

MasterClass



JUDD APATOW

—
Teaches Comedy





ABOUT

JUDD APATOW

Judd Apatow is considered one of the most sought-after comedy minds in the business. He has been closely associated with many of the biggest comedy films and hit television shows over the last decade and a half.

Most recently, Apatow released *The Zen Diaries of Garry Shandling* which chronicles the life and spirituality of comedian Garry Shandling. Prior to that, he and co-director Mike Bonfiglio followed folk rock icons The Avett Brothers through the making of their latest album in *May It Last: A Portrait of the Avett Brothers*. Both documentaries premiered on HBO to glowing reviews.

Last summer, Apatow produced the romantic comedy, *The Big Sick*, starring Kumail Nanjiani, Zoe Kazan, Holly Hunter, and Ray Romano. The dark horse box office success earned a 97% on Rotten Tomatoes, made AFI's Top 10 list, and was nominated for an Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay.

In television, Apatow is the executive producer of the highly acclaimed *Crashing* on HBO, which is currently shooting its third season. He served as the co-creator of Netflix's *Love* which is streaming the complete series on Netflix.

Apatow also executive produced the multi-award-winning HBO series *Girls*, *Freaks and Geeks*, *Undeclared*, *The Ben Stiller Show*, and co-executive produced *The Larry Sanders Show*.

This past December, Judd released his Netflix comedy special *Judd Apatow: The Return*, marking his comeback to the stage after a 25 year hiatus.

Apatow has written and directed such films as *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Knocked Up*, and *Funny People*. He directed *Trainwreck* and has produced *Superbad*, *Bridesmaids*, *Pineapple Express*, and both *Anchorman* films.



INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THIS WORKBOOK

The MasterClass team has created this workbook as a supplement to Judd's class. Chapters are supported with a review, opportunities to learn more, and assignments.

MASTERCLASS COMMUNITY

Throughout, we'll encourage you to discuss elements of the class and share work with your classmates in [The Hub](#). You can also connect with your peers in the discussion section beneath each lesson video.

CLASS PROJECT TRACKS

Judd's MasterClass is about comedy, and the tips and strategies he offers can be applied to many creative disciplines. In this workbook, several tracks are offered, each of which culminates in a final project.

- For the stand-up comedian:
 - Craft a tight 10-minute act that you will build incrementally in 30-second, 2-minute, 5-minute, and 8-minute iterations. Throughout the writing process, you'll perform these versions of your act at open mic nights.
- For the screenwriter:
 - Author a screenplay for a feature-length comedy or a few episodes of comedic television. There are 32 lessons in Judd's MasterClass. If you write five pages after watching every lesson, you'll have 160 pages by the end of the class, which amounts to almost three hours of screen time.
- For the writer-director:
 - Plan, cast, and film a comedic short based on a scene (or scenes) from your screenplay.

The assignments throughout this workbook are labeled per track; some assignments apply to all tracks. Choose the track that best aligns with your goals and interests, or challenge yourself to complete them all.

For all tracks, we recommend that you keep a comedy journal, in which you'll complete assignments, brainstorm jokes, and write down concepts and ideas as they come to you while watching Judd's video lessons.

SUGGESTED VIEWING

FILM

- *Anchorman: The Legend of Ron Burgundy*, 2004 (producer)
- *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, 2005 (director, producer, cowriter)
- *Knocked Up*, 2007 (director, producer, writer)
- *Superbad*, 2007 (producer)
- *Walk Hard: The Dewey Cox Story*, 2007 (producer, writer)
- *Forgetting Sarah Marshall*, 2008 (producer)
- *Step Brothers*, 2008 (producer)
- *Pineapple Express*, 2008 (producer)
- *Funny People*, 2009 (director, producer, writer)
- *Get Him to the Greek*, 2010 (producer)
- *Bridesmaids*, 2011 (producer)
- *This Is 40*, 2012 (director, producer, writer)
- *Trainwreck*, 2015 (director, producer)
- *The Big Sick*, 2017 (producer)
- *The Zen Diaries of Garry Shandling*, 2018 (director, producer)

TELEVISION

- *The Ben Stiller Show*, 1992–93 (cocreator, writer, producer, actor)
- *The Larry Sanders Show*, 1993–98 (director, producer, writer)
- *The Critic*, 1994–95 (producer, writer, actor)
- *Freaks and Geeks*, 1999–2000 (director, producer, writer)
- *Undeclared*, 2001–03 (creator, director, producer, writer)
- *Girls*, 2012–17 (producer, writer)
- *Love*, 2016–2018 (cocreator, producer, director, writer)
- *Judd Apatow: The Return*, 2017 (producer, writer)
- *Crashing*, 2017–present (director, producer, writer)

SUGGESTED READING

Throughout his MasterClass, Judd mentions books that have taught him things about various aspects of comedy and writing. Here's a complete list of them, along with the books Judd himself has authored, for your reference.

- Judd Apatow, *I Found This Funny: My Favorite Pieces of Humor and Some That May Not Be Funny at All*, McSweeney's, 2010.
- Judd Apatow, *Sick in the Head: Conversations About Life and Comedy*, Random House, 2015.
- Lajos Egri, *The Art of Dramatic Writing: Its Basis in the Creative Interpretation of Human Motives*, Simon & Schuster, 1946.
- Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, Dell, 1979.
- Syd Field, *The Screenwriter's Workbook*, Dell, 1984.
- Syd Field, *Selling a Screenplay: The Screenwriter's Guide to Hollywood*, Delacorte, 1989.
- Syd Field, *Four Screenplays: Studies in the American Screenplay*, Dell, 1994.
- Syd Field, *The Screenwriter's Problem Solver: How To Recognize, Identify, and Define Screenwriting Problems*, Dell, 1998.
- Syd Field, *The Definitive Guide to Screenwriting*, Ebury, 2003.
- John Guare, *The House of Blue Leaves*, 1971.
- Albert Goldman, *Ladies and Gentlemen—Lenny Bruce!!*, Random House, 1974.
- Kevin Hart, *I Can't Make This Up: Life Lessons*, Simon & Schuster, 2017.
- Anne Lamott, *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life*, Anchor, 1994.
- Sidney Lumet, *Making Movies*, Vintage Books, 1996.
- David Mamet, *On Directing Film*, Penguin Books, 1991.
- John Sayles, *Thinking in Pictures: The Making of the Movie 'Matewan'*, Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

JUDD'S JOURNEY

“That’s usually what I’m trying to do: . . . tell a heartfelt, great story that touches you, to show how people try to grow, how they try to find happiness. And every once in a while, they pee with a boner.”
—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Introduction to Comedy
- The Fuse Is Lit
- Interviewing the Greats
- Taking a Different Path
- Hang Out With People Who Are Better Than You
- Sources of Inspiration

CHAPTER REVIEW

Younger, smaller, and less athletic than most of his classmates, Judd grew up as an outsider. He spent a lot of time alone and felt angry that he didn’t fit into the cultural system that favored athletic, handsome people. He became obsessed with the Marx Brothers, who taught him to question that system. Judd realized that the system was actually bullshit, and that comedy was a way to make fun of it.

When Judd’s mother got a job at a comedy club, Judd was able to get in for free and watch stand-up. Then, he created a radio show on his high school’s station called *Club Comedy*, for which he interviewed comedians, gleaned advice from the likes of Sandra Bernhard and Steve Allen. Early in his career, Judd learned how to pay rent while pursuing his comedic aspirations—by getting a day job that put him in the business, but allowed him to be creative in the evenings. He advises you to do the same.

LEARN MORE

- A young, comedy-obsessed Judd listened to comedian George Carlin’s records. Do some research and give one (or several!) of Carlin’s live stand-up comedy albums a listen. Pay attention to the content of his jokes, how he delivers punch lines, and his timing.
- Read about comedian Lenny Bruce’s life in the biography *Ladies and Gentlemen—Lenny Bruce!!* by Albert Goldman.
- Track down recordings of Jerry Seinfeld’s early stand-up. Judd aspired to be Seinfeld early in his comedy journey. Why do you think Judd was so drawn to Seinfeld’s comedic style?
- Watch *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* (1982), a film that influenced young Judd. Note how characters develop and the way comedy is balanced with real-life drama in the narrative.

3.

WRITING STAND-UP COMEDY

“You can never go wrong speaking your truth and revealing your darkest, deepest stuff that most people would keep hidden.”
—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Analyze the Comedians You Love
- Get Personal
- Consider Situations From Every Angle
- Make Lists and Ask Questions
- Write Multiple Jokes for Each Premise
- Start With a Punch Line, and Build a Story Around It
- Be Disciplined About Your Writing
- Build Your Act Methodically

CHAPTER REVIEW

Judd suggests that you watch stand-up if you want to perform it. Learn by observing, then develop your own angle.

Judd believes that stand-up gets better as it becomes more personal—that comics who lay themselves bare to the audience are often the strongest performers. The same is true of comedic writers. He sees *Knocked Up* (2007) as the first time he became comfortable with drawing upon his own life for material. Judd contends that when you are being personal as a comedian, you are actually expressing your opinion about something or highlighting an absurdity in your own life. He gives the following example: One of his two children has gone to college. His remaining daughter is unhappy that she is the only one left in the house with Judd and his wife, because four people is a family, but three people is a child observing a weird couple. Judd calls this a short observational joke. Judd has learned that the audience will cue a comedian as to which part of a joke is relatable, understandable, and meaningful. You get the most laughs when the audience recognizes themselves in your story or joke.

Your job as a stand-up comedian is as much writing as it is performing. You need to be disciplined in your writing, dedicating a few hours each day to sitting at a desk and writing jokes. To kickstart your joke-writing process, come up with a topic and write down as many jokes about it as you can think of. You'll likely use only one or two of them, but you need to write a lot in order to find the true comedic gold.

