

Getting Started In Stand-Up Comedy



presented by
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Can I Be A Stand-Up Comic?

Being funny is just the start. Do you have what it takes to make a legitimate run at becoming a professional comedian?

by Rik Roberts | SchoolOfLaughs.com

THE COMEDY BUG HAS BIT YOU

You have been thinking about trying stand-up comedy for awhile. Your friends all say you should try it. In conversations with strangers you easily get laughs. People gravitate towards you at parties. You fire off comebacks and retorts like a Gatling gun. In short, you think you have what it takes.

Maybe you even went to a comedy "open stage" night (most often called an "open mic"). On a dare you got onstage and not only did well, you won the contest.

In either case you are interested in taking the next steps towards becoming a comedian. First step? Answer three simple questions:

Are you a self-starting, highly independent, stubborn, creative type?

Are you able to prioritize your time?

Can you distinguish constructive criticism from negative feedback?

Three simple questions. But three you cannot ignore.

By nature, stand up comedy looks fun. The great comics make it look effortless and easy. People say those comedians are "lucky" to do a job they love. But don't fool yourself. Luck is just one ingredient. Dedication is another. Focus stirs the pot and perseverance is the secret sauce.

Let's assume you are fortunate enough to get enough traction to be bookable. There will be long stretches away from your family and friends (for some that might be a bonus). You will have to take long drives across the state, or country – just to do seven minutes of comedy. You won't get paid. You will do this for free, all in hopes that someone will see your set and hire you down the line.

You will have shows where your mind goes blank. There will be nights where you have to abandon your act and battle hecklers. You will perform sick, sad, distracted and stressed. You will have nights where the crowds stare at you, boo you, or even walk out on you.

But there are the other nights. Nights when inspiration and improvisation meld and magic happens. Those nights can make everything worthwhile.

So, it is a roller coaster ride for sure.

Are you the kind of person who enjoys that type of experience? Do you have thick skin? Do you handle the lonely times in a positive and productive manner?

Let's face it. Our friends laugh because they like us. Our friends encourage us because they believe in us. But all that counts is this:

YOU MUST BELIEVE IN YOURSELF.

Your friends aren't sacrificing their lifestyle, income, self-esteem or sanity to pursue a dream. They are telling you to do it.

When the going gets tough, it will come down to how you handle things. Because, your friends aren't going to be there at 1:30 AM on the side of the road when your spare tire pops.

Your friends won't be at the midnight show on a Saturday in Odessa, TX where you are the only one without a sidearm.

And, your friends won't be there when the struggling club stiff's you after working all week.

You must be open to criticism. You must be willing to put up with people less focused than yourself. You must be able to continue writing material, even when your shows are going well. *Especially* when your shows aren't going well.

It is easy to have a night or two of comedy that goes unexpectedly well. Winning a comedy night is easy with the support of your buddies. It may seem like comedy is right up your alley. It may be. But it's all the other things that go with it that you should consider.

Before you commit to the idea of becoming a comedian, make sure you set aside the time to be a great one. Develop the skills. Learn the craft. Realize that you will need to deal with the *down* side, *down* time and *down* right tough nights of stand "up" comedy.

If you decide this is worth all the hard work, then I encourage you to get involved with your local comedy scene. Go to open mic nights. Hang out with funny people. Be supportive, take chances and learn from mistakes.

Are you suited for stand up comedy? You are a stubborn enough to have read this far. You've made good use of your time (I believe).

Now carve out some time and go test your creativity. Write some jokes and see if you have the ability to take criticism. Give it a shot, find out. If you put in the hard work will be one of the luckiest people in the world.



For daily tips on how to survive and thrive in the world of stand-up comedy, as well as breaking comedy news please follow [@SchoolOfLaughs](https://twitter.com/SchoolOfLaughs) on Twitter

How Long Does It Take To Become A Comedian?

An overnight sensation is typically the result of years of hard work. But how long will it take just to get comfortable performing comedy? The answer may surprise you.

by Rik Roberts | SchoolOfLaughs.com

It is extremely exciting to get on stage your first time. Your nerves are rattling. Your senses heighten. The unknown lies ahead.

You take the mic ... and hear the laughs. Those wonderful laughs from a room full of strangers. Every chuckle like a nod of agreement with what you find funny. It feels validating. Even more, it's addicting. You can't wait to get up again. And again. And ... again. And another time ...

