



HOW TO WRITE COMEDY LIKE JERRY SEINFELD

THE OBSERVATIONAL COMEDY WORKSHEET

From “Is This Anything?” to a Finished Bit

NAME:

DATE:

THE GOAL

Do not imitate Seinfeld’s voice. Borrow the process: notice the tiny thing, question it, look behind the scenes, step it out, find the irony or paradox, build jokes and act-outs, then search for a callback that makes the whole bit feel inevitable.

- ☐ Keep your antenna up for language, behavior, rules, products, customs and tiny annoyances.
- ☐ Capture the idea immediately. A weak note you save beats a brilliant premise you forget.
- ☐ Ask questions before demanding a punchline.
- ☐ Stay in the bit. After the first laugh, ask: What else is true?
- ☐ Write toward recognition: “That’s so true — I never thought about it that way.”



THE SEINFELD WRITING APPROACH

The course frames Seinfeld's comedy as a learnable process rather than a mysterious gift. The engine begins with curiosity, confusion, frustration, hypocrisy, ridiculousness, an odd word or a tiny nuance. From there, the writer interrogates the premise and explores what is really happening.

STAGE	QUESTION	JOB
1. NOTICE	Is this anything?	Capture what antagonizes, confuses, amuses or intrigues you.
2. QUESTION	What's really going on here?	Challenge the accepted explanation; find the angle.
3. STEP IT OUT	Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?	Explore consequences, responses, senses, opposites and behind-the-scenes logic.
4. BUILD & CLOSE	What else is true? How does this come back?	Add jokes, act-outs, analogies, irony/paradox and a callback/close.

Your Seinfeld Antenna

During the next 24 hours, collect at least 10 possible premises. Do not write jokes yet.

Something confusing:

A phrase people say that is not literally true:

A rule that seems ridiculous:

A product claim or advertisement:

A tiny behavior everybody does:

A social custom we blindly accept:



Something hypocritical:

A word or phrase that sounds funny:

Something from childhood:

A moment that made you think, "Really?":



WORKOUT 1 — “IS THIS ANYTHING?”

Pick five items from your antenna list. Your job is not to prove they are funny. Your job is to identify why your brain stopped on them.

Premise 1

The thing I noticed:

What antagonized me? (curiosity / confusion / frustration / hypocrisy / ridiculousness / funny sound):

My immediate reaction — “Really?” / “Why?” / “Who does that?” / “That doesn’t sound right because...”

Premise 2

The thing I noticed:

What antagonized me? (curiosity / confusion / frustration / hypocrisy / ridiculousness / funny sound):

My immediate reaction — “Really?” / “Why?” / “Who does that?” / “That doesn’t sound right because...”

Premise 3

The thing I noticed:



What antagonized me? (curiosity / confusion / frustration / hypocrisy / ridiculousness / funny sound):

My immediate reaction — “Really?” / “Why?” / “Who does that?” / “That doesn’t sound right because...”

Premise 4

The thing I noticed:

What antagonized me? (curiosity / confusion / frustration / hypocrisy / ridiculousness / funny sound):

My immediate reaction — “Really?” / “Why?” / “Who does that?” / “That doesn’t sound right because...”

Premise 5

The thing I noticed:

What antagonized me? (curiosity / confusion / frustration / hypocrisy / ridiculousness / funny sound):

My immediate reaction — “Really?” / “Why?” / “Who does that?” / “That doesn’t sound right because...”



Choose the One With Heat

The premise I most want to explore is:

I care about it because:



WORKOUT 2 — THE QUESTION ATTACK

Use Seinfeld-style opening questions to attack the premise from several directions. Do not answer too quickly.

Do you ever notice...

How come nobody notices...

Can someone explain...

Can someone tell me why...

Who are these people...

Why do we do this...

Are they trying to fool us...

What are they really saying...



What's really going on here...

If this is true, what else is true...

Find the Angle

The question that opens the funniest door is:

My angle — the specific point I want to prove:



WORKOUT 3 — STEP OUT THE IDEA

Interrogate the premise. The transcript repeatedly stresses Who, What, Where, When, Why and How, plus sensory details, impact, consequences and responses.

WHO is involved or affected?

WHAT exactly happens?

WHERE does this happen?

WHEN does it happen?