You can turn one joke into many by building a story around a basic punch line. Once you know the core of the story, you can illuminate different parts of it. For example, in his Netflix special, Judd tells a story-form joke about throwing the first pitch at a Mets game. He identifies his punch line: he threw the baseball very badly. To build a story around that punch line, Judd describes every moment leading up to the pitch, relating to the audience his nervousness and confusion prior to the throw. Judd also brings in a visual—an utterly ridiculous photo of himself throwing the ball—which he analyzes in depth. All of these different components added up to a 10-minute story-form joke.

3.

WRITING STAND-UP COMEDY

Acts are built incrementally, and Judd sees many similarities between writing a screenplay and developing an act. Both require first drafts, rewrites, and rounds of edits. Judd thinks of a stand-up act as a speech that is written line by line over a number of years, to which you methodically add and subtract jokes.

LEARN MORE

- When Judd decided to perform stand-up comedy after a long hiatus, he watched Patton Oswalt's acts to jog his memory for writing jokes. Watch Oswalt's stand-up and see what you think.
- Watch or listen to some of your favorite comedians' stand-up and pay attention to the anatomy of their jokes. How do they set up ideas, and how are those ideas transformed into punch lines? Record your observations in your comedy journal.
- Watch Judd's special *Judd Apatow: The Return* on Netflix. Pay special attention to how he opens his act, how he transitions from joke to joke, and how he closes his special.
- Judd discussed the essence of the story-based joke with comedian Mike Birbiglia. Watch Birbiglia's stand-up, keeping an eye out for how he tells his own comedic stories.
- Judd cites Sarah Silverman as an example of a comedian who has become more personal in her jokes over time, and as a result, her stand-up act has grown stronger. Watch one of the earliest of Silverman's stand-up acts that you can find, then watch one of her most recent acts. How has she grown? In what ways have her jokes become more focused on her personal life? Take notes in your comedy journal.

ASSIGNMENTS

- For all class project tracks:
 - To kick off your writing process, sit down with your comedy journal and make the following lists: everything that makes you mad, everything you think is wrong with yourself, everything you think is wrong with the world, things you wish you could change about your

3.

WRITING STAND-UP COMEDY

ASSIGNMENTS CONT.

personality, and things you wish you could change about your body. We encourage you to turn this assignment into a daily habit; spend time each day making a new list in your journal, then develop a few items on your list into jokes. If you're on the screenwriter class project track, consider the topics and themes you want your screenplay to encompass, and make lists related to them.

- For the stand-up comedian:
 - Write an observational joke, similar to the one in the chapter review. Analyze one of the primary relationships in your life—with a partner, child, boss, employee, or friend—searching for humor in a basic observation about it. Make sure your observation is not dependent on context or knowledge the audience won't have—for example, it shouldn't be an inside joke that only people in your line of work will understand. Once you have written your short observational joke, share it with your classmates in [The Hub](#).
 - Begin to build a story around a punch line. Think about the funniest thing that has ever happened to you, and identify the core of that story. Then illuminate different parts of the story by describing the situation and your feelings in detail. What were all of the events that led to that moment? Write down ideas in your comedy journal. You'll continue to build around the punch line in the assignment for Chapter 4: Performing Stand-Up Comedy.

4.

PERFORMING STAND-UP COMEDY

“You have to be bad in front of people who are truly disappointed when you are bad. And that’s what makes you strong. It’s what gives you a thick skin. And you can only learn by doing it.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Get Any Stage Time You Can
- Find the Value in Every Opportunity
- Have a Conversation With the Audience
- Just Be Garry
- Lean Into the Bomb
- Explore Different Relationships With the Audience
- Be Patient
- The Struggle Will Make You Strong

CHAPTER REVIEW

Becoming a good stand-up comedian means spending a significant amount of time on stage. Early on in his career, Judd realized how important it is to take advantage of every opportunity to be on stage, even if it’s merely to keep the audience’s attention for the 20 seconds in between acts. He used these moments to try out new material.

Judd suggests dealing with stage nerves by talking to the audience as if you’re just having a conversation with them, instead of focusing on getting laughs—this will likely be more enjoyable for everyone, including you. Make it your goal to simply be worth hearing.

Performing on stage is about more than telling jokes—it’s about creating a persona. You want the audience to connect to your character, not just to what you’re saying. If your act is not going as planned, embrace it. Learn to look at your nerves from a different perspective and lean into the bomb.

Keep in mind that as a comedian, you don’t have to be funny at every moment. You can work your relationship with the audience in many ways. Judd says that you might want to make the audience unhappy or deeply uncomfortable, then pivot back to comedy. It’s a viable technique, and you’d be in the company of Andy Kaufman and Norm Macdonald in trying it. When Judd was young, he was told by veteran comedians that it would take seven years to shape his comedic persona, so get comfortable with the fact that for a long time, you’re probably going to suck. Be patient and keep working.

LEARN MORE

- Watch comedian Garry Shandling’s stand-up. Judd says he had a talent for appearing as if he was discovering the material in the moment. Look out for this quality as you watch, and take notes in your comedy journal. Then watch Judd’s documentary *The Zen Diaries of Garry Shandling*.

4.

PERFORMING STAND-UP COMEDY

LEARN MORE CONT.

- Read [this transcript](#) from *Saturday Night Live*'s "Weekend Update," which features Norm Macdonald's character Charles Kuralt. Notice how he structured his jokes. Judd says that when the jokes weren't working, Macdonald slowed down and didn't express an interest in pleasing the audience. Watch [this "Weekend Update" clip](#) and look out for the qualities Judd highlights in his analysis. Why does Macdonald's weirdness work? Why is it fun to watch? You can read transcripts of Macdonald's other *Saturday Night Live* episodes [here](#), and look through a database of episode transcripts [here](#). If you find Macdonald particularly funny, read [40 of his best "Weekend Update" jokes](#) from 1994 to 1997.
- [Watch Andy Kaufman's performance on Saturday Night Live](#) (and be prepared to feel uncomfortable). Notice how he turns the traditional structure of a joke on its head with the first bit about the cannon. How does he betray the expectations of the audience, and how is his affected accent working? Notice how Kaufman leans into the bomb as a part of his act, advice that Judd gives you. If you relate to Kaufman's comedy, watch more of his acts, and try to identify the goal of each joke. How does he want the audience to respond? How does he work to manipulate their discomfort? Take notes in your comedy journal.
- After watching Kaufman's acts, watch comedian Jim Carrey's take on Kaufman in *Man on the Moon* (1999). Then check out the Netflix documentary *Jim & Andy: The Great Beyond* (2017), which uses behind-the-scenes footage of Carrey's serious—and at times crazy—dedication to inhabiting Kaufman.
- Judd does a combination of stand-up comedy and television in his career, and these two fields collide in *Crashing*, a TV series about a struggling stand-up comedian. Watch *Crashing*, produced by Judd, then consider checking out *The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel*, another television show about stand-up. Set in the 1950s, it tells the story of Miriam Maisel, a 26-year-old Manhattanite who is a mother by day and a stand-up comedian by night. (Like you, she keeps a comedy journal!) Judd's comedy hero Lenny Bruce is also a character on the show. Watch the pilot and see what you think.

4.

PERFORMING STAND-UP COMEDY

ASSIGNMENTS

- For all class project tracks:
 - The lessons Judd learned from interviewing comedians in high school have stayed with him throughout his comedy career. Find a comedian or comedic writer in your community you'd like to learn from, and ask if they'd be willing to let you interview them. Be respectful of their time and take notes; then, share what you learned from them with your classmates in [The Hub](#).
- For the stand-up comedian:
 - Continue to build around the punch line you came up with in the assignment for Chapter 3: Writing Stand-Up Comedy. Now think of five more ways to approach the story. Examine everything about the situation. Read all of your jokes (each of which should illuminate a different part of the story and support the basic punch line) aloud. Time yourself. How long is this story? Keep writing new jokes from different angles to stretch out the length of your story-form joke.

5.

DEVELOPING LIFE INTO STORY

“Most of time, you know, you’re using those real-life moments as ingredients that you then change and turn into something completely different, or [you are] inspired by things that have happened in your life.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Excavate Your Own Neuroses
- Examine the Meaningful Moments From Your Life
- The Most Personal Moment in *Freaks and Geeks*
- Take Note of Cinematic Moments in Your Life

CHAPTER REVIEW

It’s hard to believe, but early in his career it never occurred to Judd to mine his personal life for material. Now excavating his own neuroses has become a hallmark of Judd’s films and television shows. Think about personal moments in your own life and see if you can apply them to your comedic characters or plotlines. The moment can be as mundane as eating a grilled cheese sandwich and chocolate cake while watching television, something Judd did consistently in his youth and which he and creator Paul Feig wrote into Bill Haverchuck’s character on *Freaks and Geeks*.

Judd likens taking movie-worthy moments in his life and reworking them for the screen to making cinematic “soup”; everything you remember, all the things you’ve heard, and the moments you’ve observed are the ingredients. Combine them, and make adjustments to help spark ideas for a film or a television show.

ASSIGNMENTS

- For all class project tracks:
 - Create your own *Freaks and Geeks*–style questionnaire and circulate it among your friends. Some possible questions to include could be: When was the first time that you experienced heartbreak? What is the most humiliating thing that has ever happened to you? What was the worst job that you ever had? What has been the most challenging experience in your life? What is the most important lesson that you have ever learned? Come up with as many questions as you can that you think will be helpful for your story, project idea, or stand-up act. Like Judd, you can use the themes and experiences you discover as fuel for stories of your own.
 - Try to recall moments in your life that felt like they could have been in a movie. If they don’t feel inherently cinematic, think about other “ingredients” that you could add to these situations to make them even funnier or more amusing. Write these on index cards as well, and file them away for use in a later assignment.

