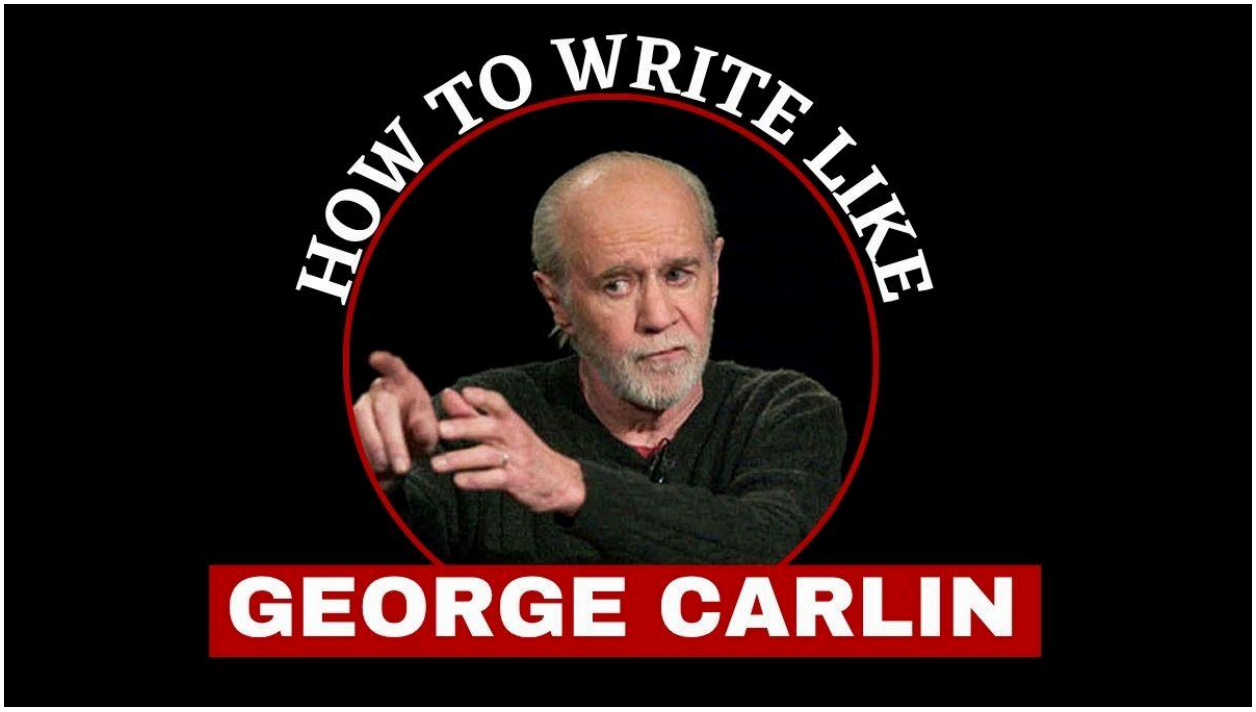
“Whoever said money can’t buy happiness simply didn’t know where to go shopping”
-- Bo Derek

How to Write Like George Carlin



Course Outline & Writing Worksheet

1. The Carlin Approach: Funny, Ideas, and Language

The class presents three levels of creative development:

1. **Funny:** Learn to recognize and construct laugh opportunities.
2. **Funny with good ideas:** Give the audience an observation, question, or perspective worth considering.
3. **Funny with good ideas and compelling language:** Express those ideas with precision, imagery, rhythm, and memorable phrasing.

Carlin's work brings these elements together. The idea gives the routine substance. The structure creates the surprise. The language and performance make it land.

Core question: What am I helping the audience notice that they haven't examined this way before?

2. Start with What We Have in Common

A major starting point in the transcript is the **common realm of knowledge**: experiences, phrases, and behaviors the audience already recognizes.

Useful sources include:

- Everyday habits we perform without thinking.
- Small embarrassments we rarely discuss.
- Human flaws—including our own.
- Childhood games, rules, sayings, and rituals.
- The exact phrases people use in conversation.
- Familiar situations in which our behavior makes little sense.

The walking and Monopoly examples demonstrate how much material can exist inside an ordinary experience.

Writing principle: Replace broad subjects with observable behavior.

"People are impatient" is broad.

"People press the elevator button again even though it is already lit" gives the audience a picture.

3. Stay with One Idea: The Five W's Plus How

Carlin's thoroughness is a central theme of the class. Instead of abandoning a subject after the first observation, examine it from several directions.

Question	What to investigate

Who?	Who does this? Who behaves differently? Who benefits?
What?	What exactly happens? What objects, words, or actions are involved?
Where?	Where does it happen? How does the setting affect the behavior?
When?	What happens before, during, and afterward?
Why?	What does the person want? What explanation do they give themselves?
How?	What are the physical steps, gestures, sounds, and rituals?

