

WRITING TV COMEDY

Putting Theory Into Practice

CREATIVE GOALS

- Seamless Humor
- Consistency
- Comedy Output

SEAMLESS HUMOR

- Not forced
- Flows naturally
- Sounds like something the character would say
- A joke in a script that doesn't belong breaks audience suspension of disbelief and distracts viewers
- EX: *I Love Lucy*, *Gilligan's Island*, *Animal House*, *Something About Mary*

CONSISTENCY

- Provide an appropriate amount of humor in the story
- Funny sequence might be followed by serious scene, then dry humor, followed by physical comedy = INCONSISTENT
- Audiences lose interest when inconsistent

COMEDY OUTPUT

- Have enough jokes in script without forcing the jokes
- Most sitcoms have two to three jokes per script page

TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO SITCOM WRITING

THE PROCESS

- Develop an episode premise
- Write story outline
- Then write the first draft
- Rewrite, rewrite, rewrite
 - Roundtable writing

ROUNDTABLE WRITING

- Advantages
 - Multiple writer's go over script line by line
 - Remedies story problems, fine tunes the script
 - Writing alone can end up with forced humor
- Disadvantages
 - Too much rewriting can lead to micromanaging the script

REWRITING

- Disadvantages
 - Can damage parts of the script and character development
 - Paul Valery "An artist never really finishes their work; he merely abandons it" (French Poet)
 - Do not rely on "fix it later"

PREMISE DRIVEN COMEDY

PREMISE DRIVEN APPROACH

- “Man against nature,” “Man against self”
- Premise, then compound dramatic tension when they create story sequences, and again when individual scenes are created
- Integrate comedic tension as well
- Work from premise to sequence to scene
 - Helps to write dialogue
 - Focus some energy on laying comedic tension into premise

PREMISE DRIVEN APPROACH

- Predicaments
 - Escalating series generates comedic tension
- Character Mix
 - Relationships of characters
- Style of comedy
 - Genre, type, amount, and consistency of humor
- Casting
 - Think about who would be in role
 - Jim Carrey vs. Drew Carey

PREDICAMENTS

- An unpleasantly difficult, perplexing, or dangerous situation
 - The Big Lie
 - The Big Secret
 - Misunderstanding
 - Rock and a Hard Place
 - Surefire Scheme
 - Something That Rocks The Boat

PREDICAMENTS

- Time Bomb
- Trapped In Space
- Love Interest
- Dead Body