“So if, if you've never, if you've never been to Mount Rainier, just a heads up, it's, uh, you gotta pay to go up. It's not a free mountain. Someone owns it and it's all uphill. It's a nightmare.”

How to Write Comedy Like Nate Bargatze



Background

Nate Bargatze has enjoyed a distinguished career in comedy, with several highlights marking his journey:

Origins:

Nate Bargatze started off in Chicago in 2002 and quickly became a fixture at The Boston Comedy Club in New York.

National Recognition:

Early in his career, he graced shows like Conan and The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon.

Accolades:

2013 was notable for him as he shined in Fallon's Clean Cut Comedy Tour and secured wins at both the New York and Boston Comedy Festivals.

Contributions:

He diversified his comedic talents by writing for the Spike TV Video Game Awards and performing for U.S. troops in Iraq and Kuwait.

Endorsements:

Big names like Marc Maron and Jim Gaffigan spotlighted him as a comic to watch.

Comedy Specials:

"Yelled at by a Clown" (2014): Debuted on the Billboard Top Ten Comedy Charts, reaching No. 2.

"Full Time Magic" (2015): Released alongside a Comedy Central special.

"The Standups" (2017): Featured on this Netflix series.

"The Tennessee Kid" (2019): An hour long special filmed near Atlanta, Georgia, for Netflix.

"The Greatest Average American" (2021): Filmed at Universal Studios Hollywood and aired on Netflix. It earned a Grammy nomination for Best Comedy Album in 2022.

"Hello World" (2023): Premiered on Amazon Prime Video, filmed at Phoenix's Celebrity Theater.

Records: He made history in 2023, drawing 19,365 fans to Nashville's Bridgestone Arena, a record breaking attendance.

Nate Bargatze's "Hello World" special on Amazon Prime broke the record for the most streamed special, beating Jim Gaffigan's Quality Time, released in 2021.

Media Praise: Nate was lauded as "The Nicest Man in StandUp" by The Atlantic in 2021.

Podcasting: Nate keeps fans entertained alongside comedians Dusty Slay, Brian "Breakfast" Bates, and Aaron Weber on The Nateland Podcast.

How Does Nate Bargatze Get Laughs?

The biggest question I get with Nate Bargatze is "how does he get laughs?"

He doesn't tell jokes.

My job in this course is to drill down to what makes Nate Bargatze tick and where he gets the laughs.

Persona

Bargatze is a perfect example of the comedian whose material is character dependent. Without this character, this material would just sit there on a page, look and read flat.

Here's his trick. Bargatze plays the buffoon. He's a Larry The Cable Guy type of performer. He's simple and the world is so overwhelming to him. He's impressed by observations that might seem otherwise mundane to most people. **This makes his audience feel superior.**

He uses a bit of hesitation in his speech sometimes which reminds me of Bob Newhart with his stammer. It's a character trait that reminds us that he's a simple guy.

Bargatze has been called one of the nicest guys in comedy. It shows on the the stage and in the beginning of his special, "Hello World," you see him come from backstage to the wings to the stage and there are his wife and his daughter. He kisses his wife and he does a kind of peekaboo with his daughter, then she announces him, "Ladies and gentlemen, here's my dad, Nate Bargatze." It's more than cute. It's refreshing because it underscores his character. He's not intro'd like a lot of these comedians with some rockstar or boxing announcer. It's simple and it matches and supports his character.

Remember you're performing even during your entrance. Bargatze captures this in his intro with this special.

His style is reminiscent of Jim Gaffigan and Jerry Seinfeld. He tells a story, then breaks down what happens into its simplest steps and shines a spotlight on where he went wrong or the main characters in the story went wrong.

Nate's success comes from his family friendly appeal. I think a lot of his success is a reflection of the times we live in. The country is so divided, we can't seem to get away from the discourse we see everyday in social media, and Bargatze just tells simple stories in a way that we can relate to.

Since Bargatze has the colloquial delivery. It's very conversational but it is designed to get laughs. He's not just telling the story HOPING there's going to be laughs. He's perfected his ability to recognize when the audience is going to laugh.

Let's look at this video clip where he talks about going to Shield's Sporting Goods store in Omaha, Nebraska.

Nate Bargatze - This Is Why America Is the Best

I was just in Omaha, Nebraska (CHEER) Alright. (Laugh). It's like he was saying "Alright, you're cheering for my itinerary."

Nate Bargatze Stand-Up On the Tonight Show Dead Horse

Reminds me a lot of Jerry Seinfeld; he uses recurring words and **situations that are familiar enough but not common enough that we think about them all the time.** Like how many people have seen a horse laying down and thought it was dead?

