



Standup For Journalism

7 performers
2 days
1 big problem

Executive summary

This report is a summary of a two-part journalism innovation lab done by Kirsty Styles at the University of Central Lancashire, which ended with a live, amateur standup show called [Standup for Journalism](#) on 8 May 2019.



In light of IPSOS MORI's headline survey [finding](#) that journalists are less trusted than estate agents, the lab was designed to test whether training journalists to do standup comedy could change the public perception of the industry.

The idea for the lab was based on the highly successful [Bright Club](#) academic comedy network, complemented by [research gathered](#) to demonstrate the power of 'comedic public engagement' in academia and beyond.

- 21 people applied for the pilot, which opened for applications from 1 April 2019, with two others agreeing to join after the closing date
- Seven people eventually took to the stage to Standup For Journalism on 8 May, five of whom were journalists
- 33 members of the public joined the audience and 21 of those filled out all or part of the audience survey
- Ahead of the show, a sample of 21 from the audience said they trusted journalists' intentions (average score 6.2/10), over their ability (5.2/10) and responsiveness (4.7/10)

- All the above metrics increased during the show - indicating journalists doing comedy may help change public perceptions
- As the intention and responsiveness metrics increased more than that of ability, this may indicate that, while comedy can show the 'humanness' of the subject, this kind of public engagement may not help demonstrate competence
- On average, from a final sample of 17, the audience gave the show 8.5/10 for being engaging

The show was well-received online and on the night and, given the limited costs involved, is easily replicable.

But it may need more consideration of a 'call to action' on what 'we want people to do next', as one audience member asked: "How should I go about supporting journalism? I do believe in the benefit of good journalism but can't help but get caught up on instant stuff. Trying to figure out what to do."

As 70 per cent of the audience had already heard about the business challenges facing 'high-quality journalism', it would be great to see how the topic would work with an audience that was less aware.

The night was dedicated to Lyra McKee and £160 from ticket sales has been donated to her memorial fund.

"Journalists are often the first to arrive - and the last to leave - simply because they believe in your right to know."

Introduction

Standup For Journalism was a pilot comedy training workshop that geared participants towards a public performance.

It was designed by journalist, standup and UCLan researcher Kirsty Styles to test whether people doing standup about journalism could help change the perception of our industry.

Journalism has a well-articulated, although perhaps not well-understood, image problem, described recently by outgoing editor of the Daily Mail Paul Dacre, exemplified by the fact that they have been found to be trusted less than estate agents.

While the public might not trust journalists, many people certainly love comedy. It was the top podcast genre in 2018, standup is booming on Netflix and top comedians get paid in the tens of millions of pounds, according to Forbes.

Informed by the success of University College London's Bright Club network of academic comedy nights, this pilot journalism innovation product will help the industry understand how comedic public engagement could change its image.

The programme would seek not only to gather data on how audiences receive the work, but also aim to understand the challenges faced by journalists trying to engage the public, collating these findings in order to show implications and opportunities for the industry.

Getting public support, through enabling better understanding, using a medium people enjoy, may be crucial to ensuring the sustainability of this industry.

On 18 April, UK journalist Lyra McKee was murdered while trying to understand why people were rioting in Derry. After getting in touch with the people who were fundraising for her memorial, it was decided that funds from tickets would be donated to this effort.

Projected costs

- Kings Arms Salford theatre space, Sunday to Thursday evening in early May, including AV: £90
- Compere: £100
- Travel expenses for acts where needed: approximately £200
- Filming and photography: £100

Projected timeline

- Mid March - secure funds, book venue for training and show, create marketing materials including Standupforjournalism.com website, pitch to Luminate on 11 March call and Engaged Journalism Accelerator in Birmingham on 12 March
- 1 April - participant advertising campaign via Journalism.co.uk, Bureau Local and personal networks

- Mid April - select participants, deliver training, gather insight on wider challenges
- Early May - deliver comedy night, gather participant reflections and audience insights, create lab report and share with relevant stakeholders

The Lab

The Lab was split into two parts: the training workshop, held for two hours on Wednesday 24 April at the Crown & Kettle pub in Manchester, and the performance, held on Wednesday 8 May at the Kings Arms, Salford.

The target was to train six performers, with an audience capacity of 60 at the venue. The effort leading up to and during the performance was kindly supported by Chris Roberts from Bright Club Manchester.

The initial call for participants went live on 1 April as planned and was publicised through an initial press call via Journalism.co.uk, online networks and direct, personal outreach.



