

**American University
School of Communication**

***COMEDY IN COMMUNICATION:
The Role of Humor in Persuasive Messages***

COMM-XXX-XXX

**Professor Chris Palmer
Spring 2010**

Class Times: XXXX

Location: XXXX

How to Contact Professor Palmer:

Office: MGC Room 302

Telephone: office 202-885-3408; cell 202-716-6160; home 301-654-6137 (before 10:00 p.m.)

E-mail: palmer@american.edu (this is one of the best ways to reach me)

Office hours: Tuesday 8:00-10:00 pm; Wednesday 2:00-6:00 pm; and by appointment any time. There is a sign-up sheet on my door.

I encourage you to meet regularly with me so I can do everything I can to help you get the most out of this course. *I want to have at least one meeting with you individually within two weeks of the first class and I want to meet with you individually numerous times over the course of the semester.*

Course Description:

Communication through humor is an important way to make stories more memorable, characters more compelling, and causes more accessible. Understanding and appreciating humor is a unique part of being human, and making people smile and laugh is a learnable skill. To truly understand the nature of humor empowers the individual to communicate strategically – to create messages that are “stickier,” or more memorable and persuasive.

This class will introduce students to some of the major theories behind humor, examining the various ways in which humorous messages are constructed, and focusing on how humor can be used as an effective tool for persuasion. We will advance our understanding of humor by studying how politicians like JFK and Ben Franklin have used it to deflect criticism and advance their agendas, reviewing academic literature on the use of humor in advertising and political

communication, and examining the works of famous humorists, including Mark Twain, Judy Carter, Steve Allen, Landon Parvin, Jon Stewart, Monty Python, Chuck Klosterman, and the Marx Brothers.

Distinguished guest speakers, including comedians from DC, Hollywood, and New York City, will offer insights concerning the effective creation of comedic messages.

We will draw on the knowledge gained from these sources – comedians, literary works, scholarly articles, television shows and films – to produce our own comedic works at the end of the semester as the course culminates with the creation of humorous essays, video productions, and speeches.

Format:

We will strive for class sessions that are lively, engaging, fun, creative and informative. Our format will combine discussion, presentations, guest speakers, case studies, in-class screenings and analysis.

The actual classes might deviate from the readings and assignments described in this syllabus. All changes will be indicated clearly in class and by e-mail.

Class Schedule and Calendar

NOTE: All readings and assignments must be completed after the class under which they are listed, and before the beginning of the class following.

Class 1: Introduction

Introduce each other, complete a questionnaire, go over the syllabus, and review the plans for the semester.

Class 2: Why We Should Take Humor Seriously

Understanding and interpreting humor is one of the human mind's most fascinating abilities. Comedy crops up in many parts of our culture: in theater, literature, political speeches, films, television shows, advertisements, and social issue messages. Humor is frequently used as a tool for persuasion, and it is important for us to understand how it functions. Having a basic knowledge of humor in persuasion allows us to become critical consumers of humorous message and learn how to utilize humor in our own persuasive efforts.

Lesson Plan

Watch episodes of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*, clips from *Late Night with Conan O’Brian*, *The Tonight Show with Jay Leno*, videos of presidential speeches, and funny advertisements.

Take notes on the use of humor in these videos, paying close attention not only to specific jokes, but the overall messages in which these jokes are embedded.

Readings

- *About Barbers*, an essay by Mark Twain
- Transcript from TDS (*The Daily Show*)
- Read excerpt from *The World’s Funniest Jokes and Why They’re Funny*, by Chris Palmer and Jeremy Polk
- Attardo, S. (2000). Irony as relevant inappropriateness. *Journal of Pragmatics*, 32
Read: p. 795 section 1.2, pp. 816-818 section 5.3

Assignment

Take notes on the TDS transcript and write down your thoughts about how humor has been used at certain points throughout it. What types of humor are being used? How might the jokes contribute to or detract from the arguments that Jon Stewart and the correspondents make? Think about the content of TDS in general, not just its jokes. What effects might watching the show have on the American public when it comes to voting? Or people’s attitudes towards politics in our country? Or our perception of the media? Save this document for later in the semester.

Class 3: The Nature of Humor and its History, Part 1

We now know that humor *is* used as a tool for persuasion. Before we can understand *how* humor is used as a tool for persuasion, we must understand the nature of humor itself. To do this, let’s examine some common techniques used to create jokes, and study the history of humor in brief.

