"Stop doing what you think is expected. Just be yourself. No one else can do that."

Write Comedy Like Deon Cole



Writing for Conan O'Brien

I've said this before and I'll say it again and again. You can learn so much by listening to other performers. You gain insight, understanding and you realize that they're going through or have gone through the same thing you're going through and will go through, so when you know that and you learn how they dealt with it, you have the confidence to just move through it and not let it stifle you.

You'll also realize that every single person is different and they offer a unique point of view.

Let’s take a look at this video interview with Deon Cole and how he talks about how he got to be a writer for Conan O’Brien.



Deon Cole on Writing for Conan, Black Comedy vs White Comedy

This lesson of pressure that you believe is being put on your by a show, by a club, by your colleagues is usually just pressure you’re putting on yourself.

Deon Cole found out why Conan hired him, despite the fact that he didn’t feel like he was the right voice for the show. It’s because it wasn’t necessarily voice Conan was looking for for himself but a perspective on life that could only be found through Deon Cole’s personal experiences. And that Deon Cole’s experiences had value for the show in that they could provide an honest

humorous socio-political or socio-cultural perspective. That could never come out of Conan's mind because Conan hasn't had those experiences.

The takeaway? *"Stop doing what you think is expected. Just be yourself. No one else can do that."*



After-Hours Stand-Up: Deon Cole Won't Answer All Your "Black" Questions …

Netflix. Okay Mister.

Right away opens with a game of the scene. No playing around. I'm just gonna jump into this thing, you okay with that?

Game of the scene. Talks right to the audience, creates immediate community with them. They connected.

He tells them what he's going to do. "I'm gonna tell some jokes."
This
:

Recognition

Recognition comedy is based on situations, behaviors, habits, speech that we've seen a lot but don't think about it often enough for it to be on our minds all the time so when someone shares it out loud it makes us laugh like "That's so true. I've seen that."

"I'm not going to no woman's house who's got loose sockets in they house."

The trick? **Take something normal, exaggerate it slightly, or phrase it perfectly — and BOOM: Joke.**

Think about moments. Small moments in life where we do normal everyday things, but sometimes there's an anomaly. Like somebody going through a fast food drive thru. If the employee has an accent or even talks too fast, the customer starts shouting like the employee is hard of hearing.

What do we have here?

We have a typical moment we've all seen and heard a million times, whether it's old people or someone with an accent. The person talking to them talks like they are deaf. Doesn't seem too unique. We've heard this gag.

But in this case we are getting more specific by choosing a setting that is also common but unique compared to just talking to anyone. We see the images,

we've experienced the situation, so it means something to us. We're not only listening to the story of the comedian, we're feeling it.

When people talk to other people, they think any situation where things are different than just white, suddenly the person they are talking to becomes hard of hearing. So they increase the volume of what they are saying. You ever see this?

"I saw this family going through the drive-thru ahead of me. And the lady on the speaker had a Spanish accent. And the white dude in the car with the family didn't understand her so he starts raising his voice, like he's never heard a Spanish accent in Southern California. "I WANT TWO BIG MAC COMBO MEALS! LARGE FRY, LARGE COKE AND TWO HAPPY MEALS WITH A CHEESEBURGER AND COKE!" Then you hear the Spanish accent and he gets louder. (REPEAT). "I WANT TWO BIG MAC COMBO MEALS! LARGE FRY, LARGE COKE AND TWO HAPPY MEALS WITH A CHEESEBURGER AND COKE!"

Then you hear a white dude get on the speaker. Easy to understand. He says, "Sir, this is In and Out."

✍️ Exercise:

Take one or two of the below prompts (or come up with your own) and write the setup and the act-out of the recognizable situation.

1. What do people do when they're pretending to understand fancy wine at a restaurant?

2. How do moms text differently from dads?

3. What's the weird little ritual everybody does when checking if they locked the front door?

4. Think about something fake people say during small talk that nobody actually believes.

5. What's a fake "trick" people use to look busy at work?

6. When you don’t want people to talk to you, what “tricks” do you use?

Transcript

"Whoa, this is happening! How’s everybody doing? Everybody alright?"

"Welcome to the *Black Episode*. That’s what the title of this episode is... The Black Episode, right here."

"I'm a writer here at *Conan*, and I'm the only Black writer that's here. And it's cool, but sometimes it trips me out."

"Anytime the other writers have any Black question, they think I got the answer.
Like for real — we’ll be in a writers' session and they’ll be like:
‘Wow, we hear the rapper 50 Cent got shot nine times. That had to hurt, right?’
I'm like: ‘Man... I live in Beverly Hills. I don't know!’"

"They'll be like: ‘Hey, Black cats are bad luck. Do Black cats go through more stuff than regular cats?’"

"Like... I don't know the struggles of Black cats. I don't know cat civil rights!"

"And not all Black men have big penises, alright?"



"Being the only Black writer, you gotta be ON POINT. You can't mess up!
One time we were writing a script, I balled it up, tried to throw it away — garbage can was right there — and I missed."

"All the white writers were like:
'See? That's why he works here — no defense.'"

"One dude was like:
'The wind wasn't even blowing, and he missed that shot... I just don't trust him.'"

"It's this one white dude who always comes to my office, talks about random Black stuff.
Like one time, he just walked in like:
'Hey, do you remember Bell Biv DeVoe?'
I'm like: 'Yeah.'
He's like: 'Aren't they awesome?'
Then he just moonwalked out of my office.
Like... what the hell was that?"

(Topic shift: Working out in L.A.)

"Living out here in L.A., you gotta work out.
First trainer I had said:
'We're gonna work on your *eyes*. Your eyes are the most important thing.'"

"He told me, 'You can't eat late at night, or you'll get fat.'
I'm like: 'Why they put a light in the refrigerator then?'"