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Stand up for journalism: join a comedy workshop

Stand-up comedy can teach journalists public speaking, presenting new ideas effortlessly and engage with their audience on a human level

Posted: 1 April 2019 By: [Marcela Kunova](#)



Credit: [Marc Kjerland](#)

There are many **initiatives around audience engagement** but journalists often seem to be left out of the debate.

To help journalists connect with their audiences and improve the way they talk about the industry, reporter, standup and UCLan researcher [Kirsty Styles](#) designed a comedy workshop **Stand up for journalism**.

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Kirsty Styles ✓
@kirstystyles1



I need 6 folks from the journalism industry to join a free comedy workshop in April, then Standup For Journalism on 8 May in Manchester. Apply or join the audience here 🙏 >> standupforjournalism.com
#NotAprilFools @bureaulocal @NUjournalism @ejcnet @mcrmeteor @membershippzzle



Journalism.co.uk @journalismnews
Stand up for journalism: join a comedy workshop with @kirstystyles1 bit.ly/2UoErgQ

8:57 PM - 1 Apr 2019

31 Retweets 17 Likes



4



31



17



21 people initially applied to get involved through the online [Google Form](#), which stated 'you do not need to be "a journalist", or indeed, "a comic" to apply'. Below are the answers to a question around their reason for applying, analysed later in 'findings':

What attracted you to getting involved in this pilot?
I would like to network and improve public speaking skills.
I'd like to train in standup comedy and be able to connect better with readers and wider audiences.
I love comedy.
I have been informally studying standup comedians for a long time.
I use satire in my print and radio journalism work so I thought I could do it on stage as well.
Saw Twitter link.
Saw the article in Journalism.co.uk plus I've already been to Cheeky Peacocks comedy workshop in Manchester for writing tips.
See above. I am a journalist (grey-haired) and I wanted to do stand-up for some time.
Though it is a while since I had any journalism published, several people have told me I'm funny & quite seriously told me to do standup comedy or acting.
The chance to meet people, to gain confidence and embark on a new

challenge.
I'm interested in performing character standup again.
A sense of, and skill for, humour is all too often overlooked - plus I'm quite intrigued by this research methodology being pursued.
Giving standup a go on my list of ambitions for the year.
Curious about the project and my lack of comedic ability.
Something new to try. I love presenting and have always wanted to try standup
I worked as an international reporter, then trained in clowning. I am keen to explore the scope for comedy to shine light on challenging social issues.
Passion for journalism.
I don't know, it feels like a really bad idea.
18 years in journalism, like making people laugh, need a creative outlet.
I've always loved comedy and would love to meet some new people (I am new to Manchester).
An interest in the format of comedy to talk about real issue in an engaging way.

- 12 self-identified as working in 'journalism', others were journalism students, journalism academics, press officers, politicians and solicitors
- Six said that could not make the performance date, but said 'I'd like to get involved anyway!' - there was some general feedback online that the lab may have been better attended if it was in London
- A further eight said they could not make the training date, but this was the most popular date among the people that applied
- A second [Google Form](#) was sent to those who had expressed an initial interest, in order to confirm their training place and capture further information about them and their motivation

The training

Seven people said they could make the training, of whom: four were trained journalists, five were people living in the North West.

They said:

Why is working in journalism important to you? If you do not work directly in journalism, why is journalism important to you?	Why is making comedy important to you?
Journalism should be an open communication medium 😊.	Comedy adds light and life to our drab existence. I've not tried to make comedy; but people have told

	me I do it (inadvertently)😬.
To affect political change you need an informed electorate.	Humour is a brilliant way to discuss difficult subjects.
I just love telling the story, but I particularly get a buzz out of interviewing people and getting good quotes - everyone has a story to tell. Likewise the public have a right to know about major decisions which affect them, and that's why journalists hold the relevant authorities accountable.	I like making people laugh - as much I enjoy laughing myself. Admittedly I'm not quite sure how this is going to tie-in with journalism just yet but I'm happy to learn more!
Journalism at its best provides relevant information for people to make better decisions for themselves and their communities. I am interested in ensuring that stories are told in ways that engage wider audiences, and not just groups that already agree with each other, across vital & challenging social issues.	I love making people laugh. Comedy is a way to open the imagination and sense of play that is essential for us to face tough issues and collectively find better ways to live together and flourish in a joyful, healthy & sustainable way.
As a person who works with data, the need to create narratives and stories based or upheld by that data is really important.	We all need a laugh even if it is at my expense :).
It's important as it helps people stay connected with what is going on in the world and to stay informed. It helps create debate and healthy conversations.	Comedy is important to help relieve stress and tension for people as they can think about something else. It can also help build confidence for the comedian itself.
Journalism allows people to know what's happening around them, both local and national thing. In addition, is a way of expressing for communities and get touch with governments.	Life without comedy would be really different. It is an essential part of human life.

