Joke Writing 1-2-3

Go from premise to punch fast!

By Jerry Corley

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Introduction

One of the most common concerns I hear from humor writers and comedians is that they have days and sometimes weeks where they "can't think of anything funny." I thought to myself that I'm never without something to write or make jokes about. There's always something there, it seems. So I thought about how my mind comes up with stuff and I want to share it with you now.

Keep in mind, this is just ONE of the methods I use to find and develop comedy material. Here's the process:

I broke it down into steps and I'm going to give you that process right now. I'm calling it "JOKE-WRITING 1-2-3."

1. Start with ideas that are close to you. Look around you, think about your surroundings, situations, behaviors and ask yourself **3 questions**:

   1. What is new?
   2. What has changed?
   3. What have I acquired?

What's new? Every day is a new day. With all the holidays and special occasion days we celebrate in this country and worldwide, almost every day of every week gives us something to joke about. Did you know March 1st is National Pancake Day?

Of course, it is immediately followed by National Maple Syrup Day.

When you ask yourself these questions, don't leave anything out! Write it all down! Just looking in the mailbox, I'm sure everyone has acquired a cell phone bill, heating bill, water bill, cable bill, etc. If you have a new pair of sneakers, let's talk about them!

Too many comedians and humor writers stop too soon. They think, "there's nothing funny there. They don't take the time to write out everything about their sneakers and use their imagination to develop material. Every comedian and humor writer should be able to take ==any logical grouping of words and make it funny.== But it takes dedication and work.

Process

Okay, let's get back to JOKE-WRITING 1-2-3.

Let's look at a situation that happened to me recently. I asked "What have I acquired?" I just got a new **video poker** app for my Smartphone.

So now we have a SUBJECT: Video Poker App. How do we even start writing a joke for it?

WE NEED TO FIRST TURN IT INTO A PREMISE

==Most jokes are a convergence of two or more clearly defined ideas==. So let's go to work.

Let's utilize the oldest tool known to writers and investigators. It's called the ==Maxim of the 5 W's.== Let's ask:

Who?
What?
Why?
Where?

When?
How?

Okay so it's 5 W's and an "H." ☺
No investigation is considered complete unless all of those questions have been answered. So if we go back to the Video Poker App subject and ask those questions, we might come up with something like:

Who plays the video poker app? Me
What is it? Video Poker **or What happens when I play?** I can sometimes upset my wife.
Where do I play? I play at the airport, in line at the bank, on a plane, in the bathroom…
Why do I play? To have some mental downtime, to get away from work. To have something to occupy me while I'm in the bathroom.
When? Whenever I have nothing else to do.
How? On my phone, by myself, with my thumbs.

With this information we have all we need to develop material for the subject "video poker app" to become a **PREMISE**.

If you've read my blog or have taken my classes, you know the science of why people laugh; THE 8 HUMAN LAUGH TRIGGERS. Two prime reasons (especially with regard to commercially acceptable humor), are *surprise* and *embarrassment*. So let's ask ourselves how we can utilize a set up line that might present surprise or embarrassment. The first thing that comes to my mind is "bathroom."

So, if I look at the entirety of the material I've collected, I can put together a set up line that might go something like this:

I just got a new video poker app for my Droid. I love playing it in the bathroom.

That is now our **PREMISE.** A premise is basically an argument which results in a conclusion. In the case of comedy, the conclusion is the punchline or laugh point, which usually resolves the argument.

So now our PREMISE needs a punchline...

With <mark>VIDEO POKER APP and BATHROOM</mark>, we have two or more clearly defined ideas.

If we were to use the incredibly powerful <mark>LISTING TECHNIQUE</mark> that I teach in my seminars and in my e-book, we would come up with phrases that we could easily juxtapose to make a joke.

The first one I came up with was:

"I just got a new video poker app for my Droid. I love playing it in the bathroom. Sometimes it upsets my wife...She gets a little irritated when I'm on the toilet and she hears me yell, 'Full House!'"

Just think of the possibilities with the phrases: "flush," "straight flush," "royal flush," "all clubs." Pinochle (pee-knuckle)," "Texas Hold-'em," and the list goes on.

If we really took the time and fleshed out all the possible plays we have with those two ideas, we could come up with an easy 10, 20 or 30 jokes on just the video-poker app premise alone; 20-30 jokes!

For example, after analyzing the joke above and taking a quick look at the list we created, I almost immediately refine the joke to read like this:

"I just got a new video poker app for my Droid. I love playing it in the bathroom. My wife's feelings are mixed on that. On one hand, she loves the fact that I found a new way to play with myself. On the other hand, she gets a little irritated when I'm on the toilet and she hears me yell, 'Full House!'"

And just think we started out the day thinking, "I can't think of anything funny to write about…"
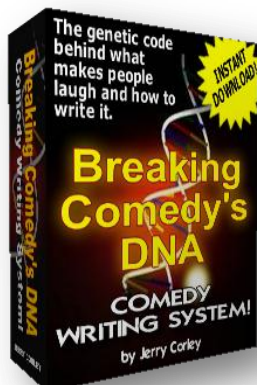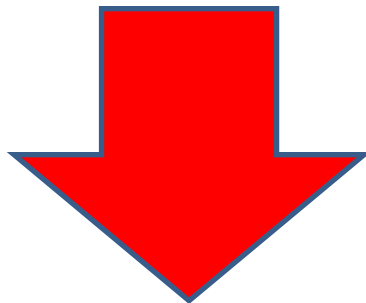
Now it's your turn. Ask yourself:
1. What is new?
2. What has changed?
3. What have I acquired?

This is just one of my many processes for writing jokes that I have used over the years to generate literally thousands of jokes. Now you can use it too.

Now you have a practical process for writing jokes. Enjoy!

Jerry Corley is a professional comedian with over 25 years of experience and a former writer for Jay Leno and The Tonight Show. He founded the Stand Up Comedy Clinic, a full-time comedy-writing and performance school in Burbank, CA.

Visit http://www.standupcomedyclinic.com

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