



"I spilled spot remover on my dog... now he's gone."

Write Like Steven Wright



Object of This Course:

By the end of this course, you should have a better command of what it takes to write one liners like Steven Wright, who was the quintessential GOAT of the thought provoking one-liner.

Steven Wright's one liners didn't just make you laugh, they played tricks on your brain.

In this course we are going to explore 3-4 different approaches Steven Wright used to create humor.



The thing you have to remember is that Steven Wright's genius is NOT inaccessible to you. To think like him takes practice and adjustment to the way you've been thinking your whole life. Most people think linearly. We're too lazy to think alternatively. From now on, you are going to start thinking alternatively.

And in this course I'm going to show you some short cuts on how you can do that.

More specifically you'll start thinking...

- In paradoxes and opposites.
- In reframing the intended meanings of words statements, signs, lyrics, authoritative statements.
- How to spot nuances in behaviors and our everyday physical surroundings and interactions and start noticing the ironies in them.
- How to use clichés, aphorisms and known phrases that have acutely expected ending and create surprise.

A Couple of Ways You Can Start to Think This Way

- ✓ Watch a lot of Steven Wright, (Just Steven Wright, at first).
- ✓ Write down some of his lines. Identify what the template is. (he uses multiple approaches.
- ✓ Start Reframing Simple Sentences, Authoritative Statements. (Use the Reframing exercise)
- ✓ Study Simple paradoxes like Why do they call it a boxing "ring" when it's square?
- ✓ Start looking at song lyrics, scripture and find the hidden truth.
- ✓ **Take Action:** Start Creating your own. You might suck at first, get over it and keep practicing.
- ✓ Now look at other comedians approaches to this way of childlike thinking



👉 Definition of a One-liner:

Let's get on the same page on what a one-liner is. Not all one-liners are one line. Some are a little longer. The idea is to be as concise as possible. That's the magic of the one-liner, to convey a lot of information in a short period of time.

A **one-liner** is a **concise joke delivered in a single sentence or very short set-up and punchline**.

It packs a complete comedic idea into a compact form — often hinging on wordplay, paradox, absurdity, irony or an unexpected turn in logic.

Classic Example:

"I bought a humidifier and a dehumidifier. I put them in the same room and let them fight it out." — Steven Wright

What Makes a One-Liner Work?

1. Compression

It distills an entire observation, idea, or story into one **tight punch**.

2. Surprise

It delivers an **unexpected twist** — a turn of meaning or logic the audience didn't see coming.

3. Ambiguity or Wordplay

It often exploits **double meanings, misdirection, reframing, or paradox**.

4. Provokes Thought the ponderable or one-liner, makes you think. It's makes the brain dance.

5. Timing

In performance, **pauses and pacing** add extra punch to the brevity.



But it's not just the material that makes the joke work. Underneath the seemingly monotone delivery of Steven Wright is a complexity in his character.

💥 How Steven Wright's Character Sells the One-Liner

1. Unassuming Thinker

Steven Wright's stage persona is not slick or cocky. He's a **soft-spoken, dry, meandering thinker**.

He's **not superior** — in fact, the audience feels **superior to him**, partly because of the way he looks. This also makes the audience think they are smarter than him. This creates a "safe" space for absurd ideas. He's just trying to figure it out. We're surprised when his logic actually works, because it makes us say, "Oh, that's so true, I never thought about it that way! And it makes the comedians say, "I wish I would've thought about it that way."

2. Childlike Logic

He operates in an **imaginary world where absurd things can happen**, because it's built on his **internal logic** — not reality's rules.

3. Detached Delivery

His **flat tone and slow pace** make the absurdity land harder. The tension builds, then releases into laughter. And the pace allows the audience to process the illogic of his logic.



Let's look at some of Steve Wright's Material:



https://www.temi.com/editor/t/2bheswHLnHRwjtJW6FmInbP_17-Mo_2tMrR2MSGIXOm3OgGFbkn_FtIWwLrsfm-1UCkQAF1HjNdiKaCgONn4oDarCrU?loadFrom=SharedLink

Let's Explore this Insanity!

The 5 Main One-Liner Types Steven Wright Uses

1 Paradoxes



A statement that contradicts itself or leads to an impossible conclusion. Or two things that can't possibly be true at the same time but seemingly are.

Example:

"Why do they call it a boxing ring when it's square?"

"Why is it called a building when it's already built?"

"Why do we park in the driveway but drive on the parkway?"

Exercise:

What's a different way to use the phrase "Up in this bitch."

2 Ponderables / Existential Observations/Cliche reformations and take-offs

A whimsical or absurd observation about how the world works — or might work.

Example:

"If at first you don't succeed, then skydiving definitely isn't for you." This is built on a cliché reformations and work-arounds.

"if you cut a crumb in half do you have half a crumb or two crumbs?"— George Carlin

"There's a fine line between fishing and standing on the shore looking like an idiot."

3 Signs and Instructions (Literalism)

Definition: Taking signs, labels, instructions, or literal language at face value, creating an absurd interpretation.

Steven Wright Example:

"I have a map of the United States... actual size. It says, 'One mile equals one mile.' I spent last summer folding it."



👉 The above joke is a great example of how Steven Wright utilizes tags and toppers.

"I went to a restaurant that serves 'breakfast at any time.' So I ordered French Toast during the Renaissance."

"Now hiring: Psychic. You know where to apply."

4 Explicit Truth Reframing

Restating **something obvious or mundane** in an absurd way, making it newly funny.

Example:

"I spilled spot remover on my dog. Now he's gone."

5 Absurd Imaginary Scenarios

Definition: Crafting an **impossible or cartoonish scenario** based on real-world objects or ideas.

Example:

"I put instant coffee in a microwave and almost went back in time."

✍️ Exercise Quick exercise:

Take this setup and write at least one punchline.

"I used Hand Soap to wash my body... [RESULT?]"

