



Most comedians try to think of something funny. Mitch Hedberg takes a moment and thinks “what if this moment happened in a completely different situation.”

What if I could take different words, phrases and statements from real life and look at them in a different way?

If we looked at things in a different way what would they be?

How to Write Comedy Like Mitch Hedberg



Bio

A quick Wikipedia intro can tell you a lot about a comedian. They can also reveal things YOU can do to achieve similar success...



Hedberg began his stand-up career in Florida, and after a period of honing his skills, he moved to Seattle and began to tour. He soon appeared on MTV's Comikaze, followed by a 1996 appearance on the Late Show with David Letterman that brought him his big break. He won the 1997 grand prize at the Seattle Comedy Competition. The next year he appeared in an episode of Fox's series That '70s Show.

97 He did the Seattle Comedy Competition and won the grand prize. That got him noticed and probably got him representation.

Representation:

Hedberg's longtime manager was [3 Arts Entertainment](#).

Watch

You really have to watch Mitch Hedberg in order to get him:

▶ Mitch Hedberg: Classic Set at Just For Laughs from 2001!

▶ Mitch Hedberg Early T.V. (1995) stand-up Early Persona was more direct, but didn't have the quirky personality of the later persona.

It's probably the clearest difference between a comedian's persona when he's first starting and his persona after it has been developed and refined.

Genres

- Observational comedy
- Surreal humor
- Word play



- Non sequitur
- One-liner
- Deadpan

Laughter Triggers

- Coincidence
- Recognition
- Surprise
- Embarrassment
- Superiority

Key Structures

- Superiority
- Observation/Recognition
- Wordplay / Double-entendre
- Simple Truth
- Irony
- Reverse (Paraprosdokians)

Observation & Wordplay & Compare and Contrast, Reverse Techniques (Paraprosdokians)

- "If I am reading this graph correctly—I'd be very surprised." —Stephen Colbert
- "If all the girls attending the Yale prom were laid end to end, I wouldn't be a bit surprised." —Dorothy Parker
- "On his feet he wore ... blisters." —Aristotle
- "I've had a perfectly wonderful evening, but this wasn't it." —Groucho Marx



- "My uncle's dying wish was to have me sit in his lap; he was in the electric chair." —Rodney Dangerfield
- "I like going to the park and watching the children run around because they don't know I'm using blanks." —Emo Philips
- "I haven't slept for ten days, because that would be too long." —Mitch Hedberg
- "I sleep eight hours a day and at least ten at night." —Bill Hicks
- "I don't belong to an organized political party. I'm a Democrat." —Will Rogers
- "War does not determine who is right—only who is left." — Bertrand Russell
- "On the other hand, you have different fingers." —Steven Wright
- "Outside of a dog, a book is man's best friend. Inside of a dog, it's too dark to read." —Jim Brewer, sometimes attributed to Groucho Marx

Persona & Style

Mitch Hedberg is a classic study in applying your persona to your humor. In fact once you can grasp the Mitch Hedberg persona you can kind of see where the jokes and quirky observations come from. The persona actually helps the jokes make sense.

Hedberg's persona is like, Maybe-I'm-stoned-maybe-I'm-not. (He definitely was)

It's kind of like the old Foster Brooks drunk character and the Dean Martin drinking character traits.

The drunkenness is recognizable and them being drunk allows the audience to feel **superior**. The drunkenness or the persona driving the drunkenness allows these characters to have a more creative license for material that might typically elicit a groan from an audience



▶ Dean Martin - Comic Banter in London (Just watch 5-10 minutes to get the gist)

▶ Foster Brooks Roasts Jimmy Stewart Man of the Hour (Just need a few minutes to understand the Foster Brooks character approach)

Add to that the inspirations of Stephen Wright and you get Mitch Hedberg.

▶ Mitch Hedberg: I Wish They Made Fajita Cologne | Late Night with Cona...
More refined persona.

One Key Mitch Hedberg Formula:

Observation + **Persona Filter** + **Wordplay** = Joke (+ ACT-OUT)

"An escalator cannot break. It can only become stairs."

Sometimes just stating the observation doesn't quite get to the joke, but if you run it through the Mitch Hedberg (Maybe-I'm-stoned-Maybe-I'm-not, filter), the observation becomes more plausible.

Step it Out Further (What if?)

"If this is true, what else is true?"

"What would happen if...?"

"An escalator cannot break. It can only become stairs... it doesn't have a sign that says, 'Escalator out of order' the sign only says, 'Escalator temporarily stairs.'"



Another technique Hedberg liked to use is to take **collocations** or **descriptive labels** and apply a **simple truth formula**.

That formula or process is a typical formula used by the most successful comedians.