CASE STUDIES: DEVELOPING LIFE INTO STORY

“It’s a discussion of the truth. Then, it’s a discussion of, ‘Okay, but what would make this amusing to watch? And then a discussion of the thematic ideas that will drive this.’ Like, ‘What are we watching this for?’”
—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- *Crashing*: Start With the Truth of Your Experiences
- *Knocked Up*: Imagine Other People Dealing With Your Problems

CHAPTER REVIEW

Judd’s approach to developing a story based on real life—either his or someone else’s—is simple: start with the truth. When developing the protagonist’s journey and plot for the first season of *Crashing*, Judd sat down with creator and star Pete Holmes to discuss the details of his personal life and why he wanted to become a comedian, in order to suss out the essence of the protagonist, who was based on Holmes. Then, Judd and Holmes tried to figure out what would get people invested in watching the show. They realized that viewers would watch to see if the protagonist could find a way to succeed, and that helped them write multiple plotlines that fueled the television show across several seasons. Judd advises you not to get too attached to your episode ideas, as some of the plotlines you come up with might be thrown out the window in service of the larger thematic story goals. But so be it—it’s just part of the development process.

Another tactic for developing story ideas that draw upon your life experience is to start with the kernel of an idea from a situation in your own life, and tailor it to fit the personalities of your characters (and actors if you have them already). For example, Seth Rogen once pitched a complex idea for a comedy to Judd, who in turn told Rogen that he didn’t need such an intricate story to be funny—he was hilarious all by himself. In fact, Judd told Rogen, it’d be funny to see you do something as simple as accidentally getting a woman pregnant and watching you deal with the aftermath. Thus, the idea for *Knocked Up* was born (pun intended).

ASSIGNMENT

- For the screenwriter and writer-director:
 - Identify a particularly challenging, amusing, or humorous story from your life (or pick one from your friends’ questionnaires from Chapter 5: Developing Life Into Story). Imagine who would be the worst possible person for it to happen to. How would that person handle it? What about his/her personality would exacerbate the situation? How can you design the situation to deliver maximum conflict and, consequently, comedy? Take notes in your comedy

6.

CASE STUDIES: DEVELOPING LIFE INTO STORY

ASSIGNMENT CONT.

journal and use what you've come up with as additional material for your class project.

- Television and film provide writers with the unique opportunity to show the mundane, strange, and inherently hilarious actions we all perform on a daily basis, often times in private. Think about a habit—like Judd's eating grilled cheese sandwiches and chocolate cake at the same time—that is natural to you but might be completely ridiculous to an outside observer. Come up with five of these kinds of behaviors in your own life, write them on index cards, and file them away for use in a later assignment.
- For the stand-up comedian:
 - Write a 30-second bit for your stand-up act. Analyze one of your odd behaviors or habits, or one of your most embarrassing moments. Then try performing it, imagining you are the emcee at a comedy night and this 30-second spot is meant to be a segue and introduction to the next comedian. Record your performance and upload it in [The Hub](#) for peer review. If you feel inclined, offer your classmates constructive feedback on their acts as well.

7.

CRAFTING COMEDIC STORYLINES

“That is why people like watching these things, because they relate to good behavior and bad behavior. And they also relate to people’s dreams and their struggles to be happy and to find love and relationships. And, you know, through comedy, we see where it all goes wrong. For the most part, it’s everything going wrong.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Think of Your Comedies as Dramas
- Create Obstacles to Connection and Love
- The Drama in *Knocked Up*
- Establish Relatable Stakes
- Flawed Characters Drive Stories
- Be Original by Being Specific
- Give Your Stories a Grace Note

CHAPTER REVIEW

When you’re writing a comedy, Judd recommends approaching it as a drama. Your story should be strong enough to stand alone, sans jokes. Judd feels that love and the obstacles those in love encounter are at the root of every story, comedic or not. Keeping this in mind as you write will help you develop your plot and characters.

Everyone is stumbling blindly through life, trying to figure out how to live, find love, and work through their problems while being forced to learn along the way. This happens to the characters in *Knocked Up*, and it should happen to your characters, too.

The stakes in comedy need to be high, otherwise the audience simply won’t care about the characters. Stakes consist of what your protagonist is worried about, what he or she is trying to attain, or what he or she stands to lose. Comedy is the result of the mishaps and misadventures along the way. Your characters must learn a lesson, otherwise there is no story. A good story is reinforced by rich supporting characters. As a comedic writer, specificity is your best friend. The details are what make a story funny and unique. In *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, much of the comedy is in the distinctive setting and character quirks. Everyone has a boss, but the 40-year-old virgin’s boss is inappropriately sex obsessed. Most stereo stores have something displayed on the televisions at all times, but only in Judd’s film does an incessantly played Michael McDonald DVD drive Paul Rudd’s character crazy. The best way for a film or show to be original is to be specific. Try to tack onto your stories what Judd calls a grace note, a moment or line of dialogue that expresses a human truth which touches the heart of the viewer, but stays true to the sense of humor and personality of the character(s) involved.

LEARN MORE

- Judd follows the maxim given by playwright John Guare: All plays put someone in a corner and see how they get out of it. Read *The House of Blue Leaves* and some of Guare’s other plays to see how he makes characters jump over dramatic hurdles.

7.

CRAFTING COMEDIC STORYLINES

LEARN MORE CONT.

- Judd discusses filmmaker John Cassavetes, who believed that most stories are about people in love and the obstacles to their love. Watch some of Cassavetes's films and see what you think. Notice how he crafts a storyline in each movie.
- Watch season 5, episode 19 of *Taxi*, "Louie and the Blind Girl." Judd identifies a grace note at that end of the episode, the truth and humor of which he aspires to in his own comedic writing.

ASSIGNMENTS

- For the screenwriter and writer-director:
 - Look back at your first assignment from Chapter 6, Case Studies: Developing Life Into Story. You should have paired a challenging, amusing, or humorous situation with a person who is perfectly *unsuited* to deal with it. We'll call this your comedic "premise." Now, ask yourself—What are the dramatic underpinnings of this premise? What is at stake for the person involved? What do they want and/or what are they trying to accomplish? What are the obstacles they face? How do their flaws exacerbate the situation? If stakes do not exist, how can you introduce them? If dramatic elements are not present, how can you incorporate them? If the person in question is not flawed, what flaws can you give them? The incorporation of these additional elements will help transform the situation from a comedic premise into a story that "has a reason to exist." To use Judd's example as a point of reference, the premise for *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* is just what the title implies; a man who has not had sex by the time most people have. But Judd and his writing partner, Steve Carell, approached it as a story about shame, embarrassment, and the human desire for fulfillment and connection. Take notes in your comedy journal and use what you've come up with as additional material for your class project.

7.

CRAFTING COMEDIC STORYLINES

ASSIGNMENTS CONT.

- For the stand-up comedian:
 - Begin crafting your two-minute iteration of your stand-up act. You can use what you developed in your 30-second bit in Chapter 6, Case Studies: Developing Life Into Story and expand on it. You should also look through your comedy journal to pull jokes that will bring your act to the two minute mark. After you've collected material, begin stringing it together. Think about how you can transition from joke to joke, and practice religiously. You might use an overarching theme to provide cohesiveness to your individual jokes.

8+9.

STRUCTURING FILMS, PARTS 1 & 2

“Even the movies that you think are super weird have a very simple structure. Now, knowing that makes you less nervous because you feel like, ‘Okay, this is doable. This isn’t something mysterious and magical that I will never crack the code on. This is something that I can figure out.’”
—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Outline the Structure of Other Films
- Begin With a Simple Structure
- Syd Field Structure Case Study: *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*
- Develop Innovative Versions of Established Beats
- Unconventional Structure Case Study: *Funny People*
- Take Time to Establish Characters in Your Openings
- Identify the Ending That Is Closest to Your Heart
- Serve the Story With Every Scene
- Space Set Pieces Thoughtfully

CHAPTER REVIEW

Writing screenplays takes practice—once you finish one, you shouldn’t sit around and talk about it, you should immediately start on the next one. When Judd got serious about his writing, he got into the practice of outlining other movies in order to understand their structure—not with the aim of mimicking their structure, but to learn all the ways other filmmakers have told stories.

In college, Judd took a class with renowned writer Syd Field, whose books many consider screenwriting bibles. Field had a very simple view of story structure in film—a three-act structure, with each act about 30 pages (sometimes longer)—and he believed that all films, at their core, follow this structure. Judd invites you to find reassurance in the simplicity of this structure—it doesn’t have to be complicated to write a movie. But he also encourages you to innovate within it. Judd sometimes follows the paradigm faithfully, as was the case for *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, which he cowrote with Steve Carell. In other cases, Judd dispenses with Field’s paradigm all together.

The structure of *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* maps very closely to Syd Field’s model. The first act is 30 pages and serves as the “Setup” in which Steve Carell’s character, Andy, is introduced. There are strong visual cues—a bachelor pad full of action figures, breakfast for one, his reticence around colleagues—all of which signal exactly who the character is. Toward the end of the first act, the inciting incident takes place, or as Judd says, “a problem lands” when all of Andy’s coworkers discover that he is a virgin.

The second act, or “Confrontation,” spans from pages 30 through 90 and consists of two separate sections. The first section, pages 30 through 60, revolves around Andy’s coworkers’ quest to help him lose his virginity. By the midpoint of the movie that has failed and Andy takes things into his own hands by pursuing a relationship with Catherine Keener’s character, Trish. The second section of the Confrontation, pages 60 through 90, follows the unfolding of their relationship.

The third act, or “Resolution,” occurs between pages 90 to 120. This part of the screenplay focuses on the meltdown Andy has

8+9.

