



How to Write Comedy Like Bill Burr



Bill Burr has quickly become one of my favorite comedians. He's intelligent. He's crafty, and the dude is wickedly funny!

He's narrowed down his demographic to mostly male 18-44. Although he can resonate with a broader demo, this is his core.

Burr has balls because even in our overtly politically correct world, he tackles issues that can cause a rift; mostly with women.

Grab Burr's latest comedy DVD "You People Are All The Same" [Here](#). (C'mon people! It's Five Bucks!)

But he's no different than any other comedian who gets laughs. Where the laughs are you will find him using a variation of the 12 Comedic Structures and the 8 Major Laughter Triggers, that I teach in my [comedy classes](#) and breakdown in my [e-Book](#).



I'm going to approach the first few minutes of this bit of Bill Burr's, almost line by line, and offer suggestions as to why the bits work so well. This way you can see how the things I teach, work. Even in a rant-style like Burr's.

Play the video then and follow along with the with assessment and PLEASE leave comments. Even if you disagree. We're here to learn!

Here we go:

Performance Technique

First of all pay attention to Bill's technique. His point of view is clear. He's a Cynic with a capital 'C.' But what makes it work is that he keeps this wicked, mischievous smile all the way through. CLASSIC! It's his way of saying to his audience, "I don't take myself too seriously: notice the funny here folks!"

It's that smile that makes him likeable. Kind of the guy you want to have a beer with.

Structure

I've spent a lot of time arguing that structure is key to getting laughs. Bill uses structure just like any other comic. He just finesses it and disguises it, as you would disguise exposition in a script.

Below we'll go line-by-line. Bill Burr's lines will be in yellow. My running commentary (if you give a shit) will be in blue.

"I'm afraid to get married, man:

Perfect. Sets up dilemma. Even though I'm up here on stage, I have fears too. Plus it's very conversational. When it's a conversation, the punch usually comes with more surprise because we're not expecting a joke.

"What man wouldn't be afraid to get married at this point? Look at Kobe. Look at the shit he's going through right now.





Audience laughs. Why? Surprise and Recognition We recognize Kobe and his situation while at the same time we're surprised that Burr would choose Kobe Bryant as a guy we should empathize with.

Guy's gettin' a divorce: his wife is gonna get seventy million bucks: never hit a layup in her life:.

Audience laughs. Why? Recognition, incongruity and simple truth. By saying, "never hit a layup in her life," he puts an instant image of Kobe's wife in our minds doing a layup! For some of you, your image may have her in a Lakers' uniform. That's both recognition and incongruity, because our minds probably see her as the wife of an NBA star and not in a sweaty jersey and Burr puts her there in there on the boards at the base of the paint, doing a layup. He paints this incongruous picture for us and we laugh. Also, it's simple truth. Burr has taken the complex issue of legally awarding Alimony and narrowed it down to: "she never hit a layup in her life." True and Simple.

NOTE: You'll notice that Bill Burr is an avid sports fan. Within his act you'll find multiple sports analogies, euphemisms and metaphors.

We continue:

Can anyone explain these divorce settlements? Can anyone make sense of them? Tiger Woods' wife: Two Hundred and fifty million dollars! She's a babysitter! Worth a quarter of a billion fucking dollars!"

Two fascinating things going on here. The incongruity that befalls on the fact that a babysitter is getting two hundred and fifty mil is funny because of the huge incongruity, but this audience pulls back a little. But Burr uses this tension build to challenge the audience and further make his point. Notice: He's still smiling!

"Somebody explain this. Justify it. Justify it! What? He cheated on her? I don't give a fuck! I don't give a fuck! He cheated on her. The relationships over right there. Kobe cheated right? Shouldn't that relationship been over right then? Why did she hang out for three years like some jaded cop trying to get her fuckin' pension? Right? Get that ten years in?"

Audience Laughs. Why? Give you one guess; ANALOGY drives the INCONGRUITY. Here he even uses the "is-like" formula to get the incongruity in place. "Why did she hang out for three years like some jaded cop trying to get her fucking pension?" Once he set up that incongruity play, then audience laughs. Then he tags it with "Get that ten years in:"

NOTE: You should take note that Burr laughs out loud at this point. Keeping the flavor of the entire show in a humorous light. Cynical, but humorous! Brilliant! It's theater science that *the*



audience is in whatever state the performer is in, so when Burr laughs he keeps the audience in a humorous mood.



