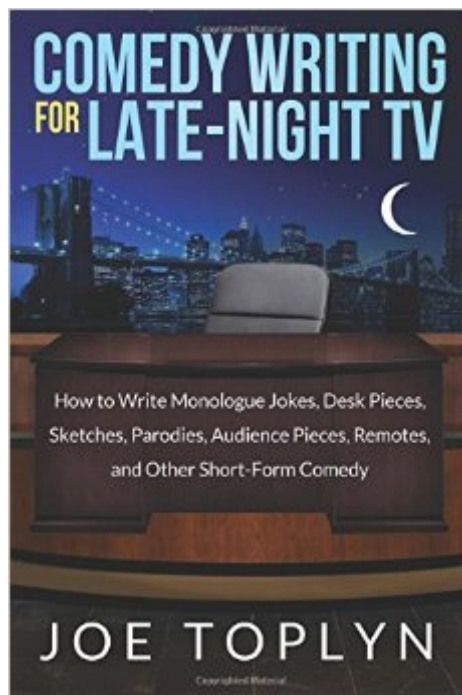


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# Comedy Writing For Late-Night TV: How To Write Monologue Jokes, Desk Pieces, Sketches, Parodies, Audience Pieces, Remotes, And Other Short-Form Comedy



## Synopsis

He has written and produced comedy/talk shows for over fifteen years. Now four-time Emmy winner Joe Toplyn reveals his proven methods of writing for late-night television in this one-of-a-kind insider's guide. Toplyn analyzes each type of comedy piece in the late-night TV playbook and takes you step-by-step through the process of writing it. His detailed tips, techniques, and rules include: 6 characteristics every good monologue joke topic must have 6 specific ways to generate punch lines 12 tools for making your jokes their funniest 7 types of desk pieces and how to create them 9 steps to writing parodies and other sketches How to go after a writing job in late night PLUS a complete sample comedy/talk show submission packet Also use this comprehensive manual to write short-form comedy for the Internet, sketch shows, magazines, reality shows, radio, advertising, and any other medium.

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## Customer Reviews

I'm Steve O'Donnell, former Head Writer of "Jimmy Kimmel Live" and "Late Night with David Letterman." Unlike most comedy writers, Joe Toplyn is well-organized, systematic and methodical. Aspiring gag-smiths and joke-mongers may appreciate his new "how to" guide as a goofy version of Rommel's famous book on armored warfare. "Comedy Writing for Late-Night TV" is clear, comprehensive, and studded with humorous vignettes from the author's own experience, many of which involve astonishingly dangerous moments in pursuit of a funny visual. Fortunately, there is minimal permanent damage from the many near-collisions, suffocations, and immolations by homemade napalm atop five-story towers. (Counter-intuitively, Toplyn outdoes Rommel on this

point.) The hefty 430 pages are a remarkable blend of business-like instruction with very silly examples culled from Toplyn's years of labor on Letterman, Leno, on-line, and beyond. The forms, the approaches, the jargon, and the pitfalls of the host-desk-and-guest format are all explored with straightforward plainness. Toplyn is an Engineer of Yoks, and his sensible perspective on a completely ridiculous subject matter is a metaphysical achievement. There is a wealth of playful asides but there is also plenty of old-fashioned pedagogy. (The Five W's and the H, for the love of Mike!) Characteristic of the author's Friar's Club/NASA dual nature is the impressively thorough index, one of the most specific and detailed since Grey's Anatomy. (The companion volume to the ABC series.) Emblematic of the book's variegated contents are some of the more particular index entries: paper cut, fat jokes, hidden camera, stop consonants, hacky jokes, and even Aristotle. By the way, Toplyn, in his military way, loves the acronym shorthand for program titles, like LNWJF for "Late Night with Jimmy Fallon." Here is another encapsulation: Of use and interest to writers of all kinds and certainly to the general entertainment fan, CWFLNTV is recommended reading.

It's been a lifelong dream of mine to get staffed on a late night show. With this book, I now have all the knowledge and creative tools necessary to pursue that dream. Through his decades of experience working for the likes of Letterman and Leno, Joe Toplyn has figured out the secret to writing each type of late night comedy piece repeatedly and consistently. The section on monologue jokes alone is worth the price of the entire book. In addition to writing comedy pieces, this book will also teach you about the late-night tv industry and how to put together a professional submission packet. The timing of this book release could not be better. The late night tv lineup is going through more changes than it ever has before. There are likely dozens of late night writing jobs up for grabs. Get this book, put together your own writing packet, and maybe you can grab one for yourself.