Look for comparisons, contradictions, consequences, and details you can demonstrate.

Development question: If this observation is true, what else might be true?

4. Find the Inconsistency

Inconsistency is one of the most important words in this class.

Search for the gap between:

- What people say and what they do.
- What a rule promises and what it produces.
- How people judge others and how they excuse themselves.
- What a phrase intends and what its words literally mean.
- What an institution claims to value and what it rewards.

The driving example discussed in class exposes the driver's self-serving standard: other people's speed is judged against their own.

That approach becomes especially useful when the speaker admits participating in the behavior.



Writing principle: Name the contradiction precisely enough that the audience can see it.

5. Put the Observation into an Act-Out

An act-out lets the audience watch the behavior unfold.

Rather than explaining that someone keeps checking an appliance, demonstrate the checking, the hesitation, the intervention, and the disappointment.

Act-outs can:

- Make a small behavior visible.
- Establish an expected response.
- Heighten a contradiction.
- Create a second laugh from an observation.
- Reveal what someone says versus what they are thinking.

Writing principle: Establish the normal behavior clearly. Then introduce the unexpected response.

Play the situation with conviction so the surprise has something solid to break.

6. Question the Language

Carlin's interest in words continues throughout the approaches covered in the class.

Literal interpretation / Simple Truth
Take language we normally accept figuratively and examine what it actually says.

"As opposed to?"
Question a modifier or claim by imagining its opposite.

Collocations
Examine words commonly used together. Some combinations contain redundancy or an assumption worth questioning.

Cliché reformation
Begin a familiar phrase, then replace its expected ending.

Cliché take-off
State the complete phrase, then add a comment that challenges, contradicts, or reinterprets it.

Comparison and contrast
Use matching phrasing to establish a pattern, then reveal a surprising difference.

Sound and rhythm
Choose words for meaning and delivery. Alliteration repeats initial consonant sounds; assonance repeats vowel sounds. Parallel phrasing and repetition can also give a passage momentum.

7. Turn Frustration into Comedy

The class emphasizes using what bothers you as material.

Start with an actual frustration, then investigate the behavior, rule, or contradiction behind it.

Ask:

- What specifically bothers me?
- What does the person or institution claim?
- What happens in practice?
- What example makes the problem visible?
- Where is the absurdity?
- How am I implicated in this?

The performance discussion includes **“raise the bridge”**: lift the eyebrows and explore an expression of disbelief, curiosity, or amused confusion.

Experiment with how that changes the invitation you give the audience. Keep the emotional point of view, while making room for them to enjoy the absurdity with you.

8. Build the Bit and Polish the Delivery

Use the class's development goal: **find at least three laugh opportunities before leaving the idea.**

Those opportunities might come from:

- The initial observation.
- A revealing detail.
- An act-out.
- A comparison.
- A tag commenting on the previous line.
- A topper heightening its absurdity.
- A final reversal or resolution.

Give the routine a rise and fall. Shared experiences and silliness can help reconnect the audience during more challenging material.

Then rehearse. Precise wording, clear enunciation, and confidence with pauses help the audience follow the idea in real time.

Writing Worksheet

Name: _____
Date: _____

Goal: Use the exercises below to develop one original two- to three-minute routine.

The examples below are original practice examples, not George Carlin quotations.

Exercise 1 — Ten Observations, One Deep Dive

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Purpose: Find recognizable behavior and uncover material by examining its details.

Step 1: List ten observations

Begin each with:

“Did you ever notice…?”

Write behaviors people can picture. You are collecting raw material; every item does not need a punchline yet.

Possible starting points:

- Checking a phone immediately after putting it away.
- Pressing an already-lit elevator button.
- Preparing to leave, then starting another conversation.
- Opening the refrigerator again without adding any food.
- Quietly rehearsing an order before reaching the counter.

My ten observations:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Step 2: Choose one and investigate

My observation: _____

Who does it? _____
What exactly happens? _____
Where does it happen? _____
When does the behavior change? _____
Why do we think it helps? _____
How do we physically do it? _____

Step 3: Find the comic gap

What are we trying to accomplish?

What are we actually accomplishing?

Example:

“You press the elevator button again. It’s already lit. You’re not requesting an elevator anymore. You’re leaving a negative review.”

Step 4: Develop three laugh opportunities

Initial observation or punchline:

Tag or additional detail:

Act-out or topper:

Target: One developed premise with at least three potential laughs.

Exercise 2 — The Inconsistency Investigation

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Purpose: Turn a frustration into a specific contradiction the audience can recognize.

