

WRITING TV COMEDY

Predicaments

DEFINITION

- An unpleasantly difficult, perplexing, or dangerous situation
- Predicaments generate humor by creating tension
- Permanent predicaments are often built into overall premise of a sitcom.
 - *Gilligan's Island*

THE BIG LIE

- Lead character tells a lie during a weak moment
- Lie leads to another and another until situation is out of control
- The funny incongruity grows larger and larger with each lie until it is finally resolved when the truth is revealed

THE BIG SECRET

- Lead character discovers a secret about another character but can not share the information
- Secret can be passed on misinterpreted which leads to funny complications

THE MISUNDERSTANDING

- One character misinterprets something that they are told or overhear, then gets into trouble when they act on the misinformation
- Comedic tension is created when the viewer realizes the character misunderstood

ROCK AND A HARD PLACE

- Character must choose between two good or two bad things
- Often involve growing levels of deceit and may take form of moral dilemma
 - Long promised anniversary dinner VS. tickets to a big sports event

THE SUREFIRE SCHEME

- “Trust me, what could go wrong”
- Plan to get rich, etc
- Followed by problems, bad decisions, and foolish risks

ROCKING THE BOAT

- All is normal until certain event
- Create tension by threatening the status quo and builds up until a showdown, or emotional confrontation takes place
- Past relative visiting, or past acquaintance arrives
 - Old Boyfriend / Girlfriend
 - New neighbor

TIME BOMB

- Race against time
- Characters get themselves into a situation where have to accomplish an impossible goal by a deadline
- Characters competing on a dare
- Characters boasting himself into an impossible deadline at work

TRAPPED IN SPACE

- Character is trapped in a small place, usually with another person (claustrophobic, pregnant)
- One or more characters are overdue for some appointment (wedding, speech)
- Story works like a pressure cooker: small space, sparks start between characters, being trapped causes tension, missing appointments add tension

THE DEAD BODY

- Being at a eulogy for someone the character did not like
- Character has to interact with the body

CHARACTER MIX

- Characters should complement each other rather than be the same
- Each character should contribute something fresh to the character mix
 - Conflicting point of view
 - Get themselves or others into trouble
 - Live a bizarre lifestyle

CHARACTER MIX IDEAS

- Role Reversal
- Fish Out Of Water
- Odd Coupling
- Love Interests
- Pretense
 - Character pretending to be something they are not