(Topic shift: Women are crazy)

"I found out women are crazy. Fellas, you know!
You sit there like: 'Man, my girl, we just can't get along.'
It's because she's crazy."

"Ask women! They'll tell you.
Any crazy women in here, make some noise!"

"You gotta be CRAZY to admit you're crazy!"

(Story about girl staying over)

"Had a girl come over once, late night, we were drinking.
I was trying to be nice — like: 'You shouldn't drive. Here's some sweats and a t-shirt — sleep here.'
She was like:
'Oh, you just wanna have sex with me!'
I'm like: 'No!'"

"She goes:
'You know what? I'm flipping it tonight. I'M gonna act like the guy and treat YOU like the woman!'"

"She shoved me on the bed and jumped on top of me.
I was like: 'I wonder where this is going...'
She goes: 'Shut the hell up!'"

"Afterward, she was like: 'Now I'm gonna play PlayStation for four hours and leave and never call you again.'
I'm laying there like... 'You don't even know how awesome this is right now!'"



(Topic shift: Bad neighborhoods and dating)

"Ladies, if you live in a bad neighborhood, *let people know*."

"Went out with this girl once, met her at a Mexican restaurant — but it was Black-owned.
Name was ‘Casa de Pookie’s.’"

"They threw gravy on my fajitas.
I was like: 'Just wrap my food up.'"

"Told her: 'I'll drop you off at your place.'
She says: 'Keep straight, make a right.'
We pull up — and she lives in the PROJECTS."

"No problem with that — but everybody kept walking around my car!"

"I said, 'You want me to walk you to your door?
WHO gonna walk me back to MY car?!'"

(Topic shift: Photos with thugs)

"I’m not taking any more pictures with thugs."

"Thugs never smile in pictures.
In New York after a show, these guys go: 'Yo, come take a pic!'"

"They all standing there looking HARD...
And I'm the only dude smiling like this [Deon smiles big]."

"Looked like *I* wanted the picture with *them*!"

(Topic shift: Michael Jackson)

"When Michael Jackson died, it was sad."

"My son was seven at the time.
Saw Michael's funeral on TV — picture of Michael on the screen — and asked:
'Daddy, who's that?'
I said: 'Michael Jackson.'
Then another picture popped up — he goes: 'Who's that?'
I said: 'Michael Jackson.'
Another one — 'Who's that?'
'Michael Jackson.'"

"My son looked at me like: 'You're kidding me!'"

(Topic shift: America used to be cooler)

"America used to be cooler.
Back in the 1950s — James Dean, Chevys, Levi's — everything was cool."

"Now too many laws mess up the coolness."

"You gotta wear a helmet, elbow pads, knee pads — just to ride a bike."

"Jaywalking laws?
I gotta stand at a corner and wait for a tiny white man symbol to tell me when to walk?"

"Meanwhile, there's a big colored hand telling me 'stop' — and I'm like: 'Come on brother, let me across!'"

Deon Cole exits to applause.

"Thank you all so much! Goodnight!"

✍️Exercise: Flip a Relationship Stereotype: How to Build a Bit

Building Blocks Template:

1. **Set up the traditional stereotype** ("Normally, we expect *this*...")
2. **Flip the roles** ("But imagine if *the other person* did it...")
3. **Describe the new behavior vividly** (paint the scene with small funny details)
4. **React to it in a relatable way** (how ridiculous/awkward would it be?)

10 Stereotypes + How to Flip Them for Comedy

Traditional Stereotype	Flipped Version
1. Men never ask for directions.	A woman stubbornly refusing GPS, claiming she's "navigating by intuition."

2. Women always want to talk about feelings.	A boyfriend crying because *she* forgot their "six-month talking anniversary."
3. Men don’t like shopping.	A guy losing his mind over a Bath & Body Works candle sale.
4. Women love planning weddings.	A groom who already picked color themes, flower types, and *crying over Pinterest boards.*
5. Men never listen.	A girlfriend zoning out while her boyfriend explains his feelings — and pretending to take notes.
6. Women are bad drivers.	A woman doing perfect NASCAR-style pit stops, and her boyfriend crashing the golf cart.
7. Men hate cuddling after sex.	A guy begging to cuddle all night, while the girl is like "*Get off me, it’s hot!*"
8. Women love gossip.	A group of guys dissecting celebrity drama more viciously than a Real Housewives reunion.

9. Men are obsessed with sports.	A woman screaming at a kid's T-ball game like it’s the Super Bowl — face painted and all.
10. Women are always the ones "overpacking" for trips.	A man showing up with 17 bags for a weekend getaway ("I need options, okay?!").

Quick Note on How to Use These:

Each flip creates a **contrast** that:

- **Surprises** the audience (unexpected behavior)
- **Feels relatable** (everyone knows the original stereotype)
- **Sets up vivid images** (the weirder or more exaggerated the reaction, the funnier it gets)



Overall Structures and Tropes Used by Deon Cole

Instructions:

Use the prompts below to create your own jokes following the structures Deon Cole uses in his stand-up. Be honest, exaggerate real situations, and have fun flipping expectations!

1. Fish Out of Water:

Describe a time you felt like the only person who didn't fit in. Make the misunderstandings bigger and funnier!

2. Role Reversal:

Take a typical 'male' or 'female' behavior and flip the roles. How would it look if the other side acted that way?

3. Petty Observations:

Pick a small everyday rule (like waiting at a red light) and act like it's the dumbest thing ever. Exaggerate why it bothers you.

4. Paranoia Escalation:

Tell a story where you got nervous over something silly. Keep exaggerating why it felt so serious.

5. Misguided Questions:

Imagine someone asking you for expert advice about something you know nothing about. What ridiculous advice would you give?