STRUCTURING FILMS, PARTS 1 & 2

when he realizes that he actually has to sleep with his girlfriend, and the arguments that follow. In the end, he reveals that he is a virgin and Trish decides that's something she can handle. They have sex, and this is followed by a big musical dance number to "Let the Sunshine In" from *Hair*.

The ending is just as important as the beginning, and every scene in between should serve a purpose in the story. Judd recommends identifying all possible endings to your film and choosing the one closest to your heart that also leaves the audience with the message you hope to impart.

If you're attempting to crack problems with story or character arcs, think about where your "set pieces"—energetic, extended sequences that contain the film's biggest laughs—should be placed. A set piece in *Knocked Up*, for example, is Seth Rogen's and Paul Rudd's characters taking magic mushrooms before a Cirque du Soleil show. Judd has found that about every 10 to 15 minutes in a film, he wants something "special and hysterical" to happen—a "tear down the house" moment. This helps him figure out the pacing and placement of his set pieces. There's one rule you should follow regarding set pieces: you need one in the last 10 minutes of the film. A film's resolution needs to be as funny as its best scenes.

Sometimes a comedy's structure can be unconventional, like that of *Funny People*, which takes an unexpected turn halfway through the movie in order to reveal a more complete picture of Adam Sandler's character, George. Instead of adhering to a traditional structure in which George would get sick and then get better, thereby resolving the conflict and ending the movie, Judd wrote a narrative in which George's character is even more messed up after he recovers his health. Right when a conventionally structured movie with this story would end, Judd has George pursue an ex-girlfriend on whom he cheated. Seth Rogen's character, Ira, comes with George on his journey, which of course blows up. At that point, *Funny People* becomes about whether or not George and Ira will salvage their friendship. The film's structure doesn't really set the audience up to root for George. Rather, it paints a picture of the human condition.

8+9.

STRUCTURING FILMS, PARTS 1 & 2

LEARN MORE

- Read Syd Field's screenwriting books. Note principles that strike you or help you solve a problem you've been trying to work out in your script.
- Read [this interview](#) with Syd Field to get a visual of his paradigm.
- In this chapter, Judd reveals that some of the openings of his films are inspired by the opening of *Stripes* (1981). Watch *Stripes* and see if you can determine which of Judd's film openings were influenced by it.
- A young Judd received advice from screenwriter and comedian Mike Binder. Check out his IMDb page and watch a few episodes and films he's written.

ASSIGNMENTS

- For the screenwriter and writer-director:
 - Try Judd's tactic of outlining films you admire in order to understand their structure. Choose several movies you admire and outline them scene by scene. Then, look for similarities in the structural conventions across them, and evaluate them according to Syd Field's paradigm. (You can use [this worksheet](#) as a guide.) How much time does each film take to set up the main character? When is the inciting incident or problem introduced? What are the different beats of the middle act? What are the turning points that move you through the different acts? How can you apply what you've learned from these films to your own writing process?

8+9.

STRUCTURING FILMS, PARTS 1 & 2

ASSIGNMENTS CONT.

- For the stand-up comedian:
 - Restructure your two-minute act into five minutes. Judd likes to start his scripts simply and let the audience know who his protagonist is within about 10 minutes of the opening. Use that same concept for your stand-up act. How can you start in a way that lets your audience know who you are and what they're in for for the next five minutes? How long will that take you? 20 seconds? 45 seconds? A minute? Play around with that timing. In Judd's films, the ending is as important as the beginning, and he considers every possible conclusion. Consider all the ways you can end your act and write them down in your comedy journal. Rehearse your act using each ending. Settle on the funniest way that complements the contents of your act and your persona. Figure out where in your five-minute act to place your set piece, the moment in which you'll get your biggest laughs.

WRITING PROCESS: FIRST DRAFT

“You have to find ways to not be intimidated by the process because the idea of filling the blank pages is scary.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Brainstorm Scenes Around a Thematic Idea
- Brainstorming Case Study: *Knocked Up*
- Develop a Rough Outline and Set Reasonable Goals
- Believe in the Vomit Pass

CHAPTER REVIEW

For Judd, the creative process begins with a thought, and in that thought is a thematic idea that he would like to convey to an audience. Once he has the thematic idea or premise, Judd’s first step is to write down scene ideas on note cards, without thinking about how they’ll connect. Judd also records small ideas in a notes app on his phone. He doesn’t have to use all of the ideas he captures—as was the case with *Knocked Up*—but the process of writing those ideas down is crucial.

When Judd has created 100–200 cards, he sits down with them and searches for the story. At this point, he forces himself to outline the movie. He knows it’s not going to be perfect—and that’s okay, because he’ll spend time revising it. Revising the outline usually entails focusing on the characters’ problems—making them more complicated, and either resolving them or not resolving them—and arranging them rhythmically.

Once he finishes the outline, Judd sets a goal for himself of writing a certain number of scenes each day. He works through the outline—not necessarily in order—crossing off scenes until there are no more to write. Judd urges you to not let the writing process intimidate you. Setting small goals of a certain number of pages or scenes each day will help you to not become overwhelmed. Judd recommends that you strive to write five pages per day. At that rate, you can write the first draft of an entire movie in five or six weeks.

Judd is a firm believer in the “vomit pass,” which is a practice of getting all your material down on paper without judgment or self-editing, so that ideas can emerge from your unconscious. Judd urges you to keep your writing time separate from your editing time, because if you edit yourself as you write, you’ll likely end up paralyzed.

LEARN MORE

- Read *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* by Anne Lamott, which inspired Judd’s vomit pass approach.

WRITING PROCESS: FIRST DRAFT

ASSIGNMENTS

- For the screenwriter and writer-director:
 - Settle on a premise or thematic idea that you'll use as the base of your final project. Choose something that feels personal to you, and ask yourself if an audience will be able to relate to it. Draw upon material from your comedy journal. By this point, you should have a host of material to choose from. The possibilities are endless!
 - Now try out Judd's card method. Brainstorm ideas for scenes, and write your ideas down on index cards. Retrieve the index cards you created in Chapter 6, Case Studies: Developing Life Into Story about your experiences, idiosyncratic behaviors, and habits, and see if they feel at home with the themes and ideas you're coming up with now. If you find the approach is working for you, every time you think of an idea for a scene, write it down immediately on an index card. This part of the process will take a significant amount of time. Once you've accumulated a mass of index cards, proceed to the next step.
 - Take your cards and arrange them into a narrative progression. Try to make sense of the order of scenes and consider how you can transition between them. Notice any gaps that you'll need to fill in your outline, which you will complete in the next step.
 - Create an outline based on the rough narrative progression you've made with your index cards. Your outline should include a simple, strong opening that establishes your protagonist straightaway and at least a semblance of an ending. If you need help with structure, revisit Syd Field's books on screenwriting and see chapters 13 and 14 of Judd's class.
 - Now use your finished outline to begin the vomit pass. Spew out scene transitions, bits of dialogue, and anything else you come up with. If you have the urge to edit yourself during this time, force yourself to resist it. Try Judd's tactic of crossing off scenes in your outline as you write them—this should provide enough satisfaction and motivation to keep you going. Write five pages every day and before you know it you will have completed an entire first draft.

WRITING HABITS

“If you can get into a certain kind of flow state, you can be very, very creative. It also has to do with not allowing your judgmental voice to slow you down.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Find the Habits That Support Your Flow
- Give Your Brain Time to Work
- Read Your Script Out Loud

CHAPTER REVIEW

Writing habits are completely personal—some people thrive in a group setting like a writers’ room, while others need solitude. Judd likes both, for different reasons. What’s essential is that you force yourself to actually *write*. Don’t just sit there and think about writing. Habits such as writing at the same time every day can support your workflow and create an ideal environment for you to have that lightning-bolt moment of creative inspiration. Also know that part of the writing process is giving your brain time to work. Even if you’re not working, your brain is working on your story. Trust it and allow it to do so. Once he has a draft, Judd likes to read his script aloud in order to spot what is and isn’t working.

ASSIGNMENT

- For all class project tracks:
 - Although Judd doesn’t personally use the technique, he appreciates his writing hero David Milch’s approach of writing at the same time every day. Pick a block of time during which you know you will be able to write. Hold yourself to the window of time you’ve chosen and use the hour(s) creatively by crafting new jokes for your stand-up act, working on your script, or storyboarding for your comedic short.

12+13.

CHARACTER, PARTS 1 & 2

“A lot of times in movies, characters become little comedy teams. ‘Oh, this person’s passive. This person’s aggressive.’ And then, when they get together, they talk. And suddenly, the passive person blows up after being quiet the whole time. You can come up with psychological dynamics that are also comedy dynamics.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Use Psychology as a Starting Point
- Think in Terms of Egos, Not Morals
- Create Realism With Complex Characters
- Identify Your Characters’ Emotional Core
- Take the Time to Flesh Out Your Characters
- Create Dynamics That Clash
- Give Every Character a Strong Introduction

CHAPTER REVIEW

As you delve into the psychology of your characters, the self-help shelf at your local bookstore can be a great resource. These books shed some light on why people make the crazy choices they often do, which you can then channel into your characters.

When writing characters, keep in mind that the human condition is not ruled by morals, but rather by ego. Characters are not loved because they behave well; they’re loved because they are complex, relatable, and three-dimensional. Even the sweetest of characters have bad days and mood swings.

Again, don’t be lazy when thinking through who your characters are. Judd urges you to take the time to flesh out your characters. The more detailed your characters’ backgrounds, the more storylines you have for a television show, and the funnier and more three-dimensional the characters will be in a film.

When writing pairs of characters, make their dynamics clash. Writing characters whose personalities are at odds with one another will result in the funniest confrontations. Judd recommends giving your characters strong introductions. If someone arrives on the scene in a comedy, he or she should be hysterical. Remember, lazy writing stands out on the screen.