After months of trial and error your shows get stronger. You start daydreaming about quitting your job and giving it a go. But how long does it take to become a comedian?

Let's slow down for a second. Becoming a full time stand-up comedian takes longer than you might think. Let's first discuss how things usually work when you start a new career.

THE FIRST MONTH ON THE JOB

At any job I had before stand-up, it usually took about a month to get comfortable. At that point I certainly didn't know everything. But I knew where most things were. I understood how some of my fellow employees went about their business.

Let's pretend you are going after a new job as a salesman. You apply, get accepted and begin training under a helpful manager named Nicholas.

After a month or so, you begin to understand the expectations. You know what it takes to do the job. You might even begin to feel comfortable enough to experiment. You might even try different approaches and put your own spin on it. Your confidence improves.

So, after four weeks you feel good about calling yourself a salesman. Even though you realize there is still a lot to learn, you can get the job done.

Those first four weeks at a typical job would be forty hours each, totaling one hundred and sixty hours.

Stand-Up comedy is much the same. But there is a scary difference. An undeniable truth you will need to understand.

SUCCESS AT STAND-UP COMEDY CAN MOVE GLACIALLY SLOW

At the beginning of your comedy pursuit, you will discover stage time is *very* limited. There are dozens of other people attempting to get on stage at every open mic. If you are lucky enough to get a spot, you may only be given three to five minutes to tell your jokes.

Let's say you live in a medium sized town. I'll generously assume you can get on stage four times a week for five minutes a set. That's a whopping twenty minutes of stage time or "work time." It's going to take a while to even reach your first full day (eight hours) at this new job. Twenty-four weeks as a matter of fact.

At your sales job, you have a clear outline of expectations. And you have your manager Nicholas overseeing your work. He's responsible for getting you started heading in the right direction. In your pursuit of a stand up comedy career, you will be flying solo from the start. You have no experienced leader whose job security rests on making sure you succeed. No Nicholas checking your work and advising on how to become better and more skilled.

Nonetheless, you keep showing up. You begin to get the hang of it. You even get the attention of an occasional club booker or fellow comedian. You feel like this is something you should definitely pursue.

LETS LOOK AT THE NUMBERS

Great. You need to have that enthusiasm and desire. Because knocking out your "first week" of stand-up will take awhile. At twenty minutes of stage time a week, it will take one hundred and twenty weeks to accumulate forty hours. That is over two years to get the "first week on the job" experience.

So far, we are only addressing the time on the microphone. You will spend a good deal of time writing off stage to prepare material. You could factor a few of those hours into the equation.

So how long does it take to become a stand-up comedian? Or how long does it take to get that first "month" or 160 hours in the books?

If "on the clock" equals "on the stage" it would take 480 weeks (or 9.25 years) to reach one 160 hours of stand-up. You now have your first full month on the job. Wow.

Those are pretty intimidating numbers. Lucky for us, that statement is not 100% accurate.

The truth is, you will get offered more time onstage as you get better at the craft. Even after just a few months of decent quality comedy you might get ten or fifteen minute spots at some open mics. Within a year (if you are really hustling) you could even get some local paid work. Best case scenario, you might perform ten or fifteen minute sets as an emcee at decent club. That can be as many as eight shows a week.

That is two "work" hours a week. At that pace, you'll be on stage one hundred and four hours a year if you worked every week of the year. Which, in year two ... isn't as likely as it seems.

But, the workweeks can come a little faster than in our opening example. The point being, **you will need to get onstage a lot**. Show up early and stay late. Ask for help when you need it. Try new opportunities when they present themselves. Do everything you would do at a "regular" job to reach that first month at work.

NOW THE ZINGER

You will most likely be squeezing this comedy career on top of your day job, college classes, family duties or whatever else you are already spending time doing.

Yes, you will have to juggle the late nights attempting to become a stand-up with the early mornings of the nine-to-five job. You will have to spend time away from friends and family. Your relaxing weekends disappear as you hit the road to pursue a dream.

Pursuing comedy as a career is achievable. Certainly. But it requires a LOT of work. Focus. Learn about the craft as much as you can. Take every opportunity that presents itself to get better. And realize that success is measured in years and stage time.

What if after all that time you don't see any progress? Zip, nada, nothing? Well, you still have your sales job. And at least you can tell your supervisor Nicholas about all the fun you had giving it a go.

STILL INTERESTED?

Cool. Enjoy these podcast interviews with a former School of Laughs students who have gone full time into stand-up stand-up comedy.

