



"He's the best observational writer in the game right now." -- Anonymous

How to Write Comedy Like Joe List



INTRO: Who is Joe List?

Joe List is one of the most respected stand-up comedians working today—and a key member of what fans call the “**Podcast Bros**” generation of comics, alongside names like Mark Normand and Sam Morril.

He co-hosts the long-running podcast **Tuesdays with Stories** with Mark Normand, which has built a loyal following over hundreds of episodes and helped define a modern wave of comedian-driven content.



Let's take a look at some of his material:

▶ **Joe List: I Hate Myself - Full Special**

Pay attention to how he opens.

He acknowledges the way the audience reacts to the intro which instantly builds community, yet he still talks past them not directly at them. He doesn't do crowd work with them.

But immediately starts to examine the audience's response.

Where does his material come from?

I think a lot of his material forms from his interactions on his podcast appearances. He talks about it there then refines it and brings it to stage.

Joe List represents a modern evolution of stand-up:

- Built a career through **podcasts + YouTube specials**
- Focuses on **precision writing over big theatrics**
- Turns **small, personal discomfort into consistent laughs**
- Known for what he calls a **“small ball” approach**—not flashy, but highly effective

Core Mechanics - Start Small (Minutiae Over Grand Ideas)

Joe List doesn't start with:

- Politics
- Society
- Big philosophy



He starts with:

- Airports - under the radar stuff. Not broad.
- Therapy
- Conversations
- Social mistakes

👉 **Rule: If it feels too small... you're on the right track**

The “Joe List Formula”

Small Observation

- **Personal Discomfort**
- **Logical Reframe or Substitution**
- **Understated Act-Out**
= **Strong, Reliable Joke**

Reframes simple ideas, then escalates with an act-out.

Some ideas are not even literally true, but philosophically or imaginatively (especially when he exaggerates by making them bigger than they are) in our minds, they are.

It's not what it is, it's how I feel about it. And I'm going to express it out loud.

It's like, Here's how the world is. Here is what we all see. Here's how I see it.

Joe also moves through the bit with, if this is true the way I see it, this other thing should also be true. Basically it's an if, then statement. Then he'll usually add an act-out.

He's kind of an every man. But then he reframes it to a new level.



For example the OCD bit is a perfect slice of reframing.

Let's take this bit he does on OCD and break down what he does:

I'll tell you what's good about therapy. You get a diagnosis, you find out what's going on. Like what's wrong, you know? Like we're all fucked up, you know? You go to therapy, you get a diagnosis.

Like I have OCD, obsessive compulsive disorder. Which is fine. I'll just say "I have it."

Some people word it differently. Some people will say this: "I am OCD. You ever meet those people? Like, "I gotta go wash my hands. I'm OCD."

That triggers my OCD because I'm like, you're not saying it properly. I guess it sounds normal because you hear it, so it sounds normal, **but watch when you replace it with something else.**

"I gotta go wash my hands. I'm genital herpes."

See how that... (PAUSE, LET'S THE AUDIENCE CONFIGURE, THEN IF THIS IS TRUE, WHAT ELSE IS TRUE? DO YOU IDENTIFY AS GENITAL HERPES? HOW DO YOU INTRODUCE YOURSELF?)

HE SAID / SHE SAID (FORM OF COMPARE & CONTRAST)

Like. I'm sorry you have Gen--.

"No, no, I am genital herpes. It's who I am. Call me Jen for short. It's very serious."

Simple Truth -

https://youtu.be/odtAJ2kPdqc?si=oYba0L_Uq5B5s2WW&t=1636

Time Stamp: 27:16

This is where Joe List takes a He said / She said with his dentist. Argues with his dentist the dentist insists that the cost for a root canal is not 3000 dollars and



then in the end the math ends up at exactly 3000 dollars. This is a simple truth-comedic irony situation where the average man is able to prove the perceived authority wrong. (Benign Retaliation).

Watch the story play out and see all the jokes Joe List makes getting to the point of the story. Then, write your own story that is like this story where a clerk, doctor, boss, principal, store manager, cop, judge tells you one thing and you go through a series of moments that comes to a solution where you wind up being right.