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Thank you. That's, uh, very nice. <laugh> uh, <laugh>. I,
uh, so I, uh, I was in Seattle recently and if you ever go
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to Seattle, they have a mountain. Rainier is, uh, about an hour away. It's the third biggest mountain in America. It's a good one to go to. I don't know who number one or number two is, but maybe one day it'll be number one. You know, <laugh>, uh, do mountains keep growing? I don't know. That's stuff that I don't know, but it's a good time to see it <laugh>. It doesn't have the attitude of a one or a two. So

I was with a buddy and we rented a car. He's driving on the way out there, I see a dead horse. I mean, just laid out in someone's yard. And I've never seen that before. And I was like, man, how bet you don't think about that when you buy a horse like it dying, like you don't fast forward that far. You know, that's a huge thing. Dying in your yard. That's the weight of a horse, you know? I mean, you can't just scoot it off into the woods with your foot and be like, let's try to get another one before the kids come home. You have to, you have to tell your wife to keep the kids away for a month. You gotta Google how to move a dead horse, <laugh>. You gotta possibly get another horse to help you do it. And that's, uh, that's not gonna be easy, you know? I think that's what the blinders are for. 'cause it's like, just look ahead. Don't worry about what's going on back here. <laugh>, or you gotta get, are you gonna get your friends to help you do it and you can't spill the beans too quick on that. You know, you think it's hard to get 'em to help you move a couch, try a dead horse, <laugh>. I mean, you gotta lie to 'em. You gotta just be like, we're getting a divorce. We hit each other. Just come over, bring your truck though. And,

And when they pull in there, uh, lemme tell you they're gonna see it. Alright? Everybody saw it, it was next to the road. So they're gonna pull into that driveway and be like, man, I don't think they're gonna divorce at all.

<laugh>,

I think we're here to move that dead horse is what I think. And I, I say, let's let him bring it up. Make him ask. But I will be shocked if we don't touch that dead

horse today, <laugh>.

And look, if you ever, if you ever have to move a dead horse, uh, I've clearly thought about it, <laugh>, and you want to be, you wanna be the first one to the horse. You don't want someone else to tell you where to grab a dead horse. So you just run out there like you love it, like it's the third one you've done that day and get to the hoofs and go ahead and start lifting and be like, you guys get where you guys gotta get some guys down there and let's just get it over with <laugh>. So at this point, uh, we're basically at Mount Rainier <laugh>, and that was the whole car ride, was that conversation, <laugh>. So if, if you've never, if you've never been to Mount Rainier, just a heads up, it's, uh, you gotta pay to go up. It, it's not a free mountain. Someone owns it and it's all uphill. It's a nightmare. So <laugh>,

We, we get up and we park and then we're like walking up this trail and I'm going up and I mean, I can barely breathe. And this couple's coming down and I like stopped him. I was like, Hey, is this like enough? Like where we're at? Like, you know, is this like, you get it? Like, we're not trying to live on this mountain, so is this good? You know? And the lady goes, I'm 75 years old and I did it. And I was like, maybe that's why you didn't hear the question that I asked. Because I mean, everybody's pretty cocky on the way down. You know, like <laugh>, there was women with babies, they had three month old babies strapped to their chest. I was like, why would you bring that much extra weight with you? I left my wallet in the car. I mean, they looked exhausted. I'm surprised they're not just babies left up there and rangers have to come down whose baby's this <laugh>? It's like, that's ours. We'll let it grow up and come down on its own. <laugh>. It was a huge mistake bringing that baby today, <laugh>. So we get, we get our picture and we come back down. So now we're driving back and, uh, since my buddy was driving, he did not, he did not see the dead horse the first time, you know? And I was like, well, you gotta see it, dude. You can't not see it. You know, that's all I've talked about. So

We, we get to the house, I kind of remembered where it was and we get to the house and I was like, it's right here. And I pointed and the horse was standing up doing unbelievable. I mean, it was one of the healthier horses that I've ever seen. And I, uh, and then I realized, you know what, I guess I've never seen a horse sleep either. So thank you guys so much

This is a classic example of observational and situational humor, combined with some elements of exaggeration and self-deprecation. Let's break it down:

One of Bargatze's favorite tropes is to take a situation (finding your horse dead) and walking through what needs to be done. There's incongruity involved because he's acting as if a dead horse is like a dead hamster, "you can't just kick it into the woods…"

Over-describe using simple truth or analogy. I'm dumb. How can I describe how dumb I am using an anecdote or imaginary "what-if" story.

Self-Deprecation: Throughout the bit, the comedian portrays himself as someone who's not particularly knowledgeable or perhaps a bit naive, particularly with lines like "do mountains keep growing?" or misunderstanding a sleeping horse as a dead one.

Observational Humor: Noting the everyday or seemingly mundane and drawing out its humor. For instance, the realization about mountains not being free or the absurdity of people bringing extra weight like babies on a hike.

Exaggeration: This is used to escalate the humor, as seen in the detailed and hilarious visualization of trying to move a dead horse, requiring the help of friends, another horse, and the whole "divorce" ruse.

Repetition for Emphasis and Incongruity: The repeated mentions of the "dead" horse anchors the story and provides a consistent touchpoint that builds anticipation. Like how often do you hear someone use the term "Dead Horse" in a sentence, much less have it repeat in a



story. The repetition trope is a common trope use by Jerry Seinfeld, especially early Jerry Seinfeld.