035 GOING FULL TIME IN COMEDY WITH JONNIE W.

082 FIRST YEAR IN STAND-UP COMEDY WITH BRIAN BATES

090 MONTY MITCHELL, SNAKES, RED BULL & ROAD TRIPS

Overcoming Stage Fright

Conquering anxiety and fear is the first step towards taking the stage. It's not as hard as you think.

by Rik Roberts | School Of Laughs

The fear of getting on stage and performing stand-up comedy is real. Public speaking in general is usually mentioned as causation for anxiety. But with a little perspective, planning and patience it doesn't have to be so stressful.

Successful comedians learn to either overcome this fear or to at least manage it.

I have broken down the tips into three categories. The week(s) before the show, the day(s) before the show and the show itself.

Here are some ideas to help you relieve some of the anxiety. These tips on overcoming stage fright should help you immediately!

THE WEEK(S) BEFORE THE SHOW

1) *No pressure.*

Realize that no one single performance can make (or break) your career. Bad or mediocre shows from an unknown comedian usually don't go viral. A great show can help you get momentum, but won't vault you into headliner status overnight.

2) *Be fearless.*

Know that most everyone in the audience is afraid to go onstage. To them, you are brave. And if you stumble a little bit they will totally cut you some slack. Embrace it!

3) *Have an escape plan.*

Prepare for the possibility of "going blank" during the performance. If it should happen, have a "go to" joke that you can do while you try to figure out how to get back on track. I know this may sound odd, but have one joke you do ANYTIME you get lost onstage. Ideally, it should be a short, thirty-second (or less) joke. A joke that is just long enough to buy you time. Now, if you go blank, you have something to say.

4) *Don't pander.*

You can't please everyone. And you won't. Some people in the audience will not like your style of comedy. No big deal. Do you like every person you meet? Every singer you hear? Of course not. Focus on the people who are enjoying your set.

5) *Don't focus on the negative*

In the same sense, DO NOT become distracted by someone in the audience who isn't into your show. Chances are, they are thinking about something that has nothing to do with you. Let them work it out. You don't need to get caught up in it.

6) *Be magnetic and productive.*

Know that being creative will always be a magnet for criticism. Embrace it. Also, know that it is better to create something people can judge than to never create anything at all. Comedians are producers, so keep making jokes.

7) *Rest*

A rested mind is a well oiled machine. If at all possible, get a good nights rest the evening before a show, or even a nap the day of if you need one. Comedy is where mental toughness meets physical readiness.

THE DAY OF THE SHOW

1) *Spend some time envisioning success.*

Create a visual in your mind of the show going well. Envision laughs, applause and success. Athletes spend major dollars on envisioning success. You can at least spend ten minutes.

2) *Develop a routine.*

It is nice to have a familiar routine when you are in an unfamiliar place. Go for a walk outside if possible. During the hours before a show, run a steamy hot bath or shower. Dim the lights. Slow down your breathing and focus on different aspects of your show. As you are doing this, allow nothing to distract you. Turn the cell phone and tv off. This time for you and your jokes to mingle and get familiar.

3) *Expect the unexpected.*

Envision that things may occur during the show you have no control over. A waiter may drop his tray. A police car may go screeching by. Members of the audience might show up late. Be at peace with that. Look at them as opportunities to improvise and think on your feet.

THE SHOW ITSELF

1) *Breathe.*

In the moments before you go onstage take a few deep breaths. Get some oxygen into your system.

2) *Hydrate.*

Yes! Drink some water to hydrate you vocal chords. Alcohol, coffee and tea will dry you out. If you have a scratchy throat, drink warm water (lemon optional) to help soothe the throat. Cold water constricts the vocal chords so avoid it.

3) ***Focus on the beginning.***

Know the first words and the first routine you will get into on stage. Focus on that. If you have practiced in the week(s) leading up to the set everything will flow from there.

4) ***Relax.***

Nerves can make you speed up and stumble. Make sure to SLOW down, SMILE, and SELL your jokes.

5) ***Engage with the audience.***

While onstage, you should make eye contact with members of the audience who are having a good time. Connect with those who are digging your vibe.

6) ***Separate yourself from your material.***

Know that your performance is not WHO you are. It's WHAT you are doing. Separate your opinion of yourself from the audience's opinion of your jokes. If they don't like a joke it doesn't mean they don't like you. It just means you need to make a note to work on that joke before your next show.

