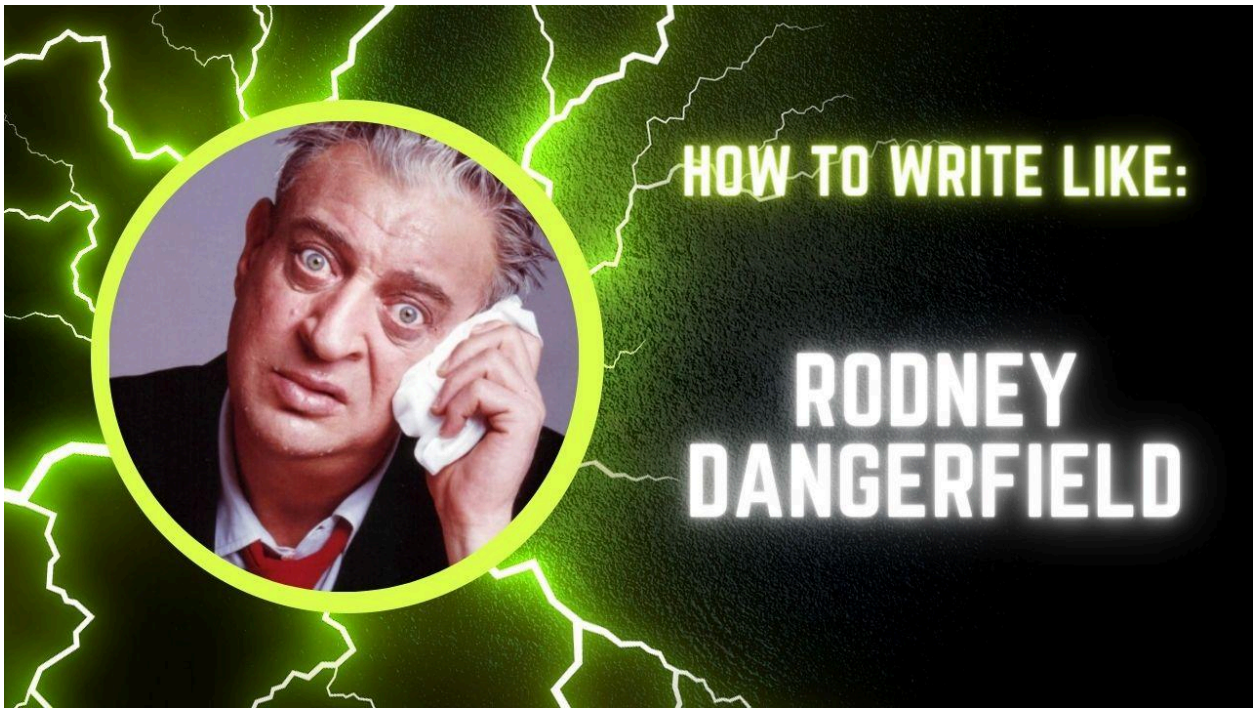
“The other night I was in a place. I felt like having a few drinks. So I went over to the bartender. I said, "Surprise me." He showed me a naked picture of my wife. ”

How to Write Comedy Like Rodney Dangerfield



Background

Rodney Dangerfield, known for his self-deprecating humor and the catchphrase "I don't get no respect!", had an interesting and unique career trajectory in the world of comedy.



Early Life and Initial Attempt at Comedy

Born Jacob Cohen in 1921, Dangerfield started writing jokes at 15 and began performing under the name Jack Roy. However, his early career in entertainment did not take off as he had hoped.

Return to Comedy and Rise to Fame

After a hiatus from comedy, during which he worked as a salesman and lived a relatively normal life, Dangerfield returned to the comedy scene in his 40s. He rebranded himself as Rodney Dangerfield in the late 1950s or early 1960s. His career really took off in the 1970s, especially after his appearances on "The Ed Sullivan Show" and "The Tonight Show".

Signature Style and Success

Dangerfield was known for his quick, one-liner style of comedy, often focusing on his lack of respect, unhappiness, and other personal shortcomings. This style resonated with audiences, making him a popular figure in stand-up comedy. The majority of his comedy was either self-deprecating or “my wife” jokes.

Film Career

Dangerfield also had a successful film career. One of his most famous roles was in the 1980 film "Caddyshack", and he continued to appear in films through the 1980s and 1990s.

Legacy

His unique style and late-blooming career have made him an iconic figure in comedy. Dangerfield is often cited as an example of perseverance in the entertainment industry, showing that success can come at any age.