I don't believe you can learn to be funny. What you can learn, however, are methods to structure your funny. And that's exactly what you learn from this book. So far I have only read as far as the chapter on monologue joke writing, but that's because I am in post production on an indie feature I wrote and produced last year. And I wanted to write an original sitcom pilot I'd been meaning to write for a while. Oh, and I'm a stay at home dad to two kids. No biggie. But more about my film in a minute. Anyway, that chapter blew my head clean off with its clarity. I read it in bed, and I woke my wife up with my enthusiasm as I tried to explain my huge paradigm shift, but all she said was "that's nice." I have read 13 books and I have done 2 courses on stand-up comedy and comedy writing. I don't think this puts me at

a disadvantage with doing comedy, as some comedians think. I have worked as a stand-up, an MC, a sketch comedy writer and performer, and a joke writer. And been paid. I think you do what you can to model what has worked before. But the problem with a lot of books is they try to cover too much ground. They want to show you how to write jokes, monologues, stand-up, sketch, solo shows, sitcoms, and screenplays. There's no way one 300 page book can cover all those. The best ones just focus on one area. That's exactly what this book does. The section on monologue joke writing was the clearest explanation I have ever read. Typically, in other books that cover this, you get lessons on how to pick topics, generate ideas, but then you have figure out how to structure them yourself. You get something like "the punchline is your own reaction". Huh? I have to make a sarcastic comment on what I've written. But not all comedy is sarcastic, so then what do I do? Other times, the advice you follow allows you to write a joke for a comedian in 1983. But not now. This book explains how to write contemporary comedy. Also, you won't learn exercises that exist by themselves as some comedy writing books have you do. These often leave you scratching your head as you try to figure out how to turn them into comedy material. With Joe's book, you learn how to write usable comedy material from the get go. Yes, you will learn the formulas regularly used by late night comedy writers. They are used because of the sheer amount of work involved. You may also think, "this guy wrote for Leno? Urgh, Leno's not funny." You may substitute Letterman for Leno in that sentence depending on your preference. But you know, whatever you think of those guys and their late night perspectives remember in order to work as a writer on those shows, you have to be able to pump out 70-150 jokes (sometimes more) a day. A day. Some stand-ups write a couple of jokes a day for a year and have an hour long show at the end of it. And if that's your goal, then great. But that many jokes will get you fired from your late night position. While volume may seem like a negative, the more you practice the lessons learned in this book, the more your quality level will increase. If you want to learn stand-up comedy writing, comedy screenplays, solo shows, or sitcom writing Joe's book isn't for you. Sure, the mechanics of laughter are the same, but with those different genres I just mentioned there are other things you need to learn. You will learn every facet of producing material for late-night, which not only includes monologue jokes, desk pieces, etc but sketch comedy too. So if sketch comedy is your thing, then you can certainly learn a lot about how to write sketch comedy from this masterful book. I mentioned earlier about being in post-production on my first screenplay. While I wrote that script before I bought Joe's book, the techniques I have learned so far and will learn once I finish the book will help me on my next screenplay. The skills you learn are absolutely transferable, whether stand-up

comedy is your ultimate goal or screenplays. The skills from this book can help you edit and hone your comedy in both stand-up and script writing. In case you're wondering, I do not know Joe and I gain nothing from writing this lengthy testimonial. I refer to him by first name, because of the experience I have had in reading this book so far. It has made me feel like I am getting a personal tutorial. So I feel I can refer to him by his first name, even though I have never met him. Buy this book. More importantly, read and implement its lessons.

I wish I'd won four Emmys, or even one. Joe Toplyn is a guy who knows what he's talking about. His *COMEDY WRITING FOR LATE NIGHT TV* is a potent mix of algorithms for the engineering of jokes with fall-out-of-your-chair examples of jokes that work. Who knew that comedy could be understood? Having spend my childhood worshipping Johnny Carson, and my adulthood in the company of extremely funny people, I am struck dumb by the intellectual firepower that the formidable Mr. Toplyn brings to the conscious and artful construction of jokes. His how-to instructions are so lucid, so simple, and so easy to apply that even I have become funnier. If you aspire to comedy writing, whether on late-night TV or anywhere else, this book is a must-read. If, like me, you just love to laugh, this book is the most fun you can have without crossing state lines or breaking the law.

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