Lesson Plan

Elaborate on the Attardo reading assigned during the last class. Explore the idea of incongruity as it relates to humor: that a sudden, surprising, and unexpected change in direction that is related to the context of a story is at the heart of most jokes. Pages XX-XX in *The World’s Funniest Jokes and Why They’re Funny* explain the ideas that “relevant inappropriateness,” or a change in direction based on context, is the basis of humor, and that surprise (good comedic timing) enhances the quality of a joke and brings it to life. It explains in greater detail why context, change in direction, and surprise must all be present in order for a joke to work.

Discuss *double entendres* and *reverses* as they are explained in the Helitzer text. Watch films and TV clips that offer demonstrations and discuss these as we watch them.

In-class Videos

Dirty Jobs with Mike Rowe; <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nqzQxMtmjn8&feature=related>
 Dan Aykroyd’s *Mainway Toy Company*
 Dan Aykroyd’s *Ask President Carter*
 Dan Aykroyd’s *Fred Garvin: Male Prostitute*

Readings

- Helitzer: chapters 1, 6, pp.50-57, pp. 144-148
- *Pun for the Ages* by Joseph Tartakovsky
- *Napalm and Silly Putty* by George Carlin, pp. 1-11, pp. 21-22, pp. 56-68, pp. 71-75, p. 82 (section entitled “Maybe They’ll Adopt”)

Assignment

Examine the above essays by George Carlin. Note where different forms of humor that have been described by Helitzer are used, and write down your thoughts about why these jokes work in order to prepare for next week’s class discussion. If you don’t find the jokes funny, make a note of that, but also write down why the joke (based on its construction) should work in theory.

Class 4: The Nature of Humor and its History, Part 2

We have learned about two of the most common joke structures: *double entendres* and *reverses*. Let’s study four more: *stupidity*, *triples*, *paired phrases*, and *physical abuse* in the context of historical and contemporary comedy.

Lesson Plan

Discuss the assignment from the last class in detail. Set up the desks in a circle to encourage contribution to the discussion. Encourage people to ask questions about ideas that they don’t understand, and debate arguments that their peers make about why certain jokes are or are not funny.

Discuss *triples*, *stupidity*, *paired phrases*, and *physical abuse* as they are explained in the Helitzer text. Watch films and TV clips that offer demonstrations and discuss these as we watch them. Relate all six joke structures to incongruity as we have defined it.

In-class Videos

Laurel and Hardy – *The Music Box*

Three Stooges – *Curly’s Sweater*

Readings

- Helitzer, chapters 7 and 8
- Read excerpt from *The World's Funniest Jokes and Why They're Funny* by Chris Palmer and Jeremy Polk
- Read or watch one of the following comedic works:
 - o Essays
 - Excerpt from *Don't Shoot, It's Only Me* by Bob Hope
 - Ambrose Bierce
 - PG Wodehouse
 - Bill Cosby
 - Woody Allen
 - Nora Ephron
 - SJ Perelman
 - Isaac Asimov
 - Charlie Chaplin
 - o Films
 - Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*
 - The Marx Brothers' *Animal Crackers*
 - *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*
 - Monty Python's *Life of Brian*

Assignment

Essay 1 (15% of final grade): Select an essay to read or a video to watch from the above list. Write an essay in response to that video or literary work, analyzing why it is or is not funny. Draw on information from Helitzer and Attardo in your analysis. Note what types of humor are used, and explore the reasons why jokes are or are not effective. Due next class.

Class 5: Timeless Techniques Used by the Best Comedians

Trends in comedy change over time, and people from different generations find different jokes funny based on the cultural atmosphere in which they were raised. Although people's appreciation for comedy is partially based on frame of reference, some simple comedy techniques are timeless. Let's take a closer look at the history of comedy.

Lesson Plan

Watch The Marx Brothers' *Horse Feathers*. Take notes to be discussed during the second part of class. Also watch the "comedy techniques" sketch from *Monty Python Live*.