LEARN MORE

- Think about the kinds of characters you’re writing and do some research via self-help books. Maybe one of your characters is a success-oriented business person, an anxious person battling depression, or a codependent person in an unhealthy relationship. Look for books addressed to that kind of person. What makes them tick? What are their telltale behaviors? What kind of people do they naturally clash with? Take notes in your comedy journal as you read. Perhaps your research will even inspire new characters.
- Pick one of the films or TV shows Judd mentions in this chapter with your comedy journal in hand (*The 40-Year-Old Virgin*, *Trainwreck*, *Funny People*, and *Crashing*, to name a few), and take notes every time a new character appears. How is the character introduced? How did Judd maximize comedic effect

12+13.

CHARACTER, PARTS 1 & 2

LEARN MORE CONT.

in the character's entry? If you were the director, how would you have filmed the character's introduction? How would you use the formal techniques of the camera to convey the character's personality from the get-go?

ASSIGNMENTS

- For the screenwriter and writer-director:
 - Write detailed backstories for all the major characters in your story. Really take the time to flesh out who they are by asking yourself: What are their psychological underpinnings? Where do they come from? Why do they conduct themselves the way that they do? What do they want? The more details you have the better. Now look back at what you've written in your first draft and see how these details can be incorporated into the characters' interactions.
 - Pick three characters from the first draft of your screenplay and analyze how you introduce them. Are these the strongest possible introductions that these characters can have? Challenge yourself to rewrite these scenes in a way that highlights the characters' distinct personalities and senses of humor in the most impactful way possible.
- For the stand-up comedian:
 - Develop a character that you can perform on stage in your act. Consult [this list](#) to learn about four up-and-coming stand-ups who portray characters in their acts, then seek out videos of their acts online (or in person, if you're able). Then use Judd's tip on writing characters to develop your own character in your stand-up act. Who is this person? How can you give him or her a strong introduction on stage? What aspects of their personality will people relate to? Write down ideas for your character in your comedy journal. As you progress through Judd's class, you might find that inhabiting a character in your stand-up act doesn't work for your brand of comedy, and that's okay. But don't limit yourself in the beginning. Try it out and see if the character is a fit.

DIALOGUE

“A lot of times jokes don’t work because you can tell that joke is just there because it’s a joke. And it didn’t come from character or the situation. Someone’s just hammering a funny line in. But the jokes always work much better when, in your gut, you know that character would say that.”
—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Determine What Your Character Wants
- Think of Dialogue as the Character’s Mask
- Base Jokes on Your Character’s Personality
- Staying True to Character: *Funny People*
- Test Drive Dialogue As Much As Possible

CHAPTER REVIEW

Once you know who your characters are at their core, it’s much easier to write what they’ll say on screen. Each character in a scene wants something. Oftentimes the wants and needs of one character will conflict with those of another. Judd suggests you think of dialogue as a mask that your characters wear to conceal their genuine feelings. Why might a character act cocky? Because on the inside, he’s terrified. Why does Steve Carell’s character lie in the poker scene in *The 40-Year-Old Virgin*? Because he wants his co-workers to think he’s cool and to keep his secret from them.

Your characters’ jokes should be rooted in their personality and demeanor. Moreover, the uniqueness of a character should drive the jokes he or she tells. If you don’t know in your gut that your character would make a particular joke, then it’s not going to ring true. If you’re at a loss for how a character would respond to something, start by asking yourself what you would say in that situation. Then refine it so that it fits with the voice of your character. Jokes are powered by the distinct qualities and temperament of a character. When you approach dialogue through this lens, the character’s lines will always be original and fresh. Read your dialogue aloud as much as you can so you get a sense of how the scenes will work when brought to life.

LEARN MORE

- As you watch movies and TV shows in the upcoming weeks, keep your comedy journal nearby. Every time a character speaks an excellent line of dialogue, or characters have a great exchange, note it. Over time, you’ll get a sense for the natural rhythm of dialogue.

DIALOGUE

ASSIGNMENTS

- For the screenwriter and writer-director:
 - Adopt Judd's method of writing dialogue for a scene in your screenplay that you've been having trouble writing. Talk through the scene and have a friend transcribe what you say. Sometimes staring at the blank page or screen can give you writer's block, so thinking aloud while someone else types might help you break through that barrier. Take a look at the scene(s) you've produced at the end of the working session. Be a brutal judge. Cut anything that's not hugely funny or doesn't work. Then write a second draft, and then a third.
- For the stand-up comedian:
 - Find an open mic night in your area where you can perform your two-minute act. After your performance, note what worked and what didn't.

15.

TIPS FOR WRITING TELEVISION

“I like to know where I’m trying to get to. . . . With every season on every show, we may not know all the beats. But we basically try to know where we wanna get at the end of the season. And then, we can rewrite the details all day long.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Deconstruct Your Favorite Shows
- Determine the End of the Season and Work Backward
- Take the Opportunity to Explore Characters Deeply

CHAPTER REVIEW

After meeting an old-school television producer who encouraged him to write a pilot, young Judd and a comedian friend took a stab at writing their first episode of TV. Having never written for television before, Judd hunted down and read 50 scripts from the show *Taxi*, along with scripts from the first season of *The Simpsons*. As he read, he deconstructed them, outlining the action and resolution in each. Through this work, Judd realized that each episode had a similar overall structure. Although nothing happened with their pilot, Judd had gained an education in what writing for television looked like.

Television writing isn’t just about writing episodes—it’s also about writing the arc of an entire season. Judd likes to work with the arc of the season in mind, so that each individual episode is a step that leads to the end of a season.

Writing television affords you the opportunity to delve into the nuances of your characters’ lives in a way that writing a movie doesn’t—because when you’re writing a movie, you have to come up with a final resolution, whereas with television, you only have to resolve moments. When you’re trying to decide if an idea should be a movie or a television series, Judd advises you to consider whether your idea requires deep exploration over time—if so, it will likely be better suited to TV.

LEARN MORE

- Read scripts from *Taxi* and *The Simpsons* like Judd did when he was starting out. Here are two original *Taxi* scripts, [“Come as You Aren’t”](#) and [“Jim the Psychic,”](#) and two original *Simpsons* scripts, [“Brake My Wife, Please”](#) and [“You Only Move Twice.”](#) Notice how the stories are structured and how the screenplays themselves are formatted.
- Check out [this interview](#) with Judd in which he explains how and why he wrote a spec script for *The Simpsons* in 1990 and discusses the episode’s airing 25 years later.
- Read humorous monologues about television character tropes and the over-simplicity of their decisions and arcs in [“I’m a Flawed Character From a Critically Acclaimed TV Show.”](#)

15.

TIPS FOR WRITING TELEVISION

ASSIGNMENTS

- For the screenwriter:
 - In this chapter, Judd discusses the differences between a movie and a TV show. As an experiment, consider the possibility of transforming your feature into a television show. What unresolved issues in your story—which simply can't be explored in a two-hour time frame—could be drawn out and examined across a season of television? Looking at your story through this lens, come up with a potential arc for a first season of your movie-turned-TV show. Then create an outline for the episodes/steps in between.
 - Reflecting on the previous exercise, evaluate if your feature script is best served by the feature film format. Do you have a strong enough resolution to your story for it to conclude at the end of the film? Or are you more interested in exploring nuances of character that might require more time?

16+17.

WORKSHOPPING SCRIPTS, PARTS 1 & 2

“I think the key is when you’re getting notes or criticism, if you think that people can force their notes on you, you’re more inclined to shut down. But if you know you’re the final arbiter of whether or not to take notes, well, then there’s no reason to not listen deeply.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Use Roundtables to Punch Up Your Scripts
- Consider All Notes Openly
- Be the Final Arbiter
- Involve People Who Understand You
- Cast Your Table Reads Carefully
- Rewriting *Bridesmaids*
- Writing Doesn’t Stop Until the Movie Is Locked

CHAPTER REVIEW

While Judd is working on a project, he frequently turns to friends, colleagues, and hired guns for ideas to make it better. Judd and his collaborators get together and listen to a table read or watch a cut of the movie and brainstorm ways to improve the drama, jokes, and characters. For Judd, this kind of collaboration is essential. Sometimes the funniest moments of the film are born in a roundtable. On the other hand, sometimes the roundtable’s feedback or ideas can be totally off the mark. Ultimately you have to trust your instincts about which pieces of advice you take, and which you leave on the table.

Getting notes on your writing can be hard, and your first reaction may be to dismiss the notes out of hand. But it’s essential to learn to think through every note, no matter how painful, and to pay attention to similarities in criticism you receive from various people. If you feel insecure when receiving notes, remember—no one is forcing a note on you. It’s your decision to take or leave a note. This mindset should empower you to be open to other people’s ideas.

When you begin to hold table reads for your script, casting is key. The wrong actor reading a part could make your screenplay feel like a bomb. Resist the urge to tear up your pages and instead try another actor. If you find that it’s still not working, start rewriting. Maybe your characters need deeper exploration, as was the case with *Bridesmaids*.

The writing process doesn’t stop once you’re on set shooting your script. Judd encourages you to think ahead to the editing room—What extra material will you want to have if you find that the scene isn’t working? Keep brainstorming jokes or different ways for the actors to perform a scene so that you don’t kick yourself in postproduction.

ASSIGNMENTS

- For the screenwriter and writer-director:
 - Set up a table read to work on your script. Read your script aloud, assigning parts to your friends and/or cocreators, and improve it beat for beat. Cast your table

16+17.

WORKSHOPPING SCRIPTS, PARTS 1 & 2

ASSIGNMENTS CONT.

read carefully, and be aware that a miscast reader can affect how you interpret a character or dialogue. If one of your readers isn't working in a part, have them switch with someone else. At the end, have a discussion about the jokes and the story. Is every scene as funny as it can be? Is the story working? Why is the big scene at the end falling flat? Ask everyone to be brutally honest. You want your script to be the best it can possibly be.

