



How to Write Like Jim Gaffigan

Jim Gaffigan is one of the top 10 highest-paid comedians in the U.S. In 2017 He made 30.5 million dollars. That's just a shade behind Kevin Hart. Gaffigan's material is mostly about fatherhood and food, but Gaffigan is one of those comedians who can take anything and everything and make it funny. He's also a clean comedian.

Gaffigan started in show business by pursuing acting. He moved to New York in 1990. He worked during the day, took acting classes at night, then went and did mics late into the night. He would often fall asleep at work the following day. He claims that his bosses had to wake him up so they could fire him.

Style:

Gaffigan is an observational comedian. He takes nuances and familiar situations, exaggerates them then drives the humor through act-outs of characters. He uses a dumb-guy character much like Brian Regan and a voice of conscience (that sounds like a grandmother judging him) who makes regular appearances in his act.

Early Career:

During the first six or seven years of his career, Gaffigan tried various styles, characters, and impressions, including trying to be the angry comedian. He auditioned for Late Night with David Letterman multiple times over the course of six years until he finally landed a spot on the show. After that, his career took off.

By 2015, Gaffigan had made multiple appearances at big events, but it was his appearance at the Festival of Families, a Catholic event in Philadelphia that had a huge impact on his record sales. Gaffigan was the only comedian on the bill and there were more than a million people who attended that event. Gaffigan was so popular doing his clean style of comedy that Pope Francis wanted to meet him.

As of June 2016, Gaffigan was the most popular comic on all of Pandora.com with over 647 million spins.

One of the things you might notice about Jim Gaffigan is that he loves to talk about food. This fits into my theory on making primal choices in your content. People respond to content that relates to:

- Food
- Money
- Survival
- Sex
- Lifehacks
- Childhood
- Reminiscence
- Love
- Relationships

Hampton Stevens of the Atlantic Wrote a piece saying that Gaffigan brings a vital element to stand-up that Lenny Bruce had taken away-- *“the indispensable, but apparently forgotten idea that comedians have no obligation to be provocative, topical, socially conscious, or anything else but funny”* Which is one of the stupidest things anyone has ever said about comedy since clean comedians like Jerry Seinfeld, Jeff Foxworthy, Larry the Cable Guy, Rita Rudner, Brian Regan, were already killing it in their careers with clean, unprovocative comedy.

But there’s more to Jim Gaffigan than just being clean. So let’s dig into the mechanics of how he writes his material and see if some of the take-aways can help inspire you and your comedy writing.

Video Review:

We'll take a look at a couple of Gaffigan's videos. In the chat I want you to brainstorm and identify what you see. Well, occasionally stop the video and discuss.

I want you to keep an eye out for Gaffigan's

- Patterns
- Study his setups
- Look for:
 - Double-entendre plays
 - 2 dissimilar ideas converging
 - Assumptions that can be turned into reverses
 - How he takes the main elements of his premises and steps each one of them out with a unique perspective.
 - How Gaffigan looks for inconsistencies
 - Also identify his topic (subject), angle, and punchlines.

Gaffigan: Beyond the Pale :

2010: Jim Gaffigan - Beyond the Pale - Hot Pockets

Perspective: This is already a famous bit. But watch how Gaffigan take this premise and treats it like a wet towel and wrings it out for everything he can get out of it. This is 2010.

Let's look at the Hot Pocket bit 2 years earlier. (Gaffigan had been doing the bit at this point for at least a couple of years)

 Jim Gaffigan's Original Hot Pockets (Dave Letterman)

 Why Is There So Much Spousal Murder on "Dateline"? - Jim Gaffigan: Quality Time

Gaffigan in 2017: "When your wife has a brain tumor it makes it impossible to win an argument."

 Losing Arguments with Your Wife After Her Brain Surgery - Jim Gaffigan

0-3:22 | To the End

Pay attention to the callback at the end to tie up that particular sub-segment.

Perspective:

- The audience already knows and loves Jim Gaffigan.
- The audience is more emotionally connected to Gaffigan because they are already huge fans. The audience would have an emotional reaction to anyone that announced that their wife/husband had a brain tumor, but the reaction is heightened with Gaffigan due to how much and how many people already rever him

Structure:

Simple factual setup: "It's been a crazy year for me, crazy year. (hook) I don't know if you know this but in April it was discovered that my wife had a brain tumor (outside force imposing an obstacle). **I'm not even making this up...** it was removed, she's great everything's good. (cheers).

Then Gaffigan responds to the cheers with ambivalence. *"I didn't remove it. I was just sitting in the other room soiling myself."*

But the tumor is gone, along with my ability to ever win another argument. (The audience imagines themselves in the same situation with their spouse).

ACT-OUT *Well you know I did have a tumor.*

COMPARE & CONTRAST: *What about my seasonal allergies?*

PRESENTS A FACT FROM THE SURGEON: *"The tumor was the size of a pear"*

Are there 2 dissimilar ideas converging?

Tumor/Surgery/Doctor - Fruit

Cynical Tie-in of the two elements: *Did he go to med-school or a farmer's market?*

Now Gaffigan continues with the two dissimilar ideas. *Tumors are often compared to fruit... a pear, a grapefruit, a lemon...*

JOKE: *Interesting fact: worst tumor? Grapefruit. Worst Fruit? Grapefruit.*

Drop in the chat: What laughter triggers are activated with this line?

Take a look at this line right about the 3:40 mark:

"I joke around but we have five children. There were moments where I was like 'Oh my gosh, If anything happens to my wife those five kids are going to be put up for adoption.'"

Drop in the chat: What laughter triggers are activated with this line?

6 minute mark:

Transition, dynamic shift, get the audience to participate, People who work in hospitals are truly amazing people aren't they? People in Hospitals are so nice right?

In the writing:

As we covered in the How to Write Great Setups Class last week, setups have 3 elements:

1. Topic (Subject)
2. Angle
3. Punchline

Gaffigan takes the biggest ideas from this story. The moments that stood out to him then fleshes them out, gives them substance, but then looks at the opposite, or ambivalent, (cynical) approach.

FACT, TOPIC, SUBJECT: *People in hospitals are so nice...* (how do I feel about that?)...

ANGLE: that's a little suspicious isn't it?

Why?

How?

Insert cynicism, ambivalence, opposite of expected...

PUNCHLINE: *They have to be taking some of those drugs, right?*

TAG, TOPPER, ACT-OUT:

They're a little too excited to be around sick people in pajamas, right? (Is there a double-entendre play? Are there two dissimilar ideas converging? Is there an assumption that can be shattered?) Double entendre.

Finesses it: *And when I say "sick" I'm not talking about the positive slang, right?* (INSERT ACT-OUT: DOCTOR USING POSITIVE SLANG)

Key Take-Aways:

- Compares & Contrasts
- Reverses
- Incongruities
- Looks for inconsistencies
- Ambivalence
- Reverse
- Incongruity Act-Outs
- Self-deprecation
- If this is true, what else is true?
- Looks at the simple breakdown of the concept and juxtaposes an element from that list to the main idea
- Reverse: 3:40
- Identifies the inconsistencies (Irony, Coincidence, Paradox)
- Does a character act-out often making himself the butt of the joke
- Uses his voice of conscience to beat the audience to the punch. (Like Carson used to self-deprecate after a joke)
- Utilizes callbacks
- Uses the listing technique (Hospital bit)

If there are two things you should take away from Gaffigan to apply in your act what would they be?

1. Asides
2. Incongruities and Inconsistencies
3. Imagery (Brands)
4. Act-outs
5. Callbacks