Readings

- Helitzer: chapters 14, 17, 18
- Excerpts from *The Onion*
- Excerpts from *Calvin and Hobbes*
- Selections from *Sex, Drugs, and Cocoa Puffs: A Low Culture Manifesto* and *Killing Yourself to Live*, both by Chuck Klosterman

- Excerpts from speeches by famous politicians (see books by Bark, Kador, and Smith on the supplementary reading list)

Assignment

Take detailed notes on the readings above. Include your thoughts about what makes the writing funny. These notes will be used in a class discussion during the next class.

Class 6: Constructing Humorous Messages in Writing

Writing is often the first step in the construction of a humorous message. Let's examine it closely.

Lesson Plan

Discuss notes from the last assignment during the first part of class.

Guest lecture by a comedy writer during the second half of class.

Assignment

Creative Writing Assignment (10% of final grade): Write a script, series of comic strips, a speech, or an article that is humorous. Or you may elect to write a short (3-5 page) analytical paper that examines one of the readings from our last class.

Class 7: The Importance of Interpersonal Bonding and Successful Creative Partnerships

In order to successfully engage in the creative process with other people (something that we will be doing shortly) it is essential that we become comfortable in each other's presence, and willing to put our own ideas on the table for acceptance or rejection. In lieu of a mid-term exam, let's take this opportunity to get to know one another better with a series of creative exercises that are designed to explore the nature of humor and foster the creation of bonding social capital.

Lesson Plan

Read an excerpt from Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone: The Rise and Fall of Social Capital in America* as a class. This will be followed by team-building exercises, including a game of croquet on the green.

Class 8: Delivering Humorous Messages on the Stage

More often than not, writing is only the first step in the telling of a joke. The importance of delivery and good comedic timing are tantamount. Stand-up comics, politicians, actors, and writers must all understand the principles of delivery.

Lesson Plan

Lecture on stand-up comedy followed by viewing of stand up comics and sketch comedy performers including Chris Rock, Will Ferrell, Jay Leno, Woody Allen, and Steve Martin.

Guest Speaker: Famous Comedian, as part of a campus-wide special presentation for students.

Contact: <http://www.american.edu/ocl/activities/Meet-the-Staff.cfm>

Readings

Helitzer: chapters 12, 13

Time Magazine, “An Interview with Rodney Dangerfield”

Assignment

Sketch Performance (5% of final grade): Work in groups of 3 or 4 to write and rehearse a sketch that you will perform during the next class.

Class 9: Enhancing Humorous Messages Through the Effective Use of Images

Much of the humor that we see today is in films and on television. Images must be used effectively to express jokes that have been created in writing. The careful planning of shots can not only express funny ideas, but also enhance the overall quality of a joke by adding layers of humor.

Lesson Plan

Study a sequence from Buster Keaton’s *The General* and discuss how the images have been carefully crafted to enhance the film’s comedic value. Study images from *The Onion* and discuss what makes them so funny and how they compliment the paper’s written articles.

Readings

Study the set of still images provided from *I’m on a Boat*, an SNL digital short. Note how props, camera angles, lighting, and framing contribute to the story and its comedic effect.

Assignment

Photographic Narrative (10% of final grade): Create a humorous photographic narrative or digital composite. Accompany this with a short description of why you find it funny.

Alternatively, you may study the Music Video for [I’m on a Boat](#) and write a 2-4 page analytical paper about how images contribute to its overall effect. This video cleverly juxtaposes an activity that has traditionally been reserved for members of the upper echelons of white society to the glamorous hip-hop culture normally reserved for young, wealthy black males. The video is highly dependent on carefully crafted images that suggest both the propriety associated with pretentious social elites and the glamour associated with wealthy pop-culture icons.

Class 10: Refining Humorous Messages in Post Production

Similar to the delivery of jokes on stage, good comedic timing is essential to the success of films and television shows. A comedy film's editor must understand comedic timing and the structure of jokes at the same level as its writer and director. Let's examine the editing choices made in comedy films and on TV.

Lesson Plan

Discuss the still images from *I'm on a Boat* as a class. Watch Monty Python Sketches and packages from *The Daily Show*. Compare the straightforward camerawork and editing used by Python to highly produced *Daily Show* packages. Explore the editing decisions, music, and camerawork used to enhance jokes. Observe that stylistic decisions can sometimes be jokes in and of themselves. For example a strategically placed focus pull in *The Daily Show's Diagnosis: Mystery Part 1* pokes fun at the editing decisions made in what are often overly dramatic, sensationalized news stories appearing on prime time local and national news.