Recognition

Despite his self-deprecating humor, Dangerfield was highly respected in the comedy world and received significant recognition for his work, including a Grammy Award and a place in the Comedy Hall of Fame.
With studying Rodney Dangerfield's comedy, you can look at any video and determine that it's pretty much the same style and approach.

- The character is well-defined
- The jokes are clearly written
- The structure is tight

Let's take a look at the top 100 Rodney Dangerfiedl Jokes. These are different appearances throughout his career.

Top 100 Rodney Dangerfield Jokes

Here's the link to the Transcript and Video running simultaneously

https://www.temi.com/editor/t/5PQ5AUFB6TjF5utxB0DcC7J-73gX0nk57VW2AxmnyoUxnAJInuWz5gr2BeoVVq2PImywW3SBPd2ie0onE8S2TgiFeck?loadFrom=SharedLink

Rodney's jokes were usually quick associations either using wordplay, double-entendre, reverses or tight associations (incongruity).

Are you kidding? I know I'm ugly. I stuck my head out the window. Got arrested for mooning.

How ugly? I'm telling you, my proctologist. He stuck his finger in my mouth.

You see how those two jokes are related? He's actually saying my face looks like my ass.

I was so ugly. My mother breastfed me through a straw.

Rodney Dangerfield's journey in comedy is a testament to resilience and finding success later in life. His impact on comedy and his ability to connect with audiences through humor about life's struggles have made him a beloved figure in American entertainment history.

A couple of important things to take notice of with Rodney Dangerfield's career is that he quit comedy, then got back into it and at a much later age, and became one of the most recognized comedians of all time.

1. Perseverance
2. Angle, POV and Character

He loved comedy, stayed with it, changed his name and his game. His angle of not getting respect was a perfect characteristic for a comedian.

The underlying comedy formula is that I'm just someone who's trying to get from point A to point B and encountering obstacles.

This angle helped him to be a lovable loser. And helped him write his jokes which were all about being too ugly, not being a good lover, in a bad marriage, not having a good car, bank account, home, etc. He took everything we experience every day and filtered it through the angle of being the lovable loser.

Rodney was nearly a perfect example of a comedian whose character was as defined as his jokes.

He wasn't just a one-liner comedian, he was a one-liner comedian with a very defined character.

That was Then, This is Now

There is an argument to be made about characters in stand-up comedy were more popular back in the day and the audiences today have evolved. That is true. Today character/persona equals more of an attitude and point of view.

But let's look at the top 10 most successful comedians currently (according to Ranker.com)

1. Jerry Seinfeld
2. Bill Burr
3. Dave Chappelle
4. Nate Bargatze
5. Ricky Gervais
6. Jim Gaffigan
7. Louis CK

8. Andrew Schulz
9. Kevin Hart
10. Anthony Jeselnik

Each one of these comedians has an identifiable voice and they can frame a joke/story/bit.

Take note:

Once you have a topic and you identify the angle, it becomes easier to write the jokes.

Breaking down one and two liner jokes helps you to figure out how the puzzle works.

A Few of Rodney's Jokes Transcribed

- Find some coverage of Rodney Dangerfield. (Approximately 5 minutes)
- Transcribe his jokes.
- Identify the Structure (Structures)
- Identify the Topic
- Write 1-5 jokes on each of the topics.

Wordplay
I got a dumb dog too. My dog, we call him Egypt. Every room he leaves a pyramid.

The other day, I checked into a hotel. I asked the bellman to handle my bag. He started to feel-up my wife.

I told my wife, "Our kid is spoiled." She said, "A lot of kids smell that way."

3-Way Build-up
Doctors say when a man makes love to a woman, he burns up energy. He loses 150 calories. I made love to a girl. Once I lost even more , I lost 150 calories. My watch and my wallet.

Love is important. I've got plenty of love in me. Amazing. Plenty of love. I love a lot of things. Love. I love sports. I love music, and one of my kids.

Reverse (with phrase matching)



My sex life is nothing. My wife cut me out to once a month, cut me out to once a month! Oh, I'm lucky. Two guys I know, she cut out completely.

Are you kidding? My old man never liked me. When he took me hunting, gave me a three minute head start

The other night. She met me at the front door wearing a see-through negligee. The only trouble is, she was coming home.

Mirrored Phrase
Real smart kid, I got. The other day I told him about the birds and the bees. He told me about my wife and the butcher.

Compare & Contrast (He said/He said)
I tell you I can't relax. My kid drives me nuts. The other day I told him, "You are young. You don't have it upstairs." He told me, I'm old. I don't have it downstairs.

Incongruity - using Analogy
When I have sex with my wife, it's like magic. As soon as I get in, she disappears.

