

*I'm an aspiring comedian/writer just starting out. One day I want to work on SNL. Any advice?*

I get this question a lot (probably once a week), so I decided to write down my best advice.

Most people who are on SNL as writers or cast have spent several years performing or writing comedy on a regular basis. Even though the performers and writers are usually new faces, almost all of them have been performing at theaters, comedy clubs and on the web for a long time. They are far into their journey by the time they get a chance to audition for SNL. You are probably at the beginning.

One unfortunate thing you should know is, for most people, the beginning sucks. It involves a lot of people turning you down, doing work for free, and being poor. Often, this lasts for years, and many people quit because doing something else becomes more appealing. The hardest part is making it through this initial struggle. The people who come out on the other side without changing careers usually stick around in some capacity. Many get regular jobs in TV.

With that being said, here are the best tips I can give to help you start. This applies to SNL and most jobs in TV comedy.

**Find a place to do comedy, and do comedy.**

This sounds simple, but you'd be surprised how few people follow it. Many aspiring actors and writers audition or send out samples and wait for someone to give them a shot. That's a big part of getting opportunities. But it's even more important to just go out and do it. Take classes, join a theater group, go to an open mic night, or put stuff up on the web. Just finding a place to perform or see your writing performed is most important thing you can do as a beginning writer/comedian. It helps you practice, find your voice, and figure out what an audience likes. And, like anything, the more you do it, the better you'll get.

**You probably have to get on stage and perform.**

Just about all TV comedy writers I know were performers. They were stand ups or part of the improv/sketch worlds of Second City, The Groundlings or UCB Theater.

Performing helps your writing career in several ways: 1) It helps you learn what's funny to people and hone your own voice. 2) It helps you to work with others in an ensemble environment – something you'll probably be doing if you work for a TV show. 3) It helps you meet others who are involved in comedy, which expands your personal comedy network. 4) It allows those in the industry to see what a funny person you are.

Still, maybe you're not a performer. Maybe that part is too scary or not what you're naturally good at. Are there exceptions? Yes. Many SNL writers started at The Harvard Lampoon. Are you part of The Harvard Lampoon? No? Then, maybe you need to get up on stage somewhere.

**Find yourself some like-minded friends.**

Most jobs come about because of recommendations. A plumber fixing your sink is not available that day, but he knows a colleague who's good. You'll probably hire that colleague. The same kind of thing takes place in TV. A good writer or performer gets on a show, then recommends someone they've worked with in the past, and that person gets heavy consideration for the job.

When I started out in New York, I did stand up at open mics at bars and small clubs around the city. I would play the same places week after week, and soon I made friends with the other comedians who were doing the same thing. Those people were not only my professional friends, they were my emotional support network. Doing small shows for almost no audience was terrible, but we were going through it together.

Today, several of those people are writers for The Daily Show, Family Guy, The Colbert Report, and Conan. After about five years of collective struggling, one or two of us started to get writing jobs. This opened doors for all of us because these people could recommend us.

So, find yourself a clique of people who are doing what you're doing. Don't look at them as competitors because they're not. They are probably a big reason you'll have opportunities in the future.

**Set small goals and deadlines for yourself.**

I've seen it happen a lot – people start doing comedy, find a comfortable place, and stay there. They play the same clubs or theaters, stay in the same city and suddenly discover that they've been there too long. So, it's important to keep looking forward by setting goals or small deadlines for yourself. These should not be too grandiose. "I'm going to have my own TV show in the next six months" is probably setting yourself up for failure. "I'm going to write one half-hour script sample in the next three months" or "I'm going to perform once more a week for the next three months" are better ones.

**At first, persistence is more important than talent.**

A great way to take advantage of an opportunity is simply to just be around when it happens. And that means showing up, talking to people, sending e-mails, and generally being a little bit annoying. People are more likely to give you something if you're right there waiting for it. So, do your best to be let people know you're there without doing so much that they don't want you around any more.

**Try your best to be nice.**

When people think about hiring you, they probably ask themselves, "Do I want to see this person's face every day?" Nice people have the advantage.

I hope that helps. Good luck.

- Bryan