Misdirection: A classic comedy technique. The audience is led to believe one thing (that the horse is dead), only to have the story turned on its head at the end when it's revealed the horse was just sleeping. This unexpected twist elicits laughter.

Relatable Situations: The difficulties of hiking and interactions with overconfident people who've completed their hike (the 75-year-old woman) resonate with many people's real-life experiences, making it funnier.

Play on Perspective: The humor from the horse's situation primarily arises from the comedian's perspective. The entire story is based on his misunderstanding, highlighting the difference between reality and his perception.

Conversational Style: The bit feels like a story someone might tell you over coffee, adding to its relatability and charm. The frequent "you know?" check-ins serve to engage the audience, making them feel like they're part of the story.

Makes the Audience Feel Superior: Bargatze plays the dumb guy through all his bits. That's part of his persona. He talks about his weight, his lack of intellect, his unwillingness to engage in even the slightest conflict.

Surprise often Occurs as a Pattern Disruption:
When Bargatze is telling a story and has us flowing with him in the story his double entendres or his deviations and left turns to overly describe or discuss the situation and interrupt the perceived destination of the story (Like in the visit to Mt. Rainier) and deviating from that destination to talk about a dead horse, he uses a long-form pattern disruption.

The laughter points are interspersed strategically through the use of these techniques. Every time the story takes a slightly unexpected turn or a relatable observation is made, it prompts a laugh. The climax of the humor – the reveal of the horse being alive – is a perfect wrap-up, providing a satisfying end to the anecdote all while satisfying the aspect of a callback.

Let's take this joke:

Morty and Saul

Two pirates, Morty and Saul, meet in a bar. Sol has a patch over one eye, a hook for a hand, and a wooden peg leg. “Ye gads, matey,” says Morty. “What happened to ya?” Sol says, “Me pirate ship was attacked, and a lucky shot lopped off me leg. So now I got me a wooden peg.”
“And yer hand?” asks Marty.
“When me ship sank, a shark bit me hand off. So now I got me a hook.”
“OK, but what’s with the eye patch?”
“I was standin’ on a dock, and the biggest seagull I ever saw poops right in me eye.”
“But ya don’t go blind from no seagull poop.”
“True,” says Sol. “But it was me first day with the hook.”

Nate Bargatze on How To Order Artisanal Coffee

Nate Bargatze – Locked Out & Nakedust for Laughs Comedy Festival Dumb Guy Time Travel

Most of Bargatze’s stories start with something that was imposed on him by an outside force. It’s something that just happened to him on the way to just minding his own business. This is classic Charlie Chaplin stuff. Then he breaks it into details and takes some side trips kind over explaining the details.

Bargatze has that slight hesitation in his voice that reinforces to his audience that they are superior. He’s just trying to figure it out. Even if it’s just turning on a light in a hotel room, or ordering a cup of coffee.

Bergatze's Approach

Begatze uses a classic storytelling technique. He talks about some outside force imposing something on him, then tries to solve the problem (many times realizing that the problem was in his own imagination) through his "dumb guy" persona.

✍️Exercise

Write a short (100-300 words; 1-3 minutes) story about a fact that you read that could be relatable. Or a situation that you experienced. Something that was imposed on you.

- A fact
- A billboard or sign
- A surprise situation (like the horse)
- A visit to Starbucks, the mall, a grocery store or restaurant
- Cop pulling you over
- Court

Play it through the filter of naivete that Bargatze plays it through.

I saw a sign that said, "Watch the falling rock." It wasn't a request, it wasn't a warning, like "be careful of the falling rock." It was as if the falling rock was imminent. Like it was happening right now. Like "Watch your sister out in the yard, don't let her go into the street." It's like it's happening. Watch the falling rock. Watch it. It's like they know the rock is going to fall. Like if they know the rock is going to fall, why don't they fasten the rock up there in the first place so it doesn't fall at all.

Or if the rock falls, do they put the rock back up there? Because the sign's still there. Watch the Falling Rock. Like if you drive back the next day because we did, the sign hasn't moved. I guess that's why we have insurance. Like some people don't have insurance, but we're not going to talk about them. I'm not trying to say I'm better than them. I have insurance because I have parents.

You get insurance to help you when you have unexpected accidents. As opposed to expected accidents? Because if you're expecting an accident, it's not really an accident at all is it? It's, it's just something you chose to ignore. You knew it was coming, you expected it and you were like, Nah, I'm just gonna take a nap and let the insurance handle this. There is another kind of



accident though. I like to call it the unexpected, expected accident. That's like if you have an unplanned pregnancy. Well, not me. But like if you have a girlfriend. Or if you are the girlfriend. Again, not me. If you carry that child to term, that baby is sometimes called an accident. An unexpected accident. But during the 9 months of the pregnancy, you were "expecting" that "accident."

Which is why we have insurance. We can get State Farm, Allstate, Farmers. We can get Prudential. We get a piece of the rock to protect us against things like the falling rock.