

Course title: From Punchline to the Laugh Track: Television Sitcom Writing & Directing Workshop

Language of instruction: English

Professor: Manel Jiménez Morales ; Sasa Markus Koncurat

Professor's contact and office hours: manel.jimenez@upf.edu ; sasa.markus@upf.edu

Course contact hours: 45

Recommended credit: 6 ECTS credits

Course prerequisites: there are no prerequisites for this course

Language requirements: English: recommended level in the European Framework B2 (or equivalent Cambridge Certificate) or native English

Course focus and approach:

This workshop focuses on the notion of television serial fiction, particularly the genre of sitcom comedy. After a brief theoretical introduction (TV theory, theories of creative writing and creativity in fiction) the course applies a practical approach: students will learn about the subject through the development of their creative abilities to write, organize, direct and act in a sitcom scene. **Keywords:** Television, Sitcom, Writing Fiction, Directing Fiction, Television Genres, Comedy, Humor, Theory of media, Collective creativity

Course description:

This workshop provides with basic theory and practical knowledge in creation of television fiction, especially sitcoms. Students will form small teams; each group will complete one sitcom scene through two stages working process.

Through the writing stage, held in a classroom, each team will develop a script for one sitcom scene, gaining basic insights to screenwriting for television, character development and comedy writing.

The directing stage will take place in TV studio. Students will shoot their written exercises using multi-camera system, learning how to operate in a studio, manage cameras and direct actors.

This workshop will foster collective creativity, communication and collaboration on the common project, as well as critical thinking about the television industry.

Learning objectives:

- Acquire basic knowledge and experience in creation of screenplays for TV fiction, specifically sitcom genre
- Get to know the way the TV studio functions, master work with multi-camera system and acquire experience in direction of TV shows
- Gain insights to theory of TV genres, particularly comic varieties and sitcom
- Acquire experience and get to know basic patterns of individual and collective creativity in TV studio work system and environment
- Train creativity, critical thinking and collaborative work through a methodology of project-based learning than can be applied to any other field.

Course workload:

Theoretical introduction - lectures and readings. Practical part: work in teams under a supervision, developing creative tasks in a classroom as well as in a TV studio. Field trip.

Important notice: Most of the classes will be held in a UPF Campus Ciutadella (Ramon Trias Fargas 25-27 Street). Nevertheless, TV studio facilities are located in a UPF Campus Poblenou, so the 4 classes dedicated to the sitcom direction will be held there. (Roc Boronat 138 Street). It's a 15 min trip by a streetcar between two campuses.

Teaching methodology:

Introductory part of the course will be done through theoretical lectures.

Practical part I: group forming for student's exercises, design of a storyline and development of a screenplay for a brief sitcom situation will be done in a classroom, through professor's supervision and guidance. Students will be encouraged to read their ideas in class, to take initiative and make contributions to the ideas of others, and through this process, develop understanding and acquire skills in screenwriting.

Practical part II: direction of a sitcom scene will take place in the TV studio. In this part, students will perform as a professional team, assuming the different roles of a production crew, from the technical to the artistic side. Along the different sessions, they will learn by doing in a collaborative, project-based learning dynamic.

Small number of classes will be dedicated to screenings and analysis of how some of the well-known sitcoms were made.

Assessment criteria:

25% Screenplay for a sitcom scene

30% Term-project: Direction of a sitcom scene

20% Class participation and involvement in class exercises

20% Argumentative paper - Mid-term: Students should choose one sitcom of their preference and argue, in a brief paper, why they consider it is a program of quality, analyzing the way the program is done, its cultural importance or its aesthetical aspect, applying the knowledge acquired during the theoretical part of the course.

This course will foment skills and practices orientated towards group work, communication skills and collective creativity, since student's projects will be developed in groups. Nevertheless, an individual evaluation will be carried out, according to the development, performativity and acquisition of competences of each student. Therefore, notes for each project need not be shared by all team members.

BaPIS absence policy

Attending class is mandatory and will be monitored daily by professors. Missing classes will impact on the student's final grade as follows:

Absences	Penalization
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Up to two (2) absences	No penalization
Three (3) absences	1 point subtracted from final grade (on a 10-point scale)
Four (4) absences	2 points subtracted from final grade (on a 10-point scale)
Five (5) absences or more	The student receives an INCOMPLETE ("NO PRESENTADO") for the course

The BaPIS attendance policy **does not distinguish between justified or unjustified absences**. The student is deemed responsible to manage his/her absences.

Only absences for medical reasons will be considered justified absences. The student is deemed responsible to provide the necessary documentation. Other emergency situations will be analyzed on a case by case basis by the Academic Director of the BaPIS.

The Instructor, the Academic Director and the Study Abroad Office should be informed by email without any delay.