"I don't know maybe that's too harsh, but that shit bothers me man! Dude, there is an epidemic of gold-digging whores in this country."

Audience Laughs and Applauds.

Why? The statement is surprising and a bit shocking. It's simple truth (based on the information he's given us up to this point). Burr also sets up his dilemma of still trying to figure this shit out with "I don't know. Maybe that's too harsh." So he's never saying, "This is the only truth and if you don't like it, get the fuck out." It's more like, "I'm still trying to figure this

out too!" Whenever I hear this line it reminds me the way George Carlin used shock and exaggeration by opening with the line: "You ever notice that women who are against abortion, are women you wouldn't want to fuck anyway?"

"... and every night I put on the news and I'm waiting for someone to address it. Every night. Never see it. Y'know? And every night, I bring up 'gold-digging whores' and the whole crowd pulls back like I'm talking about 'Bigfoot,' right? Like I'm saying the moon is made out of cheese or somethin.'

Audience Laughs. Why? Recognition and Release. Release; He spent time talking about gold-digging whores and built up tension. Steve Martin said that comedy is about tension and release. Well he builds up tension and then points out that the audience is pulling back, "like I'm talking about Bigfoot." Notice he uses "like" again. Doing a comparison to something unrelated and something we recognize. We also recognize the situation when someone starts talking conspiracy that people tend to pull back.

I'm talking about whores people! They're everywhere!

Shock value (Surprise). And notice he delivers this harsh line while he sporting that wicked smile. It's brilliant incongruity. You ever see a movie where the villain is spraying the bank with machine gun fire while the soundtrack is playing some playful circus music like "Entry of the Gladiators." Same cool technique. Like a point-counterpoint in music. He saying a harsh phrase while wearing a smile. Awesome!



How many? How many more great men are gonna get chopped in half before we do somethin'? (Pause) Why is it so quiet in here?!

This is awesome RELEASE! Using the audience's own political correctness tension and just putting it under a spotlight by acknowledging the tension *with the smile!* Gets the audience to release that tension. This is how powerful RELEASE can be. There's a wave of energy from the audience!

NOTE: In later specials from Burr, he would use "Why is it so quiet in here?" anytime the audience wasn't responding the way he expected them to. This says to me that he doesn't quiet get the Release theory. He just thinks the words "Why is it so quiet in here?" are somehow funny. (Interesting, right?) He could use any kind of release comment, like:

"I think that joke needs a punchline."

"About when did I lose you people?"

"I'm pissing you off right now aren't I?"

"Am I feeling tension in the room?"

Emotion

One thing you notice with Burr, is that his emotions are always clear. You know exactly how he feels about what he's talking about. This is very important in stand-up comedy. That's how a performer connects to his audience; through emotion. Even if an audience doesn't agree with your ideology, they can still relate to the way you feel about it and recognize that, because they've felt that same way about something in their lives too.

I'm not calling any woman in here a whore. So don't pull back. That's not fair. If you brought up 'wife-beaters' I wouldn't pull back. I get it. There's guys hittin' women and they need to be stopped. But you gotta understand that gold-diggin' whores are the wife-beaters for men.

Audience Laughs. Why? INCONGRUITY. When Burr says, "you gotta understand that gold-diggin' whores are the wife-beaters for men," Isn't that like saying "are like the wife beaters for men?" So he's juxtaposed the two elements. They laughed at that incongruity. Now he'll tag it with something from the wife beater section that we all recognize and give us an act-out:

"Yeah! They are! Except, we don't have that lumped up Rihanna photo in the end. (ACT-OUT: a quick act-out of a mangled face).

But it's not obvious. It's in the eyes. It's in the lines in your face. It's in Mel Gibson's





high-pitched voice on the answering machine, (ACT OUT: Mel Gibson on the phone): "I had to give up my Laker Tickets!" That is the sound of a man who's being taken for everything he's got."