IN SUMMARY

I hope these tips will aid in overcoming stage fright. Stage fright is nothing more than being unprepared. Take the time leading up to a show to get comfortable with your material. It has been said that,

"Amateurs practice until they get something right. Professionals practice until they can't get it wrong."

Even an amateur can come off as a pro with the right amount of preparation. So employ these tips and have great (stress free) shows.

Cracking The Comedy Clique

Getting involved with your local comedy scene might seem intimidating. Patience and persistence will help you find your place.

by Rik Roberts | SchoolOfLaughs.com

Beginning a career in comedy can be pretty intimidating (to say the least). You head out to the local pub or club and find yourself a stranger in a strange land. It's almost like trying to find your way around in the dark.

Like a kid at the first day of school you try to look cool, but don't even know which way to walk. There are comics over by the bar. Some are in the back of the room. A bearded hipster is walking around with a clipboard.

Questions fill your head ...

What is the process for signing up?

How come there is no one in the audience?

Why isn't anyone talking to me?

SQUARE PEGS

That last question repeats week after week. It becomes a Junior High flashback and you're not sure which one of the characters in Breakfast Club you are. Pretty soon you start to dismiss the other comics as a "clique."

As the night unwinds you start thinking, "They only laugh at their buddy's jokes. They are trying to intimidate me. I'll never get a good spot on this show."

Wake up.

This is all in your head.

What you are observing isn't an unspoken conspiracy designed to intimidate you. It is in fact much more sophisticated than that.

IT IS CALLED A NETWORK

Yes, these comics have built a relationship over time. They help each other out with material, finding gigs and sometimes even bail each other out of jail.

It's not that they don't like you, don't think you are funny, or hope you bomb every time on stage (well some will). It's just that you are one of hundreds of new faces that cycle through the open mic scene.

Many, many people try open mics once or twice and then quit. The Network is waiting to see if you are going to stick around before they invest time in getting to know you.

I think that is fair. Normal even.

The local network of comedians should still be professional and accommodating. But you should lower your expectations on the instant friendships, secret handshakes, and free flowing praise.

And let me warn you right now, you should never perform just to gain praise from strangers. You are putting your happiness in the control of others.

This has been a recipe for the demise of countless comedians. It might seem strange to hear that.

Comedians thrive on laughter. You must also gain satisfaction from crafting great material. You must enjoy the thrill of the pursuit. Be encouraged by noticing your improvement. If you focus those aspects, the laughs should follow. So should your fans.

JUST RELAX AND WRITE JOKES

Don't obsess about trying to gain approval from the established comedians in town. Especially when you are just beginning.

Instead, focus on what you can do to make your show better. Bring fresh, new comedy to the stage week in and week out. Soon, friendships will develop and you will become a part of the comedy clique. But it's not one. Just a network of friends.

And when you do, look for that timid face that walks in the door like it's the first day of school. Welcome them. Let them know how to sign up and why no one is in the audience. Encourage them to stick with it.

You did.

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IS YOUR MATERIAL HOLDING YOU BACK?

If you feel your writing is holding you back, please consider enrolling in the online writing class. Creating sets and getting stage time won't help one bit if you aren't creating solid material.

Ideal for beginners, this class features:

- over two and a half hours of online tutorials
- 114 page companion workbook
- quizzes and access for 90 days
- money back guarantee

The material is organized to take you step-by-step through the joke writing process. The average first time student develops a minimum of 8-10 minutes of stage ready material the first time through. You'll have access to the course for 90 days and can go through it as many times as you like within that time period.

To select your package, or learn more [CLICK HERE](http://www.schooloflaughs.com/online-classes/) or visit:

