



"You're not going to keep improving if you're comfortable... you can become complacent in comedy."

-- Dan Soder

How to Write Comedy Like Dan Soder



My Thoughts:

Right away after watching Dan Soder I was like, "He plays it safe." His premises are relatable, but he plays it safe, so he'll never really stand out.

And that's okay. But I think that's all his comedy will ever be is "okay."



*“All comedy starts with truth.
But the level of truth you’re willing to say determines how far you go.”*

Dan Soder has been doing comedy since about 2006. He’s at the 20-year mark.

What’s kept him from reaching a level of stardom of a Dave Chappelle, Bill Burr, Louis CK?

Last week, we spent some time writing jokes from different comedic perspectives, like:

What if you did this like Bill Burr?

What if you did this like Rita Rudner?

What if you did this joke like Dave Chappelle?

Now it’s what if you did this like Dan Soder?

But we’re also going to explore the contrasts of these other comics compared to Dan Soder, so you can see where the differences are.

Superiority as a Laughter Trigger

Bill Burr makes the audience laugh by making them feel superior to people who do things stupidly.

Dan Soder makes them laugh by making them feel superior to the fact that he doesn’t do anything that well.

Persona:

Underachiever without being a total buffoon.



George Carlin: *"There's a line. Cross it."*

So Let's Take a Look at Some Dan Soder

▶ **Get to Know Dan Soder in Six Jokes**

▶ **Dan Soder in Philly on a Thursday**





Start by being Honest.

“You know what it is? I just realized that I have a very (Shane Gillis Gesture) medium sex drive.... And that’s okay.

SAME PREMISE → DIFFERENT COMICS

PREMISE 1: “People use meditation apps”

Dan Soder (Inward / Self-Target)

“I downloaded a meditation app... got mad at how calm the guy sounded. Like don’t talk to me like that—you don’t know what I’ve been through today... I almost went to the gym.”

Laughter Trigger: Superiority (at *him*)

Audience thinks: “*That’s me.*”

Bill Burr (Outward → Then Self)

“A meditation app? You need an app to sit quietly? What happened to you? You got a phone telling you how to breathe—‘Inhale... exhale...’ Yeah, thanks Siri, I almost died in my living room.

And I’m yelling at these people... meanwhile I tried it once and lasted like eight seconds.

So now I’m mad... and bad at relaxing.”

Laughter Trigger:

- First: Superiority (*look at these idiots*)



- Then: Flip → Self-awareness (*I'm one of them*)

That's Burr's move:

Attack → Realization → Shared failure

George Carlin (System / Philosophical)

"We now have apps to teach us how to do nothing.
That's how far we've come... we need technology to help us sit still.
People used to call that 'being alive.'"

Laughter Trigger: Superiority + Recognition

Audience thinks: *"That's true... and ridiculous."*

- Truth
- Attitude - Angle - Emotion
- Exaggeration
- Act-Out
- Tag or Topper

Look for the irony, the paradox or the hypocrisy.

PREMISE 2: "Trying to eat healthy"

SODER (Self)

"I eat one salad and immediately think my life is turning around.
Like I'm in the mirror like, 'This is it... this is the new me.'
By 4pm I'm eating chips like I'm honoring the old me."



Laugh = *personal delusion*

BURR (Outward → Self)

“You ever see these people that eat healthy all the time?
They got their meals prepped, drinking green sludge... smiling like they figured life out.

Meanwhile I’m looking at a salad like it insulted me.
I eat one and I’m like, ‘Where’s the rest of it?’”

Laugh =

- First: *those people are ridiculous*
- Then: *I’m worse*

CARLIN (System)

“They sell you food now that tastes like punishment... and call it progress.
If it was really good for you, you wouldn’t need discipline to eat it.”

Laugh = *truth about the system*

PREMISE 3: “Waking up early”

- Truth
- Attitude - Angle - Emotion
- Exaggeration
- Act-Out
- Tag or Topper

Look for the irony, the paradox or the hypocrisy.



SODER (Self)

“I tried waking up early... I felt like I was breaking into my own life. Nothing good happens at that hour for me... I’m not built for that shift.”

Laugh = *identity mismatch*

BURR (Outward → Self)

“I don’t trust people that wake up early smiling.
You ever see that? 6am, they’re chipper—what are you hiding?”

Meanwhile I wake up like I got drafted into the day...
I’m brushing my teeth like, ‘I didn’t agree to this.’”

Laugh =

- First: attack morning people
- Then: self as victim

CARLIN (System)

“Morning people are just people who accepted the schedule.
They didn’t beat life—they adjusted to it. That’s not an accomplishment. That’s a compromise.”

Laugh = *reframing social norm*

PREMISE 4: “Self-improvement”



SODER (Self)

“I downloaded a self-help app... and immediately resented it.
Like don’t tell me to grow—I liked me five minutes ago.”

Laugh = *resistance to change*

BURR (Outward → Self)

“All these self-help people... ‘You gotta grow, you gotta evolve.’
Evolve into what? Another guy reading books about himself?

I bought one of those books... read three pages... got mad at how right it was.”

Laugh =

- First: mock the culture
- Then: admit he’s stuck in it

CARLIN (System)

“Self-help... isn’t that a contradiction?
If you’re helping yourself... you didn’t need the book.”

Laugh = *logical dismantling*

Soder = “Laugh at me”

Burr = “Laugh at them... then realize it’s you”

Carlin = “Laugh at the system you’re trapped in”

“Superiority laughter needs a target.

The only question is—who takes the hit first?”

- Soder: *I’ll take it immediately*



- Burr: *You take it... then I admit I'm part of it*
- Carlin: *The whole system takes it*

10 DAN SODER-STYLE PREMISES

1. "I always think I'm gonna turn my life around on a random Tuesday."
2. "I don't trust anyone who actually enjoys working out."
3. "I like the idea of being disciplined... I just don't like doing disciplined things."
4. "I'll ruin my whole day just thinking about something slightly embarrassing I did ten years ago."
5. "I always order like I'm trying to impress the waiter... and then regret it immediately."
6. "I don't want to cook—I want to have cooked."
7. "I act like I'm one good decision away from becoming a completely different person."
8. "I hate when apps try to improve my life... like relax, I downloaded you out of desperation."
9. "I don't actually want advice—I want confirmation that I'm right."
10. "I'll spend hours avoiding something that would take five minutes to do."

Truth, Attitude, Exaggeration, Act-out



Attitude
Exaggeration
Act-Out

The theory I had about Dan Soder's material kind of proved itself with his last video clip which seemed flat, but the laughter seemed sweetened.

▶ Dan Soder: On The Road | Full Stand Up Comedy Special

The bits are missing something. I think stakes are missing from the bits and a real protagonist or antagonist. They're funny ideas but don't have us rooting for someone to win so we as an audience don't really feel invested.

Soder doesn't seem to like to take risks. In my opinion I think that removes any friction or conflict. Every story has to have some kind of conflict.

Go back and look at Premise 4 above. Notice how Carlin's voice ends with that unassailable truth.

Self help? Isn't that a contradiction? If you're helping yourself, you didn't need the book.

It's the logical dismantling that demonstrates the truth. That's where the real joke is because it makes people say, "That's so true. I never thought about it that way."

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