WHY do we do it?

HOW does it work?

HOW does it affect me?



WHAT happens next?

WHAT would the response be?

THEN what would I say to that?

Sensory Specificity

What do I SEE? (colors, shapes, objects, expressions)

What do I HEAR? (exact words, sounds, tone)

What do I SMELL / TASTE?

What does it FEEL like? (texture, temperature, physical sensation)



WORKOUT 4 — BEHIND THE SCENES

One of the course's central Seinfeld techniques is to imagine the hidden meeting, thought process or conversation that must have produced the thing you are observing.

What is the official explanation for why this exists / happens?

What do I suspect is REALLY going on?

Who was in the imaginary conference room / marketing meeting / planning session?

What was the first absurd suggestion?

Who approved it — and what did they say?

What problem did they think they were solving?

What unintended problem did they create?



Act It Out

CHARACTER 1:

CHARACTER 2:

Write 6–10 lines of the behind-the-scenes conversation:



WORKOUT 5 — THE SIMPLE TRUTH & LANGUAGE AUTOPSY

Listen literally. Seinfeld repeatedly mines colloquialisms, product claims and familiar phrases by asking what the words actually say — not what we casually assume they mean.

Phrase / slogan / sign / product claim:

What people THINK it means:

What it LITERALLY says:

What is implied that nobody usually examines?

Use “as opposed to...” to expose the hidden opposite:

What is the simplest, most obvious truth hiding inside the language?



Word Surgeon Pass

Write the joke/premise in its current form:

Now remove every word that is not necessary to understanding or triggering the laugh:

Which exact word carries the irony, surprise or recognition?



WORKOUT 6 — GO DEEPER: IRONY & PARADOX

In the course, “deeper” does not necessarily mean more personal or serious. It means finding the irony or paradox inside an ordinary subject.

What two opposing ideas are both present in this premise?

How can BOTH be true at the same time?

What does society SAY this is?

What does our actual behavior reveal it is?

What is great about it?

What sucks about it?

Write the paradox as one clean statement:



Rotate the Premise

The YES / in-favor version:

The NO / against-it version:

The opposite version is funnier because:



WORKOUT 7 — HUMANIZE THE NON-HUMAN

The course highlights Seinfeld's habit of imposing a human thought process on animals and objects, then acting out what they might be thinking.

Choose an animal, object, machine, food, sign or product:

What does it physically experience that humans rarely think about?

If it understood the situation like a human, what would confuse it?

What would it WANT?

What would it FEAR?

What would it COMPLAIN about?

What would it say to another one of its kind?



Write the act-out:



WORKOUT 8 — ANALOGY: WHAT IS THIS REALLY LIKE?

Seinfeld often uses analogy to connect the ordinary thing to a second, dissimilar world. The comparison creates incongruity and gives the bit new imagery.

Subject A — the thing you are talking about:

List 10 traits / associations / actions / words connected to Subject A:

What other world, job, machine, sport, relationship, institution or ritual shares one of those traits?

Subject B — the unexpected comparison:

A is like B because:

Now make the comparison more specific and visual:



Write one tag that refers back to the analogy later in the bit:



WORKOUT 9 — CHILDHOOD & RECOGNITION

The course points out Seinfeld's frequent return to childhood and common-realm experiences. Use memory to trigger recognition, then find the adult logic hiding inside the childhood behavior.

A tiny thing everybody did as a kid:

A rule adults gave us that made no sense:

A toy / snack / school ritual / family ritual:

What did I believe then?

What do I understand now?

What part of the memory is instantly visual?



What line would make another person say, “I did that too!”?

Recognition Line

Write the cleanest “That’s so true” observation:



WORKOUT 10 — LIVE IN THE BIT

Do not leave after the first joke. The course emphasizes staying in the emotion and asking what happens next, what else is true and how the characters respond.

First joke / first laugh:

TAG 1 — If that's true, what else is true?

TAG 2 — If that's true, what else is true?

TAG 3 — If that's true, what else is true?

TAG 4 — If that's true, what else is true?

TAG 5 — If that's true, what else is true?

What is the emotional point of view I should keep playing?

What is the next logical response?



What would I say back?

Where can I add an act-out instead of explanation?