<http://www.schooloflaughs.com/online-classes/>

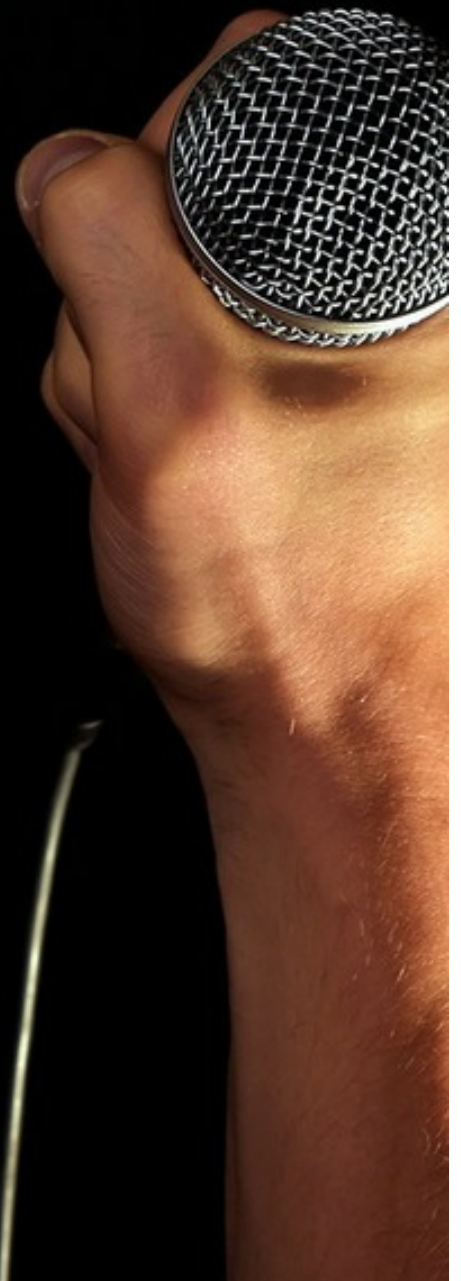


Continue The Journey

LISTEN TO THE SCHOOL OF LAUGHS PODCAST ON ITUNES OR STITCHER. WE FEATURE WEEKLY INTERVIEWS WITH COMEDIANS AND ENTERTAINERS.

YOU'LL WALK AWAY WITH TIPS ON BECOMING BIGGER, BETTER AND MORE BOOKABLE. THE PODCAST IS FREE AND IT IS EASY TO SUBSCRIBE.

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School Of Laughs

The School Of Laughs is designed to help you along every step of your journey.

Writing classes help you take your material from the page to the stage. Performance classes help get you out of your comfort zone and over stage fright.

Improv workshops get you on your feet and out of your head.

And the Business of Comedy Seminar gives you a firsthand look at the inner working of a comedy career.

All kinds of people have taken the classes. Aspiring comedians find a quicker road to success by learning the ins and outs of writing, performing and creating a comedy business.

Public speakers, trainers and managers now get a better response through memory retention from their audiences by using humor.

[LEARN MORE](#)



About Rik Roberts

A few words from the founder of the School Of Laughs



Hi my name is Rik Roberts. I'm a 25 year comedy veteran with a wonderful wife, two young kids and a love for encouraging creativity.

When I first started pursuing comedy, I found it frustrating that some nights I would do well and other nights perform so poorly I wanted to quit. It seemed like the same jokes that worked the night before weren't funny at all the next. I was literally throwing things out left and right trying to find out what was a "keeper" and what wasn't.

During that early part of the journey, I performed hundreds of shows at bowling alleys, college bars, church fellowship halls, comedy clubs and even a couple of zoo's – and would still have inconsistent sets.

Then I was asked to run a comedy workshop at my home club Zanies in Nashville. At first I said, “you can't teach people to be funny.”

I was told, “look at all your best jokes, analyze them and figure out WHY they are getting a laugh. Then, teach *that* to the people who come to the workshop”.

It took me months to analyze my material before I knew the answers. And then my progress skyrocketed. Turns out **“you can teach people to be funnier.”**



What changed? I discovered that regardless of the topic my “keepers” had more than a clever punch line. They were jokes that utilized multiple comedy techniques. Meaning, I wasn't relying on one single angle to generate a laugh.

At first I didn't know these techniques had names (some didn't and I named them myself). I also found trends in the structure of my sets that worked (and some that didn't).



Now, I can look at my jokes the way a quarterback looks at a playbook. I can read audiences like Peyton Manning reads a defense. And I can construct a joke like James Brown can build a Brick House. You can, too.

I am now performing for the groups I want to, as often as I want to, and without having to worry if the show is going to go well or not. You can, too.

Start by simply [signing up](#) for the monthly "Insider Tips" newsletter. If you want more than tips and are ready to dive into an incredibly thorough comedy course, get started today with the [online comedy class](#). It's a ton of fun and you can take it at your open pace.

I look forward to helping you take powerful, purposeful steps towards building your comedy career. If you need it. If not, I wish you the best and hope you take advantage of the podcast and blog.

Enjoy the journey!

- Rik Roberts