- For the writer-director:
 - Read your screenplay and pick your favorite scene or scenes—one(s) that are meaty and can stand on their own—which will become a comedic short that you plan, cast, and shoot for the directing part of your class project. Remember, the idea for *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* all started with one scene: the poker game in which Steve Carell's character reveals that he is a virgin to the guys at work. Make sure that the scene(s) you select capture the essence of your project and can function independently.
- For the stand-up comedian:
 - Workshop your five-minute act with an audience of friends to test out your material. Also feel free to pitch them jokes you've been mulling over for a while but haven't quite perfected. Listen to their ideas and feedback—but remember, you are the ultimate decider about what goes in your act.
 - Record yourself performing your five-minute act and share the video in [The Hub](#) for peer review. Learn what's working and what isn't, then change or add material accordingly. After you've tweaked the act based on your fellow classmates' notes and your friends' feedback, practice, practice, practice, then take it to an open mic night.

CASTING

“For me, I’m trying to get to the essence of who the person is. In a lot of ways, the scene doesn’t matter. The scene is just a way for me to get a vibe if this feels right, if this person feels correct for the part.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Cast As Early As Possible
- Cast People You Want to Follow Out of the Room
- Remain Open While Casting

CHAPTER REVIEW

Judd casts his films and television shows as early as he possibly can, in order to have maximum time for table reads, rehearsals, and for the actors to connect. When casting, Judd follows his instincts about who is right for the role. He looks for people who seem genuinely interesting and who he’d want to spend more time with.

Judd encourages you to be open to what actors bring to their auditions, as they may have an idea for the character that’s better than what’s in your script. Judd had this experience with Jane Lynch in *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* and Melissa McCarthy in *Bridesmaids*. Improvisation is a great tool for drawing out an actor’s creativity. Let them go off the script at times and you might end up with a result that’s much funnier than what you had on paper.

ASSIGNMENTS

- For the screenwriter and writer-director:
 - Get an actor’s input about one (or several) of your characters. Ask him or her to read your script as if they were going to play a certain character; then have a discussion about the dialogue, the character’s arc, and anything else you’d like to learn about from an actor’s perspective. See if the actor’s interpretation sparks anything for you or gets you thinking about the character in a new way. It’s not uncommon for screenwriters to rewrite parts based on input from actors.
- For the writer-director:
 - Assemble a cast for your short. Hold auditions, looking for actors who can “lift off”—that is, who can improvise and possibly give you a performance that’s funnier than what’s on the script pages. Also ask yourself Judd’s important question: Do I want to spend time around this person?

WORKING WITH ACTORS

“It’s emotionally very taxing to be an actor. And it is a gift. They are giving you a gift. They’re giving you a piece of themselves. So a set should be built around respecting that.”
—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Let Cast Know What to Expect
- Keep Direction Simple
- Help Cast Maintain Confidence
- Respect Their Process

CHAPTER REVIEW

Actors have the difficult job of being emotionally vulnerable on camera, and as a director you have to show them great respect.

On set, Judd tries to maintain a pace at which no one feels rushed. When actors feel rushed, bad acting happens. Setting expectations up front helps build confidence, so Judd lets the actors know before the camera is rolling that they will begin with a couple of takes to find the scene. When they know how to prepare and that they have a few chances, an energy comes to the scene that brings about great performances.

Judd learned from David Mamet’s book on directing that giving actors detailed prescriptive direction doesn’t work. You have to be subtle. Respect your actors and their ideas, and be truthful with them. They want to be able to trust your judgment. Take the time to build rapport before the shoot. Don’t force actors to work in a style that doesn’t allow them to deliver their best performances. Respect their individual processes and adapt your directing style to accommodate them.

LEARN MORE

- Read David Mamet’s *On Directing Film* and note the principles you agree with.

ASSIGNMENT

- For all class project tracks:
 - Take an acting or improv class. Aspiring directors, learn what actors go through to give performances for you and the camera. Bring your comedy journal to class or practice. Take notes on techniques that you can use to better relate to actors and give them more specific, pointed direction that won’t limit their creativity or interpretation of the script. Aspiring stand-up comedians, use what you learn about improv to help you come up with jokes on the fly when you’re on stage. Improvisation is a good way to test out material and keep you on your toes.

ADVICE FOR ACTORS

“I think you could walk into an audition and say, ‘I’m never good on the first one. So if you don’t mind, I’d like to do it two times.’ Every single time I think the casting director or the director will say, ‘Great.’ It also shows that you know how you work and you’re confident.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Show Enthusiasm About the Project
- Be Comfortable as Yourself
- Don’t Be Needy
- Enjoy the Process of Auditioning
- Stand Up for Yourself

CHAPTER REVIEW

Judd’s advice to actors is simple: relax, be yourself, and respect the material. No one is going to cast an actor who walks into an audition acting like the script is shit.

Learning how to feel relaxed or at ease in an audition is a challenge, but it helps to remember that auditioning is not just about the outcome—it’s about the process. If you walk in with a desire to enjoy the process, you’ll go much further than if you walk in desperate and hungry for a part. Even if you don’t get a particular part, you can win the favor of casting directors by being positive and pleasant to work with. If you know you need a second take to do your best, don’t be afraid to ask for it. Casting directors want you to do your best, so they’ll likely be happy to grant you that request.

LEARN MORE

- Judd recommends Kevin Hart’s book *I Can’t Make This Up: Life Lessons*. Hart writes that in every audition, he simply tries to have a great time, connect with everyone present, and be his authentic self. Read his book and experience the perspective of another comedian.

DIRECTING: TONE

“I’m generally going for realism. There might be a color palette. There might be a sense of ‘let’s have this movie be a little colorful and fun.’ Or another time, we might say, ‘No. It’s just totally real.’”
—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Maintain Consistent Tone
- Establish Tone in Preproduction

CHAPTER REVIEW

Judd recommends that you begin establishing the tone of your film in preproduction. Sometimes it’s helpful to compare your film to existing ones so the people working on it understand the world in which it exists. Is it straight realism or is it something more conceptual? Setting the tone early on in the process will help everyone working on the project, from the actors to the costume designer. Tone might continue to develop throughout production, all the way through shooting. Part of the director’s process is deciding whether a scene adheres to that tone. If it doesn’t, cut it or adjust accordingly.

ASSIGNMENT

- For the writer-director:
 - Create a presentation deck that explains the tone you want to capture in your comedic short film. Compare your film to other comedies that are in a similar vein, and cite those examples in your presentation. Be sure to address the level of realism you desire for the project. Use adjectives to describe the tone of the film and the characters in the story. Present your deck to everyone involved in your short, and feel free to share it in [The Hub](#) if you’d like feedback from your classmates.

DIRECTING: SHOOTING COMEDY

“I’m not trying to blow your mind visually. I’m trying to capture a moment so that you forget that it’s a movie. That’s all I really want to come up with—a coverage that feels almost slightly voyeuristic or like a documentary so you do not think about the fact that I exist.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Learn the Basics by Reading Books
- Take Advantage of All Resources at Your Disposal
- Always Get a Clean Single
- Shoot With Multiple Cameras to Capture Subtlety
- Give Yourself Alternatives for the Editing Room

CHAPTER REVIEW

Judd’s primary lesson for you about directing is to not be intimidated by the process—just get out and do it. You’ve likely got a video camera in your pocket (in the form of a smart phone), so there’s nothing standing between you and shooting a comedy short. You can learn the basics of filmmaking by reading books, and you can learn about method and style by watching, listening to, or reading interviews with directors you admire. Glean all you can from the resources at your disposal, then take what they have taught you to the streets to make your own movies.

Judd doesn’t see his directing as overly stylized. He simply wants the audience to feel as if they’re listening in on and observing real interactions between people. To capture that authenticity and the subtlety of conversations, he often shoots with multiple cameras. That way, he catches any natural overlaps in speech or surprising reactions that actors elicit from one another. Judd’s only rule on set is get a clean shot of every person in a scene. That way he knows he can edit around just about anything. Beyond that, he likes to get as many alternate takes as possible so he has choices in the editing room. This is especially important when it comes to jokes—if he doesn’t capture an adequately funny joke, he knows he’ll cut the whole scene.

LEARN MORE

- Read John Sayles’s *Thinking in Pictures* and Sidney Lumet’s *Making Movies*, books that Judd recommends to those interested in learning about the filmmaking process.
- In this chapter, Judd discusses *The Art of Dramatic Writing* by Lajos Egri. Get a copy and see if Egri’s discourse speaks to you.
- Judd sees himself as working in the tradition of directors like Hal Ashby and Robert Altman. Watch a few of Ashby’s and Altman’s films to get a sense of what Judd means.
- Take Judd’s advice and actively seek out the advice of your favorite directors and writers. Watch DVD commentaries, find long-form interviews, and listen to podcasts with each of your favorites.

DIRECTING: PRODUCTION

“There is a way to do stuff that’s very bold and funny and original—even without that [technical] ability—and in a way that costs literally zero dollars.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Assess Tomorrow’s Scenes Tonight
- Schedule Your Shoot Day Thoughtfully
- Set a Realistic Schedule and Stick to It
- Find Creative Solutions to Budget Limitations
- Make Low Budgets Serve You

CHAPTER REVIEW

To prepare for a day of shooting, Judd rereads the scenes on the schedule the night before, to both refresh his memory about why he wrote them and to assess the appropriate shooting strategy. Will he shoot the scene according to the script, or will he need to allow time for improv? He also runs through the blocking, either mentally or in person with the actors.