Step 1: List five things that bother you

Choose rules, expectations, claims, or behaviors.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Step 2: Pick one and identify the gap

My subject: _____

What they say or claim:

_____

What they actually do:

_____

The specific example that exposes the contradiction:

_____

Example:

“A fictional workplace says, ‘We respect your time.’ Then schedules a mandatory hour-long meeting to explain how to make meetings shorter.”

Step 3: Find yourself in the problem

When have I done something similar—or helped the system continue?

_____

Example addition:

“I accepted the invitation immediately. I didn’t want them thinking I wasn’t committed to having fewer meetings.”

Step 4: Build the sequence

Write:

1. A clear statement of the claim.
2. An example that contradicts it.
3. Your reaction.
4. A tag that heightens the contradiction.
5. An act-out of someone defending the behavior.

My draft:

Target: A short bit that makes a point through examples and surprise.

Exercise 3 — Put Familiar Language Under a Microscope

Suggested time: 25 minutes

Purpose: Find joke possibilities inside language we usually accept without examination.

Step 1: Collect five complete phrases

Use advertisements, workplace language, slogans, idioms, or familiar sayings. Record the wording accurately.

Possible practice phrases:

- “Your call is very important to us.”
- “We are experiencing higher than normal call volumes.”
- “Please allow three to five business days.”
- “We’re all one big happy family.”

- “Think outside the box.”
- “Good things come to those who wait.”
- “If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again.”

My five phrases:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Step 2: Explore three approaches

A. “As opposed to?”

Question one word or claim by imagining its opposite.

Example:

“‘Carefully selected ingredients.’ As opposed to what? Whatever stuck to the chef’s shoe?”

My version:

B. Literal interpretation / Simple Truth

Describe what the words would mean if taken literally.

Example:

“‘Think outside the box.’ You hired me, assigned me a cubicle, and immediately started complaining about my location.”

My version:

C. Reformation and take-off

Use the same saying to write both forms.

Reformation example:

“Good things come to those who wait. Additional fees come to those who wait too long.”

Take-off example:

“They say, ‘Good things come to those who wait.’ The dentist kept me waiting forty minutes. Then I got a root canal.”

My reformation:

My take-off:

Step 3: Develop the strongest line

Where would someone say this? _____
Who would say it? _____
What response would they expect? _____
What unexpected response can I give? _____

Add one act-out and two tags.

Target: Three joke drafts and one developed exchange.

Exercise 4 — Build a Carlin-Inspired Routine in Your Voice

Suggested time: 30 minutes, plus rehearsal

Purpose: Combine observation, inconsistency, language, and performance into one cohesive bit.

Step 1: Choose your strongest premise

My premise:

My emotional point of view:

Be specific: baffled, suspicious, embarrassed, exasperated, delighted by the absurdity, or another emotion.

What I want the audience to notice:

Step 2: Build five beats

Beat	Writing task
Recognition	Establish a familiar experience or phrase.
Investigation	Reveal a detail people normally overlook.
Contradiction	Show where the behavior or explanation stops making sense.
Heightening	Add a comparison, consequence, tag, or act-out.
Resolution	Finish with the strongest laugh or a final line that brings the idea together.

Include at least three potential laugh points, one act-out, and one detail that reveals your own involvement or flaw.

Step 3: Polish the language

Replace vague words with specific images.

Plain version:
“They make canceling difficult.”

More specific version:
“To cancel, I need my account number, my childhood address, and a signed statement from the printer that no longer works.”

Look for rhythm, parallel phrasing, or repetition that strengthens the idea.

A sentence I can sharpen:

My revised sentence:

Step 4: Rehearse two deliveries

Perform the routine first with frustration, then with amused disbelief. Try the raised-eyebrow approach discussed in class.

Listen for:

- Which delivery communicates your point most clearly.
- Whether the act-out is easy to follow.
- Words that sound written rather than spoken.
- Punch words that need clearer enunciation.
- Places where you rush past a laugh opportunity.

What I changed after rehearsal:

Target: One rehearsed, original two- to three-minute routine.

Final Revision Checklist

- Have I given the audience a recognizable starting point?
- Have I explored the details rather than stopping at a broad complaint?
- Is the inconsistency clear?
- Have I created at least three laugh opportunities?
- Does the act-out reveal something beyond the explanation?
- Have I included myself where appropriate?
- Does each tag develop the same idea?
- Is the language specific and easy to understand aloud?
- Does the ending resolve or heighten the premise?
- Does the routine sound like something **I** would say?

Practice Assignment

Over the next week, collect **one behavioral observation and one exact phrase each day**.

Choose the strongest pair, investigate them using the Five W's plus How, and develop a new bit. Record your rehearsal or performance, review where the audience recognized the behavior, and revise where the idea or wording became unclear.

Get personal 1 on 1 Coaching with Jerry just follow this link to learn more!