Audience Laughs. Why? RECOGNITION. Men experience abuse too in different ways. This compare and contrast and Recognition drives the point with laughter. AND they recognize the Mel Gibson phone message that got so much play on the news. Then he tags it. By reminding us what it is. Classic act-out structure; tell us what you're going to tell us. act it out. then tell us what you just told us.

"I've got to tell you. I'm envious of women. I'm not saying your problems get solved, but at least they're taken seriously. You know? You got one-eight-hundred numbers, you got ribbons: there's groups. People give a shit. Anything happens to a guy it's just considered funny. Some woman cut her husband's dick off, threw it in the garbage disposal and turned it on. People thought it was hilarious. They were like, 'Hey Stumpy!' Nobody cares!"

Several laughs here. Why? Let's look at simple truth and recognition; "You got 1-800 numbers, you got ribbons: there's groups. Both factual (simple truth) and recognizable. But the bigger laugh comes with the compare and contrast "Anything happens to a guy it's just considered hilarious!" Then Hey Stumpy! INCONGRUITY/ACT-OUT (Dynamic Shift) What do you call a guy who had his dick cut off? "Stumpy."

But the big laugh comes in the next few lines where Burr uses a three-way build-up (triple) and recognition combined. Huge laugh! Because it escalates. The three-way build-up creates tension and the recognition pulls out the stops and BOOM! **Laughter and applause.**

"You think if a guy removed a woman's titty and threw it in the drier, anybody would be jokin' about it the next day? The entire country would grind to a halt, there would be a moment of silence: (here's the third of the 3-way build) The N.F.L. would have a special-colored headband everybody would have to wear"

When he says that line about the "special-colored headband:," do you get a clear image of the pink ribbons, etc. that the N.F.L. players wear during 'Breast Cancer Awareness Month?' That's definitely recognition at work!

Listen closely to Burr's use of the phrase "is-like." He uses analogies a lot. He often compares one thing to another then puts them both together, then often escalates that analogy in what is known as an incongruity/act-out.

Throughout the entire video he uses that powerful comedy structure. My favorite part is when he gets to the end of the act (right about the 11:15 mark) he compares a man's dick to a third-base coach, waving in base-runners.



Take a look and see Burr's brilliant use of this comedy structure and he pays it off and closes his set. Awesome!

Texture and Persona

Also, listen to Burr's use of the language. He spits out metaphor and euphemism keeping the sentences interesting and edgy. Listen when he talks about Schwarzenegger. "*Why do you think she hooked up with him? Because of that nineteen eighties flat-top he's still rockin'?*" Burr accomplishes two things in this sentence; He mocks Schwarzenegger and also keeps it interesting with the choice of words.

Conclusion

Burr uses a variation of several comedy structures in his act, combined with his wicked smile and his commitment to his emotional point of view. He also takes on this challenging subject matter with a challenging ideology. This drives anxiety in the audience, creating tension. If you have tension sometimes all you have to do is acknowledge the reality that the tension exists and the audience will release it by laughing.

I still use that technique. When I talk about issues or deal with a crabby heckler and I feel like the audience is tense and quiet. I simply say something like, "*Does anyone else feel the tension in this room?*" or I laugh through the end of this line: "*Is it me or did it just get really hot in here?!*"

These are simple comedic devices you can use to release tension that builds up in the audience. Bill Burr uses it masterfully!

If you take anything away from this video, take away Burr's use of analogy to create humorous opportunities, (the "is-like" or variations thereof).

Burr uses it like his clutch-hitter in the line-up; when he needs the bases cleared and a big laugh to take him to the next segment, he brings in the big bat (incongruity/act-out) and he swings for the fences.

Apply these concepts yourself in the exercises below.

And don't forget to grab Burr's Comedy DVD. It's a brilliant lesson in finessing structure.



Paper Tiger

Confidence:

27:57 - Bill Burr has confidence. And communicates with the audience. In this little segment watch Burr deal with the moment of silence. He gets a “whoop” from someone in the audience and just describes the moment.

This is a sign of a pro. Someone with experience. He just sort of puts into words the simplicity of what’s happening.