Simple Truth (also Paired numbers)
And my doctor, he don't help either. He told me to run five miles a day for two weeks. I called him up. I said, doc, I'm 70 miles from my house.

I was talking to my doctor. You know my doctor, Dr. Vinny Boombatz. You know my doctor? Well, he told me last week at his office, He got six cases of VD. I mean, he is all right now, you know?

Rodney's Approach to Jokes

Primary Structures Used:

- Wordplay
- Double-Entendre
- Incongruity
- 3-Way Build-up
- Reverse
- Compare & Contrast

- Simple Truth

Primary Devices Used:
- Exaggeration (Top 10 List)
- Mirrored Phrases, Matching phrases

List Your Flaws
- Lazy
- Drink too much
- Broke
- Ugly
- Fat
- Loser (can't win at anything)
- Bad lover
- Bad kisser
- People don't like me. (My parents didn't like me. My Dad didn't like me. My wife doesn't like me.)
- Getting old
- Bad dancer
- Bad cook
- Can't save money
- Spends to much time on social media
- Can't spell
- Bad with math
- Bad singer

Take any one of these flaws and work it through a top 10 list workout.

✍️Exercise

Pick a Topic:

Topic: Drinking
Angle: I drink too much
Tools: Listing technique.
Generator: Top 10 Reasons you know you drink too much. (This is just the workout to get to the jokes, you can do top 5 or even top 3)
Write: Pick one to three of the jokes and build a conversational joke or short bit out of it.

Rodney Dangerfield at the Top of His Game (1980)

✍️Exercise:

Do another exercise like this one, this time you pick the topic. You can choose a topic from the list above or create your own topic. Remember to choose a topic that is relatable.

✍️Exercise

Writing the Reverse

Topic: Sex

List: What's expected? What usually happens during sex? Who? What? Where? Why? When? How?

- List at least 10 things that happen during sex, before sex, after sex.
- For example:
    - Dirty talk
    - Foreplay
    - Dress sexy
    - Play romantic music
        - Does the music change if the angle is that you're bad at sex?
- Choose one or two,



- What's expected?
- What's the image?
- What's happening?
- Think of the opposite.
- Write the joke.

My attempt:
During sex, my girlfriend likes to wear something really hot; like a see-through top, skimpy thong. Yeah the other day during sex, she sent me a picture of it.

Example:
List 10 Things:
1 of them: Sexy outfit… What's the image? Who's assumed to be wearing it?
Go to the opposite. Write the joke.
Write the joke:

During sex there's always a sexy outfit involved. Like the other night it was a lacy bra and a skimpy pink thong. And you should've seen what she was wearing.

Your Turn: Again sticking with the topic of sex. List 5-10 things that happen during sex.

Wordplay as part of the reverse.
My wife said she gets turned on by a nice, sexy teddy. Turns out Teddy is the name of our pool boy.

I have to admit there are times when I make my girlfriend scream during sex. Like the other day she screamed, "Oh my god, Jerry, when did you get home?!"

Approach Using Incongruity

1. Relatability: Pick a relatable topic.
2. Angle: I'm a loser.
3. Get specific with the main topic. (Listing)
4. Incongruity: Choose a secondary idea (a condition, a setting, a situation) (Listing)
5. Question: If this is true, what else could be true?
6. Answer the question.
7. Exaggerate.

I'll tell you, Las Vegas, they got slot machines all over, even in supermarkets. I went in to buy a container of milk. Cost me 238 dollars.

✍️Exercise

Let's take this same topic (LAS VEGAS)

1. Stick with Slot machines or List 5-10 things that relate to vegas.
2. Choose a secondary idea (Setting, Place, Situation, Celebrity, Condition)
3. List everything slot machines and gambling, everything airport.
4. Make a statement that includes the main idea, the angle and the second idea. (HINT: the angle is usually how you feel about the situation).
5. Question: If this is true, what else could be true.
6. Exaggerate.

To make it easy let's start with:

Slot machines in the airport.

I was in Vegas. They have slot machines everywhere. They have slot machines at the airport… My flight was delayed 4 hours. I played the slots. Some people lose their luggage. I lost my house.

Slot machines at bars.
Slot machines at massage parlors.
Slot machines at pizza joints.

EXTRA:
One technique to consider is to create a topic with an added setting, then remove the setting and reintroduce it at the end. This can effectively turn the joke into a reverse.

My girlfriend and I were at the Costco and she started to talk dirty to me.
Now remove the location.
My girlfriend was talking dirty to me the other day, she was like I want to to just grab my hair and take me, baby, right now… I was like babe that's so hot, but can we wait till we're out of the Costco?


COMEDY
A LA CARTE
WRITING