In-class Videos

- [Monty Python's *The Parrot Sketch*](#)
- [Monty Python's *The Tobacconist*](#) (partial sketch)
- [Monty Python's *The Cheese Shop*](#)
- [Intro to Laguna Beach](#) (necessary to understand the following two videos)
- [TDS Laguna Beach, Part 1](#)
- [TDS Laguna Beach, Part 2](#)

Assignment

Essay 2 (10% of final grade): Watch the two-part story from TDS *Diagnosis: Mystery Part 1* and [Part 2](#) and write a 2-3 page paper (it may be longer!) that describes how the editing decisions (pacing, music, sound effects) contribute to its overall comedic value.

Class 11: Recap of How to Construct Humorous Messages

We have now covered the basic structures of jokes, a brief history of comedy, and the roles that writing, performance, camerawork, and editing play in the successful construction of humorous messages. Let's recap before moving on to the role of comedy in persuasive messages.

Lesson Plan

Review types of comedy, writing, performance, camera, and post production techniques. View videos and discuss essays that have been examined during previous classes to refresh the concepts that have been covered. Discuss the assignment from class 2 (notes on TDS) in preparation for the next three classes on humor in persuasion.

Readings (it is advantageous to read these in order)

- Excerpts from *Revel with a Cause* by Stephen Kercher
- Spotts, Harlan, Weinberger, Marc G., & Parsons, Amy (1997). Assessing the Use and Impact of Humor on Advertising Effectiveness: A Contingency Approach. *Journal of Advertising*, 26, 17-32.
Read: pp.17, 18 up to, but not including *Humor Relatedness*
- Weinberger, Marc G. & Gulas, Charles (1992). The Impact of Humor in Advertising: A Review. *Journal of Advertising*, 21, 35-59.
Read: pp. 35 – 47 up to, but not including *Executional Factors*, pp. 56 – 57
- Nabi, R. L., Moyer-Guse, E. & Byrne, S. (2007). All joking aside: A serious investigation into the persuasive effect of funny social issue messages. *Communication Monographs*, 74, 29-54.
Read: Abstract, pp. 29-34 up to, but not including *Study 1*, pp. 49-51 *Discussion*

Class 12: Humor As A Tool For Persuasion

Now that we understand the basics of how humorous messages are constructed, let's look at how humor can be used for more than just entertainment.

More than \$150 billion is spent on advertising in national media on an annual basis, with between 10% and 30% of that amount going for the placement of ads that are intended to be humorous.¹ Other estimates show that as much as a quarter or more of prime time television advertising in the U.S. is intended to be humorous.²

Humor has a special power to grab people's attention and make them remember a particular product. While watching television, surfing the web and driving around, people are continually bombarded with advertising and messages. When something makes them laugh, people pay attention, and with the continual stream of advertisements and messaging in modern life, getting people to pay attention can be the biggest challenge.

Lesson Plan

Watch persuasive messages that are humorous and discuss them to demonstrate that humor is indeed used in persuasion.

Videos:

[Cavemen Geico Commercials](#)

[E-trade Baby 1](#)

[Warm water](#)

[The Front Fell Off](#)

[“Stop deforestation”](#)

¹ *Assessing the Use and Impact of Humor on Advertising Effectiveness* by Harlan Spotts, Marc Weinberger and Amy Parsons, *Journal of Advertising*, Fall 1997

² *The Impact of Humor in Advertising: A Review* by Marc Weinberger and Charles Gulas, *Journal of Advertising*, December 1992

[Harrison Ford](#)
[“Polar Bears”](#)
[“Stripper Plane”](#)
[“Raining Elephants”](#)

