Sections Four and Five	<i>The Simpsons</i>

March 28	March 30
<i>Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim</i>	<i>Dress Your Family in Corduroy and Denim</i>
April 4	April 6
<i>The Daily Show and The Colbert Report</i> Research Project Due	<i>The Chappelle Show</i>
April 11	April 13
<i>It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia</i>	<i>Modern Family</i> Course Evaluations
April 18	April 20
Radical Revision Presentations	Radical Revision Presentations