Judd then sets the schedule for the day, with the aim of being as realistic as possible. Being overly ambitious with scheduling is a surefire way to not only screw yourself, but also burn out and potentially endanger your crew. Judd thinks it’s irresponsible to shoot 16 or 17 hours per day—it can lead to injuries or worse. If you’ve exhausted your crew with a long day, pay for their cab rides home. Foster a safe environment, and make sure your crew feels comfortable voicing their concerns.

If you’re limited by budget, push yourself to get creative with your filming strategies. You don’t need a ton of fancy equipment to make a good film. If you’re shooting something guerrillan style, make that aesthetic serve you and your story.

LEARN MORE

- Curious as to how a shooting schedule is constructed? Check out [this article](#), which explains how to plan your calendar, recommends helpful apps, and includes a breakdown sheet template.

ASSIGNMENT

- For the writer-director:
Create a shooting schedule for your comedy short by assessing each scene according to the following metrics:
 - How long is the scene? (Each page is about a minute of screen time.)
 - How many takes do you think you’ll need?
 - How much improvisation is going to be required to make the scene work, and how much time can you allot for improvisation?

23.

DIRECTING: PRODUCTION

ASSIGNMENT CONT.

- Which actors are in which scenes?
- What days will you not need certain actors to come to set?
- Where will you film each segment, and how long will it take you and your crew to get there?

Allot time for each scene accordingly, then organize your shooting schedule to reflect your priorities. Hold yourself to this timetable when you begin shooting.

CASE STUDIES: IMPROVISATION

“I feel like it’s very helpful to rehearse it and do improvisations in rehearsal, take notes, shoot it as scripted, and then really let them play and see where they go and see if they can surprise each other and—in a weird way—capture magic between the actor and the actress.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- *Bridesmaids*: Create a Mega Document for Alternate Jokes
- *This Is 40*: Rehearse, But Let Actors Surprise Each Other
- *This Is 40*: Experiment With Guided Improvisation

CHAPTER REVIEW

When you’re improvising and trying various jokes on set, it’s important to keep track of not just the material you’re using, but also the material that you’re cutting, so that you don’t lose those ideas entirely. To do this, Judd keeps a mega document throughout production to record all of the jokes that ended up being cut from scenes, ones that the writers penned on the fly just for the purpose of having extras, and jokes from previous drafts and rehearsals that didn’t make it to the final shooting script.

In the case of the toasting scene in *Bridesmaids*, director Paul Feig suggested alternate jokes for actresses Kristen Wiig and Rose Byrne. The goal was to create a scene that felt structured but improvisational, and also gather enough material to be able to have freedom in the editing room.

The hotel scene in *This Is 40*—in which Paul Rudd’s and Leslie Mann’s characters eat edibles—was both thoroughly rehearsed and also improvised. The scene was essentially scripted after notes were taken in rehearsals, but Judd encouraged improvisation to keep the actors (and himself) on their toes. Judd also experimented with guided improvisation in *This Is 40*, giving direction to the actors to riff on certain topics but allowing them to organically come up with dialogue in real time.

LEARN MORE

- Barry Levinson’s *Diner* (1982) was a very important movie to young Judd. When he learned later Paul Reiser’s character was mostly improvised, his mind was blown. Watch *Diner* and pay attention to the natural, improvised style of dialogue.

ASSIGNMENTS

- For the stand-up comedian:
 - Remember the character you started to develop in Chapters 12 & 13: Character, Parts 1 & 2? Bring him or her back and begin to improvise with the character as a base. Performing a character might give you the confidence to throw out jokes in the moment. It will also help you get to eight minutes, which is the goal for the next iteration of your act. Begin by simply inhabiting the character. Practicing in front of a mirror might be

CASE STUDIES: IMPROVISATION

ASSIGNMENTS CONT.

helpful, or if you have a willing friend, interact with him or her as the character. Carry on a regular conversation as the character. This practice will get you in the improvisatory spirit. Write down any material you thought was successful or jokes that made your friend laugh in your comedy journal.

- For the screenwriter and writer-director:
 - Create a document that you'll use to capture all of the material that comes out of improvisation in various table reads and roundtable sessions with your collaborators. This will be your mega document, which you'll maintain throughout the development (and production) of your script.
- For the writer-director:
 - Using the shooting schedule you created in Chapter 23, *Directing: Production*, identify a scene from your short that will involve a lot of improvisation. Hold a rehearsal in which you ask your actors to improvise, maintaining the spirit and narrative goal of the scene but changing the dialogue, making it up or transforming it on the spot. Record the rehearsal, and then review the video and transcribe the improvised jokes and good dialogue that are born from this rehearsal in your mega document.
 - It's time to shoot your short. The night before you shoot, refresh your memory by looking through your comedy journal. What new jokes were improvised during rehearsal that you might like to try out on set? When you begin shooting, tell the actors to perform the scene as scripted, then open it up to improvisation. Allow the actors to play around. Try yelling out lines to your actors if they come to you, and pull from your running list of alternate jokes. After the shoot, you'll be left with a wealth of directorial options and variations of performance, which will work in your favor in the editing room.

25.

THE EVOLUTION OF A SCENE: KNOCKED UP

“I do my best with the script, but I always want people around me that I think maybe can top it. I have no pride about it. I don’t care who comes up with a better line. I just want the scene to be as good as it can be.”

—Judd Apatow

CHAPTER REVIEW

Using the scene in *Knocked Up* in which Katherine Heigl’s character reveals to Seth Rogen’s character that she is pregnant and that he is the father, Judd explains how a scene transforms from a draft into its final version. The draft had the key moments of the scene, and a combination of alternate lines and improvisation was used to achieve the final result. The actors knew what points they needed to hit, but were given the space to experiment and work them out on their own. Heigl and Rogen developed their own rhythm by living the scene in the moment. In real life, information is not delivered crisply. Babbling and stammering naturally occur in conversation—especially in one of this gravity—so Judd used two cameras to capture that faltering.

26+27.

EDITING AND TESTING FILMS, PARTS 1 & 2

“Every scene in a comedy is an experiment. No one knows if something’s funny. You cannot explain why anything is funny. There’s no science to it whatsoever. So every time you tell a joke, you’re guessing.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Edit Early and Adjust Accordingly
- Start With the Areas of Greatest Concern
- Test Your Films to Identify Issues
- Test to See How Far You Can Go
- Create a Frankenstein Cut to Test Big Swings
- Sneak in Alternate Jokes With Voice-Over
- Sometimes You’ll Need to Reshoot
- Sometimes the Audience Is Wrong

CHAPTER REVIEW

Judd has his editors start cutting the movie while he’s still shooting, so that he can review and give them notes on a weekly—or even daily—basis. Reviewing cuts in addition to dailies allows Judd to get a feel for what the movie is becoming. It also allows him to give feedback to the editors early, so that the first full cut of the film is already more in step with Judd’s vision.

Even still, the first time Judd sees a film is a painful experience. The movie inevitably needs a lot of work, so Judd first concentrates on the scenes that are in the worst shape. Then, he addresses the ending. Judd likes to cut the ending early in the process so that he can determine if he needs to reshoot. Sometimes a scene that he was banking on for big laughs simply doesn’t produce them. In that case, Judd has to do some thinking to figure out if the scene can be transformed.

When testing a comedy film, you’re always looking for laughs. If the audience isn’t laughing, Judd knows there’s a problem. A smaller focus group will reveal more in-depth insights about how the audience is relating to the film’s characters. Do audience members hate a character they’re supposed to like? Judd uses that information from testing to rework the character, often cutting jokes or swapping takes to make the character more relatable. Testing also allows you to see how far you can push the envelope with controversial material.

One of Judd’s testing strategies is to create two cuts of a film: the A cut, which is the one that he’s working to polish and tighten, and the B cut, also known as the “Frankenstein Monster.” Judd uses the Frankenstein Monster to take big swings—which could be misses, or could get even bigger laughs than anything in the A cut. Throughout testing, Judd keeps an eye out for dead spots, pacing, and momentum. If a scene needs saving, Judd uses voice-over to replace or add jokes.

LEARN MORE

- Read [this article](#) that describes the way 51 films and television shows were significantly altered due to reviews received at test screenings.

26+27.

EDITING AND TESTING FILMS, PARTS 1 & 2

ASSIGNMENTS

- For the screenwriter and writer-director:
 - Go to a test screening to learn what kinds of questions audiences are asked and to witness the development of a feature film. Try to be a part of the focus group if you can. Sign up to receive updates on the following websites, or simply enter your zip code to find screenings near you: [Lionsgate's search engine](#) for local screenings, [Advance Movie Screenings](#), and [Gofobo](#). Watch the movie you saw at a test screening a second time when it is officially released in theaters. Take your comedy journal with you and note how the structure of the film changed and which jokes were added or omitted.
- For the screenwriter:
 - It's time to clean up your screenplay and take it into its last stage. Complete the final draft by working out any kinks in dialogue, scene progression, or character. Make sure every element of the script is polished, from the story to the formatting.
- For the writer-director:
 - Enlist the help of a video editor or cut your short yourself. If you shoot over multiple days, ask your editor to start editing immediately, and start reviewing the cut scenes as soon as they're available. Adopt Judd's method of creating two versions of your short—the A cut, which will be your tightened, more final version, and the B cut, the Frankenstein Monster that you'll experiment with. As you edit your short, think about timing and how you can arrange and shape scenes for maximum comedic effect.

26+27.

EDITING AND TESTING FILMS, PARTS 1 & 2

ASSIGNMENTS CONT.

- For the writer-director:
 - Host your own test screening and show your friends and family a cut of your comedic short. Create a questionnaire to distribute at the end of the screening. You can use [this survey](#) as a guide, but be sure to customize the questions to your own film, focusing on any pain points or weak scenes you've identified. Emphasize that you want unfiltered, honest feedback. After your audience has completed their surveys, ask a small group of them to do a deeper dive as a focus group. Have an open discussion about the specific areas where your short needs work.