The Colgate Comedy Hour with Martin and Lewis

Readings

- *Understanding humor as an affective cue*
 - Fedorikhin, A., & Cole, C. A. (2004). Mood effects on attitudes, perceived risk and choice: Moderators and mediators. *Journal of Consumer Psychology, 14*, 2 -12.
Read: pp. 2-3 up to, but not including *Background and Hypotheses*, pp. 4-5 *Stimulus Development and Manipulation checks*, p. 10 *general discussion*
NB: This study involves an experiment in which participants viewed advertisements for a product (cookies) after being placed in a positive or negative mood by the experimenters. It is interesting that humor was successfully used as one mechanism for mood manipulation (see pp. 4-5)
 - Strick, Madelijn, van Baaren, Rick B., Holland, Rob W., & van Knippenberg, Ad (2009). Humor in advertisements enhances product liking by mere association. *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Applied, 15*, 35-45.
Read: pp. 35-37 up to, but not including *Experiment*, pp. 42-43 *General Discussion 1*.
- *Understanding humor as a distractor versus a discounting cue*
 - Young, D. G. (2008) “The privileged role of the late-night joke: Exploring humor’s role in disrupting argument scrutiny,” *Media Psychology*, 11 (1), 119 - 142.
Read: pp. 119-126 up to, but not including *Method*, pp. 133-136 *Discussion*
 - Polk, J., Young, D.G., and Holbert L. (in press). Humor Complexity and Political Influence: An Elaboration Likelihood Approach Examining *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*. *Atlantic Journal of Communication*.
Read pp. XX – XX
- *Understanding humor as an attention-grabber*
 - Young, D. G. (2006) Late-night comedy and the salience of the candidates’ caricatured traits in the 2000 election, *Mass Communication and Society* 9, 339–366.
Read: pp 339-343 up to, but not including *Political Knowledge as a moderator*, pp. 360-361 first graph on p. 360 up to, but not including *Limitations and Future Research*

Assignment

Take notes on the readings and highlight anything that is confusing or interesting to you. As you take notes, relate your ideas to the video clips that we have watched in class.

In addition, each person must brainstorm a minimum of three ideas for the final project. Consider causes that are important to you and ways that you can incorporate humor into messages about those causes. Alternatively, consider a product currently on the market that can be advertised through the use of humor.

Class 13: The Psychology Behind Humor in Persuasion

Why exactly is humor used in persuasion? Does it simply grab our attention, or does it do more? How does it work on us? Why does it grab our attention, and how does it enhance the persuasive process?

Guest Lecture: Dr. Dannagal Goldthwaite Young from the University of Delaware, an expert in improvisational comedy and the psychology of humor in persuasion.

Lesson Plan

Discuss readings from the last class, answering questions and revisiting ideas. Revisit clips to discuss the specific ways that the humor used in them influences us. Divide class into groups for the final project. Share ideas and begin work on final projects by selecting a topic and outlining an essay, speech, sketch comedy performance, standup routine, photographic narrative, or video or audio production.

Assignment

Essay 3 (15% of final grade): Watch either *The Daily Show's Laguna Beach* [Part 1](#) [Part 2](#) or *The Daily Show's Diagnosis: Mystery* [Part 1](#) [Part 2](#). Using the readings from the previous class, write a short analytical essay (2-4 pages minimum) that addresses the following questions.

What is the overall message that has been presented to you about? Explain the argument that is made. How has humor been strategically integrated into the message? How might humor influence our perception of the message?

Begin to work on final projects in your groups. The final project will be a creative work: a sketch, speech, video, essay, or radio show that incorporates humor in a persuasive manner. This creative piece will be accompanied by an analytical paper that explains the thought process behind each joke that has been incorporated. It will also explain how your message has been enhanced by the use of humor.

Class 14: Putting Theory Into Practice

There are two classes remaining this semester. Let's use this time to continue working on the final projects.

Lesson Plan

Use class time to work on final projects with the guidance of the Chris. Students may consult with some of AU's top grad students and comedy producers during this class.

Assignment

Continue work on final projects.

Class 15: Putting Theory Into Practice (continued)**Lesson Plan**

In-class feedback on the progress of final projects. Any questions regarding humor in persuasion that students encounter as they write their analytical papers will be addressed during this lecture. This class will be a “study session” for the final project.

Assignment

Continue to work on final projects. Due next class.

Class 16: Review of Final Projects

Review final projects as a class. Students will perform sketches, show films, read speeches, show photos, or do standup routines.

Learning Outcomes:

1. Deepen our appreciation for humor, and gain new knowledge about the history of comedy and those who create it.
2. Understand and practice common methods used to construct jokes and humorous media including surprise, reversal, triples, double entendres, etc.
3. Learn about the theories behind why humor is an effective tool for strategic communication and persuasion.
4. Recognize that humor is frequently employed in advertising, political communication, and in advocacy campaigns.
5. Understand how humor varies based on the medium through which it is presented: in essays and books, through film and television, on the stage.
6. Gain the ability to use humor effectively in the construction of persuasive messages.