Classroom norms:

Students will be asked not to use their computers during the class exercises and to collaborate actively in group exercises.

Weekly schedule:

WEEK 1

Session 1: Syllabus, assessment and readings

Introduction to the course requirements and method of assessment Humor. Theory of humoristic fiction

Session 2: Historical perspectives on humor: from Aristophanes to contemporary comedy. Psychological explanations for humor.

WEEK 2

Session 1: Television. Television fiction and its role in contemporary society. Genres of TV fiction. Particularities of a sitcom genre.

Session 2: Case studies and ideal sitcom surroundings. Shared flats (*The Bing Bang Theory*), family surroundings (*Two and a Half Man*) and *The Office*:. From *Magi-Com* through *Sex-Com* to *My Com*: historical evolution of sitcom.

WEEK 3

Session 1: Screening and analysis of one sitcom episode in order to familiarize students with a 'Sitcom Code' – a key narrative structure to most sitcoms.

Session 2: Writing for television. Serial narrative patterns.

WEEK 4

Session 1 Writing a comedy. Sitcom and situation comedy. 'The Actcom' (action based) and the Dramedy (thought based) sitcoms.

Session 2 'The comic trap' situation as a base for sitcom creation. Establishing of students' workgroups and creation of basic plotlines for their exercises.

WEEK 5

Session 1: The notion of character. Character in screenwriting. Sitcom as a comedy of characters. Character mix, role reversal and other character-based writing techniques.

Session 2: Character creation for students' exercises. Role division amongst groups, choice of actors, writers and directors.

WEEK 6

Session 1: Scene in a screenplay. What a scene consist of? Particularities of comic scene.

Session 2: A visual gag configuration. Elaboration of scenes for students' exercises.

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WEEK 7

Session 1: Dialogue. Verbal humor in sitcom: from 'the running joke' to the 'one liner'.

Session 2: Development of dialogue for students' exercises.

WEEK 8

Session 1: Reading and discussion of students' screenplays

Session 2: Field trip

WEEK 9

Session 1: Work in TV studio. Getting to know a multi-camera system.

Session 2: Work in TV studio. Getting to know the television shooting "grammar".

WEEK 10

Session 1: Work in TV studio. Shooting of students' exercises I.

Session 2: Work in TV studio. Shooting of students' exercises II.

WEEK 11

Session 1: Final presentation of students' exercises – term assignment.

Session 2: Discussion of students' exercises – term assignment.

Last revision: June 2023.

Required readings:

Aristotle and S. H. Butcher. *The Poetics of Aristotle*. Createspace Independent Pub, 2014, pp. 14 -20.

Bignell, Joannathan. *An introduction to Television Studies*. Routledge, 2012, pp. 13-147.

Jacobson, Mitch. *Mastering Multi-Camera Techniques: From Pre-Production to Editing to Deliverables*. Elsevier and Focal Press, 2010, 57-79.

Recommended bibliography:

Aristotle and S. H. Butcher. *The Poetics of Aristotle*. Createspace Independent Pub, 2014.

Bamford, Nick. *Directing Television*. Bloomsbury, 2012.

Bignell, Joannathan. *An introduction to Television Studies*. Routledge, 2012.

Dayan, Daniel and KATZ, Elihu. *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*. Harvard University Press, 1992.

Debrett, Mary. *Reinventing Public Service Television for the Digital Future*. Bristol: Intellect Ltd, 2010.

Freud, Sigmund. *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*. F. Deuticke, 1960.

Freytag, Gustav. *Freytag's Technique of the Drama: An Exposition of Dramatic Composition and Art*. S. C. Griggs, 1894.

Grace, Yvonne. *Writing for Television: A Complete Writer's Guide to Series, Serials and Soaps*. Creative Essentials, 2014.

Jacobson, Mitch. *Mastering Multi-Camera Techniques: From Pre-Production to Editing to Deliverables*. Elsevier and Focal Press, 2010.

Lockyer, Sharon. *Reading Little Britain: Comedy Matters on Contemporary Television*. I.B. Tauris and Co, 2010

Marteinson, Peter. *On the Problem of the Comic: A Philosophical Study on the Origins of Laughter*. Legas, 2006.

Mills, Brett. "Comedy verité: contemporary sitcom form", *Screen*, 45 (1), 63-78, 2004.

Morreale, Joanne. *Critiquing the Sitcom: A Reader*. Syracuse Univ. Press, 2003.

Potter, W. James. *Media Literacy*. Sage Publications, 2010.

Silk, M. S. *Aristophanes and the Definition of Comedy*. Oxford, 2000.

Smith, Ewan. *Writing Television Sitcoms*. Penguin, 2009.

Hokenson, Jan. *The Idea of Comedy: History, Theory, Critique*. Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2006.