Taking Action: Use the Step Process Below to Build Your Own Bill Burr Style Rant

Four Big Step to Writing a Frustration Driven Rant

Exercise 1: What’s Already Eating You Up?

Goal: Find ten topics that trigger an immediate emotional point of view, then turn one into the opening of a rant.

Step 1 — List ten irritations. Choose specific behaviors, rules, or contradictions rather than broad subjects. “People who take a video call on speakerphone in a restaurant” gives you more to play with than “technology.”

Step 2 — Give each topic a grievance. Complete this sentence ten times:

“What drives me crazy about _____ is that _____.”

Step 3 — Pick the one you can’t calmly explain. Say your grievance aloud as if a friend has just defended the behavior. Write the first three lines *at that temperature*. You’re already frustrated when the bit begins; the audience is catching up to why.

Step 4 — Find your part in it. Add one honest admission: “And the worst part is, I _____.” That gives the rant somewhere human to go when you build the comparisons.



TEST: Read all ten openings aloud. Circle the one where your voice changes before you try to add a punchline. Use that topic for the analogy stack, compare-and-contrast, and three-way buildup exercises.

Burr's frustration has **a clear emotional point of view**, but the laughs come from structure: an everyday dilemma, an unexpected comparison, a recognizable image, and a release of tension. Have students choose a subject they actually care about. They should be able to finish this sentence before writing a joke: **"What drives me crazy is _____ because _____."**

1. Stack analogies to prove one point

Goal: Make several comparisons serve the same complaint, with each one raising the stakes.

1. Write a specific frustration: "My gym makes canceling a membership ridiculously hard."
2. State the point you want the audience to accept: "They treat leaving like a crime."
3. List ten unrelated worlds where that point could also be true: prison, a cult, airport security, a hostage negotiation, and so on.
4. Pick three comparisons that escalate. Write one or two lines in each world, then return to your original point.

Starter: "I tried to cancel my gym membership. First they treated me like _____. Then it was like _____. By the end, _____."

Revision test: If an analogy makes a different point, cut it. The stack should feel like mounting evidence from a person who is losing patience.

2. Compare, contrast, then implicate yourself

Goal: Build a complaint around an unfair difference while showing the audience your own flaw.

Choose two situations that receive very different reactions. Fill in:

	Situation A	Situation B
What happened?		
How do people respond?		



What detail makes that response visible?		
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Write the complaint in three moves:

1. **Comparison:** “When *they* do it, everybody ____.”
2. **Contrast:** “When *I* do it, suddenly ____.”
3. **Self-deprecation:** “To be fair, I ____.”

The third move matters. It lets the audience see that the speaker might be part of the problem. Try topics such as lateness, parenting advice, customer service, or how people behave at the airport.

3. Build a three-step escalation

Goal: Move from plausible to excessive to a vivid, recognizable payoff.

Start with one small irritation. Write three consequences, each larger than the last:

1. **What would realistically happen?**
2. **What would happen if everyone overreacted?**
3. **What specific public ritual, institution, or image would appear if the overreaction became absurd?**

For example, don’t end at “the whole country would care.” Ask what people would *actually see*: a commemorative badge, an emergency press conference, a special uniform. Make the third beat concrete enough to picture.

Read the three beats aloud. If the second gets the biggest laugh, either strengthen the third or put the strongest image last.

4. Turn the rant into a performance

Goal: Let the frustration rise without losing the audience.

Take the best material from the first three exercises and draft a 60–90 second bit using this sequence:

1. **Dilemma:** “Here’s what happened, and here’s why it bothers me.”
2. **Reasonable attempt:** Show yourself trying to solve it.



3. **Escalation:** Add a comparison, a stacked analogy, or a three-step build.
4. **Audience check:** Acknowledge how unreasonable you're beginning to sound.
5. **Final image or act-out:** Show the ridiculous consequence.
6. **Release:** Admit the small, embarrassing truth about yourself underneath the anger.

Mark where your voice gets louder, where you pause, and where you allow yourself a smile or laugh. Then perform it twice: once at full frustration and once as though you're trying very hard to remain polite. Keep the version where the audience can still follow your point.