Course Requirements and Percentage of Grade:

Your grade in this course will be based on the following eight course requirements, subject to adjustments for meeting deadlines, arriving for class on time, enthusiasm, attendance and professional demeanor, as described later in this document:

1. **CLASS 4 – Essay 1, Analysis of Humor Structure, 15%**: Select an essay to read or a video to watch from those listed under class 4. Write an essay in response to that video or literary work, analyzing why it is or is not funny. Draw on information from Helitzer and Attardo in your analysis. Note what types of humor are used, and explore the reasons why jokes are or are not effective.
2. **CLASS 6 – Creative Writing Assignment, 10%**: Write a script, cartoon, or a speech that is humorous. Or you may elect to write a short (3-5 page) analytical paper that examines one of the readings from class 5.
3. **CLASS 8 – Sketch Performance, 5%**: Work in groups to write and rehearse a sketch that will be performed for the class.
4. **CLASS 9 – Photographic Narrative, 10%**: Create a humorous photographic narrative or digital composite. Accompany this with a short description of why you find it funny. Alternatively, you may study the music video for *I'm on a Boat* and write a 2-4 page analytical paper about how images contribute to its overall effect.
5. **CLASS 10 – Essay 2, Analysis of Postproduction Decisions, 10%**: Watch the two-part story *Diagnosis: Mystery Part 1* and *Part 2* and write a 2-3 page paper (it may be longer!) that describes how the editing decisions (pacing, music, sound effects) contribute to its overall comedic value.
6. **CLASS 13 – Essay 3, Analysis of Humor in Persuasion, 15%**: Watch either *The Daily Show's Laguna Beach Part 1* and *Part 2* or *The Daily Show's Diagnosis: Mystery Part 1* and *Part 2*. Using the readings from the previous class, write a short analytical essay (2-4 pages minimum) that addresses the following questions.

What is the overall message that has been presented to you about? Explain the argument that has been made. How has humor been strategically integrated into the message? How might humor influence our perception of the message?

7. **CLASS 13 – Final Project, 20%**: The final project will incorporate all the material, videos and readings from the whole semester. The creation of a sketch, speech, video, essay, or radio show will demonstrate your ability to think humorously (50% of project grade). The analytical essay that will accompany this project will demonstrate your understanding of the theories behind joke structure, the psychology of humor, and humor in persuasion (50% of project grade).

8. **Class Participation, 15%**: Actively participating in this class is essential to your success. Contributing to class discussions not only demonstrates that you have done the reading, but also allows you to reinforce your understanding of the concepts covered. Active participation in any class generates new ideas that you, your peers and your professors can learn from.

Grading Policies:

Evaluation of a student's performance will be guided by the following criteria:

- An "A" grade demonstrates superior and excellent work in fulfillment of all course requirements including attendance and class participation; all work is completed on time and demonstrates outstanding research, planning and originality.
- A "B" grade is given to good work in fulfillment of all course requirements including attendance and class participation; all work is completed on time and demonstrates good research, planning and originality.
- A "C" grade is given for undistinguished work in fulfillment of all course requirements including attendance and class participation; all work is generally completed on time and demonstrates modest research, planning and originality.

A "D" or "F" grade is given for work that is incomplete, late, and/or does not demonstrate mastery of the basic material and skills of the course. A grade of "D" or "F" may also be given to students with more than two unexcused absences.

Blackboard:

I will use Blackboard to communicate announcements to students. Please make sure that your AU e-mail has been properly forwarded to the correct address if you use another e-mail provider. And please make sure that you check the Blackboard site on a regular basis for announcements.

Films and Videos:

We will be screening and analyzing selected films, television shows, and YouTube videos from the following list:

- Buster Keaton's *The General*
- Charlie Chaplin's *The Gold Rush*
- The Marx Brothers' *Horse Feathers*
- The Marx Brothers' *Animal Crackers*
- Assorted films by Laurel and Hardy
- *The Colgate Comedy Hour with Martin and Lewis*
- *Monty Python's Flying Circus*
- *Monty Python's Search for the Holy Grail*
- [E-trade Baby](#)

- [Messin' with Sasquatch](#)
- [Stop deforestation](#)
- [Harrison Ford](#)
- [Polar Bears](#)
- [Stripper Plane](#)
- [Raining Elephants](#)
- *Late Night with Conan O'Brian*
- *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*

Many of these films are on reserve in Media Services under my name. We will watch clips from some of them in class.