Humans are very linear in their thinking. It's a scientific fact that the brain cannot multitask. It can only process one thing at a time. And the brain is designed to find the most efficient way to complete a task. This includes comprehending a sentence or a phrase. In the daily routine of life the brain will default to what it knows.

As clarification, think of driving a car. When you first learn to drive, you think of every step of the driving process. After you've been driving for a while, those steps aren't even conscious. They happen automatically.

So when we hear words or phrases used together, as with collocations, we take them for granted. We've seen, heard or used them so much they have become a habit. We don't stop to think about them. This is an advantage for the comedian. Because we can train ourselves to really dissect those phrases.

Collocations were a common wordplay device with Mitch Hedberg.

Collocations are defined as *the **habitual** juxtaposition of a particular word with another word or words with a frequency greater than chance*.

Remember, the audience's brain is linear. They've heard this collocation countless times. They just accept it as the words we use to define the size of a bed. They are not thinking about actual kings, but a comedian explores it just a little bit more.

King Sized Bed

- What does that mean?



- Is it for an actual king?
- What if... a king came over?

I got a king-size bed. I don't know any kings, but if one came over, I guess he'd be comfortable.

What if...?

What if a King came over?

Act-out:

Oh, you're a king, you say? Well, you won't believe what I have in store for you.

It's to your exact specifications.

If this is true, what else is true?

When I was a boy, I laid in my twin size bed and wondered where my brother was.

Let's Try It:

Hand Soap



Expand on the Idea

Associations/Ideas related to Hand Soap:

Hand Soap

Bar Soap

Body Wash

Shampoo... how come they don't call shampoo head soap?

Face Wash

Facial Cleanser

Opposites?

Hands / Feet

Face / Ass



Your Turn - Step it out Further

What's the difference between Hand Soap and Face Wash?



What if?

What if I washed my face with hand soap and washed my hands with face wash?

They have lots of soaps. Bar soap, liquid soap, soft soap, hand soap. They have a special soap just for your face. Face wash. I think you should use hand soap on your face, because your hands (show your palms) never get wrinkles.

You can expand on this concept further:

Take some time and walk through the entire process of using soap.

- On your Face



- On your hands
- Washing your body
- Your process in the shower

Let's Do Another



**Hand Sanitizer with moisturizers & Vitamin E
Kills 99.99% of Germs**

Do you see the potential for some kind of paradox here?

You have two contrasting opposing ideas sitting side by side. Moisturizers and Killing.

1. My germs are dead but soft and supple
2. Sure! Millions of germs get murdered but my hands stay soft & supple.

Look at the details of other collocations. Hedberg liked to take collocations, and wordsmith them. Remember the definition of collocations: *the habitual*



juxtaposition of a particular word with another word or words with a frequency greater than chance.

Still Others

Dinner Rolls
Breakfast Tea
Late Night Snack
Desk Chair
Laptop Computer
Home Work
Living Room

Can you think of more?

Crowd Work

Hedberg didn't do crowd work but he did do candid observations and self-deprecating jokes about himself and his jokes during his act. Hedberg could also riff for quite a while just improving on any stimuli that affected him. When he did shows that weren't televised he would go off-script and just riff on the stage and his surroundings.

Some of it was him and some of it was the drugs.

▶ Mitch Hedberg - University of Oklahoma - 2004 Watch Mitch Hedberg High AF on heroin and cocaine in this set he does at the University of Oklahoma.

Mitch Hedberg Quotes

- "I'm against picketing, but I don't know how to show it!"



- "You know, I'm sick of following my dreams, man. I'm just going to ask where they're going and hook up with 'em later."
- "An escalator cannot break. It can only become stairs."
- "I think Bigfoot is blurry. That's the problem. It's not the photographer's fault. Bigfoot is blurry and that's extra scary to me. There's a large, out-of-focus monster roaming the countryside. Run! He's fuzzy! Get out of here!"
- "My friend asked me if I wanted a frozen banana. I said 'No, but I want a regular banana later. So, yeah.'"
- "I used to do drugs. I still do, but I used to, too."
- "I haven't slept for ten days, because that would be too long."
- "The depressing thing about tennis is that no matter how good I get, I'll never be as good as a wall."
- "Every book is a children's book if the kid can read."
- "When I was a boy, I'd lay in my twin-sized bed and wonder where my brother was."
- "I like to throw a toothpick into the forest and yell 'you're home!'"

I got some tea called "Sleepy-time" tea. It's got Lavender and Chamomile
Then I got some Lavender Chamomile Hand Soap.

"I accidentally washed my feet with Lavender Chamomile Hand Soap. That explains why my foot keeps falling asleep."

These are, of course, works in progress. Listen to Hedberg then write your own ideas. When you practice these, you'll start to see them more regularly in your everyday life.

Have Fun!