Here's mine:

I was sued by a law firm in San Diego for an ADA violation because two of my videos on my website did not have captions. Therefore, according to them, I denied hearing impaired people access to my enjoy the content of my website. I was, in turn, discriminating against hearing impaired people. They were suing me for 12 to 48 thousand dollars.

One of my arguments to the judge was that I held up my iPhone and I said, "Your honor, members of the jury. The phone is the building." They looked at me like I was an idiot. So I repeated that line, "The phone is the building." Now keep in mind, I'm not an attorney.

The only other time I ever argued a case in front of a judge was when I was cited for rolling a stop sign. I won that one. So in my view I NEVER lost a case. It was only one case, but I was batting a thousand and I was probably the winningest attorney in that courtroom at that moment.

So they were looking at me when I said, "The phone is the building." Then I said, "say I was a chiropractor and I had an office inside an office building and the building did not provide ramps for people in wheelchairs, would the chiropractor be liable for this ADA violation? Or would the owner of the building be in violation of ADA? Especially if I had informed the building owner that he was not compliant and a structural fix was beyond my control?"



The judge said, “it’s not as simple as that but theoretically you did what you could to make your business compliant, so you would probably be indemnified, but what does this have to do with your website’s videos not having captions? I said, The phone is the building. The device is responsible for providing access for people with impaired hearing. It already has screen readers for people who are blind, but failed to help people who are hearing impaired. Therefore the device should provide captions to anyone who receives audio whether it was from a phone call or video from a chiropractor’s website inside (POINTING TO MY PHONE) the building.

They stared at me for what seemed like a full minute. In reality it was probably 4 seconds. (HOLD THAT TENSION)

Bottom line is: I was fined 12 thousand dollars. My point is. Don’t be a dumbass like me and argue a case if you’re not a lawyer.

Actually I won the case because I provided reasonable accommodations, but that’s not as funny. 😂

Internal Dialogue

<https://youtu.be/odtAJ2kPdqc?si=yHNIQCwQrI2xd1Rh&t=264>

Time Stamp: 4:24

If you watch the special from the beginning Joe List does a bit on going to the airport. He mentions that at La Guardia they were playing Guns & Roses “Welcome to the Jungle.”

Notice that when Joe List does his material it’s always some background situation that’s happening underneath the broader concept.



- Most comics would do a bit about flying, airport wait times, security, TSA, etc.
- List does a bit about the music that's playing throughout the airport.

Your Turn.

Write a scenario:

- At the airport
- On a date
- At the doctor

Now write:

- 👉 What you SAY out loud
- 👉 What you're THINKING internally

That gap = comedy

Like, right off the top of my head, if I was writing about being on a date. I would talk about choosing a nice restaurant to impress my date and then being served a salad with Arugula and just pretending to know what arugula was. Then getting this leafy green salad and realizing that there is no manly way to eat arugula and how self conscious I would feel.

She's like, "You wanna share some carpaccio?" I'd be like "Sure, that's perfect!" because I'm Vegan and I have no idea what carpaccio is."

What you're goal is:

Choose a common topic.

1. Make it smaller
2. Add discomfort
3. Find the phrasing issue



4. Add substitution or role reversal
5. Add act-out

👉 Show them how quickly it builds

Remember comedy is about just trying to get from point A to point B and encountering obstacles.

✍️ **Exercise 3: “Say it Wrong”**

Your Goal:

Find the funny in phrasing mistakes

📝 **Instructions:**

Write 5 sentences people commonly say:

- “I could care less”
- “Literally dying”
- “I’m OCD”
- My mother, I love her to death.”
- I had to wake up at 3am in the morning.
You know, as opposed to 3am in the evening.

Now:

👉 Reframe them for explicitly what that phrase is saying.

Then:

👉 Exaggerate the stakes or consequences by putting yourself on the line le:

- Trying to impress a date.
- Applying for a Job
- Taking a cognitive or IQ test.



BONUS: Show how the irony of what transpires gives you a big win in the end by having the person judging you become the antagonist so that when you do win in the end we feel gratified.

FINAL TAKEAWAY

Joe List proves you don't need big ideas to get big laughs...
you need sharp observation, clean structure, and the courage to admit how uncomfortable you are.

Get personal 1 on 1 Coaching with Jerry just follow [this link](#) to learn more!