Textbook and Reading Materials:

The following books are required for the course. The second two are available in the campus bookstore.

- Chris Palmer and Jeremy Polk, *The World's Funniest Jokes and Why They're Funny* (in production)
- Melvin Helitzer, *Comedy Writing Secrets: How to Think Funny, Write Funny, Act Funny, and Get Paid for It*. Writer's Digest Books, 1987
- Stephen Kercher, *Revel with a Cause*. The University of Chicago Press, 2006

Supplementary texts: We will be reading a variety of articles, chapters and other materials that will be distributed as handouts, downloaded from the Internet, or found in the books described in Appendix A, entitled *Supplementary Texts for Comedy in Communication*. You don't have to buy these supplementary texts. I will specify relevant chapters and either put them on e-reserves for you or Xerox them for you to read. These materials are also listed under the *readings* section of certain classes.

Attendance:

Attendance is required at every class. I will take attendance each week. Non-attendance will lower your grades.

Any student who is absent should see me as soon as they return to campus so there is no confusion over due dates and assignments.

Arriving for Class on Time:

Arriving late for class will also lower your grades. Ideally arrive a few minutes early. You are considered late for class if you arrive after the start time without my prior consent.

Deadlines:

Deadlines are sacrosanct in the real world and they will be in this class too. Your grades will be lowered if you miss deadlines.

Expected Student Behavior:

Students are expected to come each week prepared to contribute their knowledge and insights with their colleagues. We will all learn from each other.

All reading and written assignments must be completed before coming to class, and written assignments must be free of spelling and grammatical errors. There will be extensive peer review and interaction.

More than your physical presence is required in class. I am looking for attentiveness, vitality and enthusiasm during class. Participation in class will raise your grades. The give-and-take of information, ideas, insights and feelings is essential to the success of this class. Thoughtful, informed, balanced and candid speech is most helpful, especially when critiquing each other's work.

Expected Professional Behavior from Students:

Students are expected to act in a professional manner, meeting deadlines, solving problems, cooperating with classmates, and generally contributing in a positive way to the class. Teamwork, listening, empathy, enthusiasm, emotional maturity and consideration of other people's concerns are all essential to success in the real world. Please bring these qualities and values with you to class. It is as important to "practice" these interpersonal skills as it is to learn from textbooks while in college.

Academic Integrity:

There will be no cheating, copying or plagiarism. As you know, AU has strict enforcement standards. Please familiarize yourself with AU's Academic Integrity Code. You can find it at <http://www.american.edu/academics/integrity/code.htm>.

Student Resources:

Academic Support Center: If you need assistance with writing or composing the required class assignments the Academic Support Center has a Writing Lab for undergraduate students. The Center also offers study skills workshops, individual instruction, tutor referrals and services for students with learning disabilities. (885-3360, MGC 243).

The Writing Center: This center is an additional resource for students in need of writing assistance. (885-2991, Battelle-Tompkins 228).

Disability Support Services: This office provides technical support and assistance with accommodations for students with physical or psychological disabilities. (885-3315, MGC 206)

Counseling Center: If you are experiencing emotional stress or personal problems which are impeding your ability to function in and/or outside of the classroom the counseling center can provide confidential assistance. The Center offers counseling and consultations regarding personal concerns, self-help information, and connections to off-campus mental health resources. (885-3500, MGC 214)

Attached: Appendix A

APPENDIX A

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS
FOR COMEDY IN COMMUNICATIONBooks

Allen, Steve, *Vulgarians at the Gate*. Prometheus Books, 2001

Allen, Steve and Wolman, Jane, *How to be Funny: Discovering the Comic in You*. McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1987

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SNL: The Best of Dan Aykroyd

SNL: The Best of Will Ferrell

SNL: The Best of Christopher Walken

Best in Show

To Buy (not in library)

DVDs:

Late Night with Conan O'Brien

The Tonight Show with Jay Leno

Killing Yourself to Live by Chuck Klosterman