WORKOUT 11 — BUILD THE CALLBACK

Callbacks create coincidence and irony by making an earlier phrase, image or analogy suddenly useful again at the end.

Strong phrase / image / word from the beginning of the bit:

Strong analogy or act-out from the middle:

What later situation could unexpectedly make that phrase relevant again?

Callback attempt #1:

Callback attempt #2:

Callback attempt #3:

Best close — the version that makes the audience feel the circle snap shut:





WORKOUT 12 — THE FULL SEINFELD-STYLE BIT MAP

Use this page to turn one observation into a complete 2–4 minute bit.

1. IDEA / OBSERVATION:

2. WHAT ANTAGONIZES ME?:

3. OPENING QUESTION:

4. ANGLE — WHAT I'M REALLY SAYING:

5. WHO / WHAT / WHERE / WHEN / WHY / HOW DISCOVERIES:

6. SIMPLE TRUTH / LITERAL LANGUAGE:



7. IRONY OR PARADOX:

8. BEHIND-THE-SCENES SCENE:

9. ANALOGY / INCONGRUOUS COMPARISON:

10. ACT-OUT:

11. FIRST PUNCHLINE:

12. TAGS — WHAT ELSE IS TRUE?:



13. CALLBACK / CLOSE:



WORKOUT 13 — WRITE FROM PROMPTS

Choose any five. Spend 10 minutes on each. The point is to practice the process on ordinary material.

1. Self-checkout asks you to do the employee's job, then asks whether you want to donate money.
2. Restaurants call food that is not on the menu a "special."
3. Airplane boarding groups somehow make everyone stand up earlier.
4. A phone says "Face ID failed" as though your face performed badly.
5. Hotel checkout is at the exact time you finally got comfortable.
6. The grocery-store impulse-buy section assumes we lose all judgment within ten feet of a cashier.
7. Apps ask whether you are "enjoying" the app while interrupting you from using it.
8. A package says "easy open" directly above the part nobody can open.
9. People say, "Can I sneak by?" immediately before announcing themselves.
10. The phrase "free trial" sounds less free the moment they require a credit card.
11. The remote control is designed to control everything except where the remote control is.
12. We say we are "killing time" and then complain that life is too short.

Your Five

Prompt #1 chosen + first Seinfeld-style question:

Prompt #2 chosen + first Seinfeld-style question:

Prompt #3 chosen + first Seinfeld-style question:



Prompt #4 chosen + first Seinfeld-style question:

Prompt #5 chosen + first Seinfeld-style question:



FINAL REVISION — THE WORD SURGEON CHECKLIST

- ☐ The premise is based on something recognizable.
- ☐ I know exactly what antagonizes / intrigues me.
- ☐ I ask a question instead of merely stating an opinion.
- ☐ I explored Who, What, Where, When, Why and How.
- ☐ I found a specific nuance rather than staying broad.
- ☐ I examined the literal language.
- ☐ I found the simple truth.
- ☐ I tested the opposite / negative version.
- ☐ I found irony or paradox.
- ☐ I looked behind the scenes.
- ☐ I used imagery or sensory detail.
- ☐ I found at least one act-out.
- ☐ I tested an analogy or incongruous comparison.
- ☐ I stayed in the bit after the first laugh.
- ☐ I wrote at least three tags.
- ☐ I looked for a callback / coincidence close.
- ☐ I cut unnecessary words without cutting necessary clarity.
- ☐ I can identify WHY each laugh should happen.
- ☐ The finished piece sounds like ME — not like an imitation of Seinfeld.

THE 5-MINUTE DECONSTRUCTION DRILL

The course recommends transcribing only about five minutes of a favorite comedian at a time. A smaller sample makes the structure and process easier to see.

Comedian / clip:

Premises I noticed:



Questions the comedian asks:

Structures / laughter triggers I can identify:

Act-outs / analogies / callbacks:

One technique I will borrow as a PROCESS — not a voice:

DAILY PRACTICE

For seven days: collect 5 observations a day, choose 1, ask at least 10 questions, and write for 15 minutes without demanding a finished joke. Writing begets writing.

DAY	5 IDEAS	10 QUESTIONS	15 MIN.	BEST DISCOVERY
1				
2				
3				
4				
5				
6				
7				



NOTICE SMALLER. QUESTION HARDER. STAY LONGER.