MUSIC IN COMEDY

“I have to say, the only thing I ever regret or wonder if I made a mistake about is music cues. I will wake up in the middle of the night and I’m not thinking ‘Oh, why did I use that joke? Why did I do that scene?’ I’m going ‘Why did I take the Bon Iver song out and use the Robert Plant song? Should I have used a John Lennon song or should I use Zero Mostel?’ And those, those things haunt me.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Use Music to Establish Tone and Reinforce Character
- Involve Your Composer Early
- Score Sparingly for Comedy
- Avoid the Generic

CHAPTER REVIEW

Judd begins thinking about the sound he wants for his movie early in the filmmaking process. He looks for songs that would help set the tone and thinks about where they should be placed. For the score, Judd involves his composer as soon as he begins shooting. While some directors may work with a temporary score from an existing film and then hand their movie off to a composer near the end of the edit, Judd asks the composer to create original music for a temp score.

In general, Judd is not a fan of scores that exactly match the characters’ emotions; rather, he prefers scores that are spare. Judd also avoids generic music at all costs. A bad score can ruin a film, so put real thought into the songs you select and how you use them.

LEARN MORE

- What songs have you never heard in a film or television show before? Which ones would you like to use in your comedy? Share tracks with your classmates in [The Hub](#).
- Check out [Tunefind](#), a website that lists songs from the soundtracks of many contemporary films and television shows. [Here](#) are songs that Judd used in *Freaks and Geeks*.

ASSIGNMENTS

- For the stand-up comedian:
 - Try working music into your act. Where would it fit? What could you do with a song? Andy Kaufman killed with [his bit](#) in which he lip-synced a single line of the *Mighty Mouse* theme song. Kaufman also imitated Elvis Presley using music. How might you use music in your act? Imitations are a viable option. So is analyzing the lyrics of a particularly raunchy song; the pausing between lines to explain your take could be very funny to an audience. Think about how you could incorporate music, which songs you’d use, and how to make their inclusion funny.

28.

MUSIC IN COMEDY

ASSIGNMENTS CONT.

- For the writer-director:
 - Get a composer for your comedy short. You needn't break the bank in hiring a professional—your neighbor who plays guitar or grandma at the piano will do. Involve the composer early on in the project, as Judd suggests. Send footage to the composer, or sit down with him/her to review it, as the project is filmed. Discuss the tone you want and listen to your composer's ideas.

PITCHING

“You can’t pitch it intellectually and hope they get your personality. You have to find a way to bring your personality to that moment.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Brevity Is Key
- Pitch Scenes That Capture the Comedy
- Pitch With Marketability in Mind
- Pitch the Emotional Side of Your Story
- Know Your Ending
- Sell Yourself
- Use the Pitch to Test Them Out

CHAPTER REVIEW

Pitching is an art form unto itself. Judd’s major tenets for a good pitch are: keep it short, show how it’s marketable, show how it’s emotional, know how it ends, and sell yourself. You should be able to describe your story in three minutes or less—don’t give a play-by-play. The people you’re pitching to will be thinking about sales, so let them know you’re already thinking about how it would be marketed to audiences. Stories with strong emotional underpinnings hook audiences—and hook Judd when he hears a pitch—so make sure to illuminate your story’s emotional core. If you don’t have an ending to pitch, Judd warns that you’ll lose the faith of the studio. Make sure you walk into the meeting with a sense of how the story will conclude.

Your listeners not only have to like the project—they have to like you. A movie can take years to make, and a television show certainly does. Do people want to be around you for that long? If not, work on it. Get comfortable, centered, and try to be fun. Look at rejections in a positive light; if they don’t understand your project, they might ruin it anyway.

LEARN MORE

- Want more tips on pitching your movie or TV show concept? Check out [this article](#) which breaks the pitching process down step by step.

ASSIGNMENT

- For the screenwriter and writer-director:
 - Write a pitch for the feature film or television series you’ve been working on throughout Judd’s class. Practice delivering it. Record yourself. Take note of the areas where you slow down, become boring, or might confuse your audience. Upload the video in [The Hub](#) if you want feedback from your peers. You don’t need the whole story figured out at this point, just the main points needed to sell it. What’s the essence of your project? Why is it funny? Be sure to convey that in your pitch, and continue to practice it. You never know when you’ll find yourself in the same elevator as an executive producer.

SUCCESSING IN SHOW BUSINESS

“If you’re not obsessed, you don’t have any shot at all. Hopefully, you have talent. And hopefully, you have some luck. But if you’re not working harder than anybody else, just stop right now.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- Pursue Your Passion Energetically
- Look for Jobs That Will Educate You
- Don’t Be a Room Killer
- Overproduce
- Spread Your Bets Across the Table
- Manage Relationships While Taking Notes

CHAPTER REVIEW

When Judd was young, he was the only person he knew who was interested in comedy. He became obsessed, devouring all comedic material he could lay his hands on—from watching every comedy show on television to looking up Lenny Bruce’s obituary on microfiche at the public library. Judd’s lesson from this period in his life? Pour all of your energy into your passion.

Judd learned that developing multiple skills in the business—writing, directing, producing—allowed him to keep working where someone with only one skill might have had a dry spell. Judd recommends that you have multiple projects going at once. Write a pilot for a television show while you’re working on your film script, and write stand-up comedy jokes on the side. If you’re just starting out, get a job that will teach you about your craft and about the business.

When you’re interviewing for a job—especially one in which you’ll be working in a group setting—you’re being interviewed not only for the work, but for the dynamic you’ll have with everyone else in the room. Nobody likes a room killer, so make sure your potential future colleagues see you won’t drag everyone down with complaints or weird habits.

Make yourself indispensable to the people who hire you. Go the extra mile for them. Strive to be helpful. Even if they don’t use everything you write, they’ll appreciate and depend on your effort.

How you handle notes is one of the greatest challenges of creative work. It’s a bit of a catch-22—if you take a bad note, your project will be bad and no one will pick it up; but if you reject a note, you may take on the wrath of executives. You have to learn how to manage your relationships with note-givers while also protecting the integrity of your project.

LEARN MORE

SUCCESSING IN SHOW BUSINESS

- When Judd was a kid, he'd go home and watch *The Mike Douglas Show*, *The Dinah Shore Show*, and *The Merv Griffin Show*. Track down episodes of these shows and watch them. Why do you think Judd was so drawn to the kind of comedy in these television shows? Do you find them funny? How have stand-up comedy and late night television changed since these comedians were on the scene?
- Now think about the comedy shows that originally sparked your own interest in comedy. Put together a list and share it with your classmates in [The Hub](#). Seek out episodes of shows they suggest that you've never heard of.

ASSIGNMENT

- For the stand-up comedian:
 - Time to craft the last iteration of your act: the tight 10. Using everything you've learned from Judd, your critics, the audience, and your friends who were kind enough to watch you suck, write your 10-minute act. Consult your comedy journal (which should now be filled to the brim if you've been doing things right) to help you add those additional two minutes to your act. Once you've written it, record yourself performing the act, then upload the video in [The Hub](#). See what your classmates have to say and look out for similar notes. Give your peers feedback on their 10-minute acts as well. Now go perform yours!

31.

A LIFE IN COMEDY

“If you want to take that risk and put in that time to see if you have the talent, to see if everything can come together, at the end of that road, if you are great, they will find you. It will work out.”

—Judd Apatow

SUBCHAPTERS

- The Artist's Mentality
- Find Your Band of Misfits
- Comedy Brings People Together
- Everyone Encounters Heartbreak
- Small Stories Can Change Lives
- If You're Strong, They Desperately Need You

CHAPTER REVIEW

The impulse toward comedy is a complex one—it perhaps stems from a need to be seen, but it also involves the risk of humiliation. Like every art form, comedy is a way for people to work through what's bothering them. Through comedy, people can find a supportive, creative community.

You have to be ready to get your heart broken, though. You'll have plenty of great ideas that never get picked up. You'll get the plug pulled on what you're doing halfway through. If you're good and you're determined, Judd urges you to stick with it. The world needs more good comedy.

LEARN MORE

- Watch *Dying Laughing* (2016), a documentary that features a slew of impressive stand-up comedians discussing why they are drawn to comedy, its inherent philosophical quality, and the agonizing experience of being on the road.

CLOSING

CHAPTER REVIEW

Congratulations! You've finished your MasterClass with Judd Apatow! We hope you feel inspired to improve and perform your stand-up act, finish your comedic script, direct a comedy short, or simply infuse your daily life and work with more humor.

Remember what Judd says: In the age of the internet, there's no reason to not make your comedy project. Somewhere out there, an audience and platform exist for your project. You'll never know if you're great unless you try. Yes, there are many, many people trying to make it in comedy or the film industry, but most of them suck. If you are strong, producers and studios desperately need you. Getting in the door isn't difficult, but writing a good script, developing a hilarious stand-up act, and directing a great film is—so get working.

We want to make sure that your experience with Judd and your classmates doesn't stop here. You can stay in touch with your peers by:

- Joining [The Hub](#) to connect with your classmates.
- Contributing to lesson discussions at the end of each video.
- Uploading your relevant assignments in The Hub for peer feedback.
- Submitting an Office Hours question to Judd.

EXTRA CREDIT OPPORTUNITY

- Tweet your thoughts and questions to @JuddApatow and @masterclass. Be sure to include #JAMasterClass in your message.

COURTESY CREDITS

Footage from *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* courtesy of Universal Studios Licensing LLC.

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Footage from *Knocked Up* courtesy of Universal Studios Licensing LLC.

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Footage from *The Pete Holmes Show* courtesy of Team Coco.

Footage from *This Is 40* courtesy of Universal Studios Licensing LLC.

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LOVE script courtesy of Legendary Television.



MASTERCLASS