

# WRITING A TV COMEDY PILOT

With Emmy-Nominated Writer/Producer: **Michael Poisson**

## OVERVIEW:

“Dying is easy. Comedy pilots are hard...” Paraphrasing a little bit there, but I believe anyone who has ever written a comedy script would agree.

There are many different factors to keep in mind when writing a Comedy Pilot:

Am I using a strong comedic voice?

Are there enough jokes per page?

Are my characters funny and relatable?

Is there a compelling central theme?

Am I telling an engaging, well-structured story?

Is it hilarious? (or if it's a dark comedy) Is it insanely sad... and also hilarious?

In this Roadmap Writers 6-Week Class, comedy writer Michael Poisson will work with a small group of writers to teach all the ingredients that go into creating a strong and exciting pilot script. Each week Michael will lead an hourlong video conference covering different aspects of pilot writing. Starting with the concept, logline, and characters, writers will work with Michael to continue on to writing outlines for their pilots, and then script pages. And finally, each writer will learn how to bring their story home with a powerful conclusion meant to not only give a sense of resolution to the pilot story, but to also open the door to an overarching plot that can last for years of future seasons.

Each week, Michael will critique the writers' assignments personally, and give notes on how best to move forward. By the end of the class, writers will have completed a full comedy pilot script, as well as a final one-on-one phone call with the instructor. Lasting about 20 minutes, this final consultation will be used to discuss Michael's thoughts on the completed script, as well as how to get it into the right executive's hands, and any other industry questions the writer would like to ask.

### **INITIAL PREP ASSIGNMENT:**

Email Michael a 1-Page Summary describing your series concept. He will read it before the first class and give you notes after Week 1's Lecture. If you have a Logline for your series, please include it in the document. If not, then just a general synopsis of your series concept will suffice.

**Email Prep-Assignment to Michael by Two Days Before Class #1 @ 6pm PT**

## **WEEK 1 – Introduction and CHARACTERS**

- Instructor will introduce himself and explain background, and industry experience.
- Will talk about the current state of TV Comedy in the industry: Types, Sub-genres, Buyers, etc.
- Instructor will explain LOGLINES and how to structure them.
- Instructor will explain CHARACTERS in TV Comedies, how to build them, what each character needs, and assigning them roles within the narrative.
- Instructor will explain the assignment due for next class and take questions from participants.
- Instructor will go over NOTES from the handed in Prep Assignment, giving students thoughts on their concepts.

**HOMEWORK:** Write the LOGLINE, and CHARACTER BIOS for your TV Series Pilot. Send these to Michael by **Two Days Before Class #2 at 6pm PT.**

## **WEEK 2 – TV Pilot OUTLINE**

- Instructor will discuss any general notes based on the Logline & Character Bio assignments that were handed in.
- Instructor will introduce OUTLINES and discuss Structure and Common Formats.
- Instructor will break down the 3-act comedy structure including the roles of Cold Open/Teasers and Tags.
- Will discuss the importance of Tone based on the genres of the Comedy Pilots being written in class.
- Will talk about the importance of researching similar genre shows and give examples to class participants.
- Instructor will open the floor to Q&A on TV Outlines
- Instructor will give individual notes on the Logline & Character Bio assignments handed in from the previous week.

**HOMEWORK:** Write the OUTLINE for your TV Series Pilot. Send these to Michael by **Two Days Before Class #3 at 6pm PT.**

## **WEEK 3 – COLD OPEN & ACT ONE**

- Instructor will discuss the Outline assignment from the previous week, and give general notes based on the assignments handed in.
- Instructor will introduce the new sections: TEASERS, COLD OPENS, and ACT ONE.
- Instructor will give examples, and discuss the importance of conflict, set-up, and how to not be too exposition-heavy in the first act.
- Instructor will give the assignment for next week: Writing the first act of your comedy pilot.

- Instructor will open the floor for a general Q&A.
- Instructor will go through his notes for each of the Outline assignments handed in, and give a chance for any one-on-one questions.

**HOMEWORK:** Write the **FIRST ACT** of your Comedy Pilot. Send these to Michael by **Two Days Before Class #4 at 6pm PT.**

## **WEEK 4 – ACT TWO**

- Instructor will discuss the Act 1 assignment from the previous week – giving any general notes and clarifications that might be useful.
- Instructor will discuss the new section: ACT 2.
- Instructor will discuss the importance of rising action, the act 2 climax (reversals, complications, reveals, etc.)
- Instructor will give the assignment for next week: Writing Act 2.
- Instructor will open the floor for a general Q&A.
- Instructor will go through his notes for each of the Act 1 assignments that were handed in and give a chance for any one-on-one questions.

**HOMEWORK:** Write the **SECOND ACT** of your Comedy Pilot. Send these to Michael by **Two Days Before Class #5 at 6pm PT.**

## **WEEK 5 – ACT THREE**

- Instructor will discuss the Act 2 assignment from the previous week – giving any general notes, and any clarifications that might be useful.
- Instructor will discuss the new section: ACT 3.
- Instructor will discuss the importance of the conclusion of the pilot while also setting up the conflict for the entire series.
- Instructor will give the assignment for next week: Writing Act 3/Conclusion.
- Instructor will open the floor for a general Q&A.
- Instructor will go through his notes for each of the Act 2 assignments that were handed in and give a chance for any one-on-one questions.

**HOMEWORK:** Write the **THIRD ACT** of your Comedy Pilot. Complete any rewrites of previous sections and **SEND YOUR COMPLETE COMEDY PILOT** to Michael by **Thursday, October 31<sup>st</sup> at 6pm PT!**

**\*\*NOTE:** You will have 2 WEEKS to complete Act 3 and Rewrite any previous Acts in order to complete your full Pilot Script\*\*

## **WEEK 6 – Final Consultation**

- Instructor will have a one-on-one phone call with each writer to discuss their final TV Comedy Pilot that was turned in. It will be a 20-minute call that will include the Instructor's final notes on the script as well as allowing a chance for the writer to ask any questions about the class or industry.
- These phone calls will be set up with the Instructor via email and must take place within 3 weeks of the final Week 5 Lecture.