- Three people made the date, two journalists and one data scientist
- The two-hour training was very kindly supported by one of Bright Club's Manchester organisers, Chris Roberts, who helped the attendees think about how and what to deliver [see Appendix 1 for training material used]
- Everyone was incredibly nervous and one in particular had not quite understood why they were there
- Further conversations were had in person and on the phone to try to bring the number of performers up to the target of six
- After an industry gathering in Manchester put together by the

Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism at the University of Oxford, two further journalists from national publications agreed to get involved giving me seven total performers, both of whom then declined the invite in the week leading up to the event

- It was decided among those that had agreed to take part that another practice would happen on Tuesday 7 May, arranged by one of the participants at Federation House, Manchester
- Four participants got involved, two were journalists, one of whom joined on WhatsApp video



Julian Tate



Nick Prescott



Angela Yeoh

The performance

The second part of the lab was the performance. A second wave of promotion was needed to fill seats in the audience. Several versions of the poster were made, as people said they could and couldn't make

the gig, which were distributed locally.

Standup... For Journalism?

8 May
6 performers
1 big problem

"UK journalists are less trusted than estate agents."

Join the audience at the Kings Arms, Salford for an experiment: can comedy save journalism?

Doors: 8pm
Tickets: £5 on the door or online at tinyurl.com/trustjournalists
Proceeds to the Lyra McKee crowdfund

Got a question? Email Kirsty - kestyles1@ucian.ac.uk

The event was covered by the Warrington Guardian, as this is my hometown, and I was asked to do a blog for Northern Power Women, whose Future List I was selected to join in 2017.

26th April

Culcheth researcher organises comedy night for journalist Lyra McKee

By **Isobel Cotogni**
Reporter



Lyra McKee, 29, was shot and killed in Derry last week while working as a journalist. Photo: PA

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A CULCHETH journalist has created a comedy night where performers will discuss their experience in the media industry.

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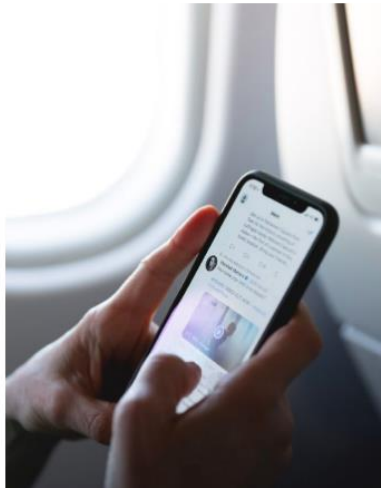
Beautiful and caring

Commented

Warrington Guardian

WHY I'M ASKING PEOPLE TO STANDUP FOR JOURNALISM – AND WHY YOU SHOULD JOIN THE AUDIENCE TO SUPPORT THEM ON STAGE

Standup For Journalism is a new comedy night designed to help start a conversation about the job of journalism in a digital society. Spearheaded by Future List member and freelance journalist Kirsty Styles, the Standup For Journalism pilot will train people that work in journalism to tell jokes, ending with a live performance. Find out more about the event from Kirsty and how to you get involved to make a difference.



"Hope locates itself in the premises that we don't know what will happen and that in the spaciousness of uncertainty is room to act." – Rebecca Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*.

My name is Kirsty Styles and at the risk of making myself immediately unpopular, I have to admit – I am – *whisper it* – a journalist.

We are typically only trusted by about a quarter of the population, the least trusted of all 'major institutions' in many countries.

All in all, I actually spent almost five years trying to be a journalist, most of that training to try to be a good one, mainly, of course because I couldn't get a job at the local estate agents...

Northern Power Women blog

- 815 people viewed the [Eventbrite ticketing page](#)
- 20 people pre-booked, of which 19 came and 14 paid on the door
- After Eventbrite fees, this means £160 was raised for Lyra McKee's memorial on the night

7 performers took the stage, including myself, they were in order:

- Kirsty Styles, former technology editor at the New Statesman, UCLan researcher
- Julian Tait, head of Open Data Manchester, data guy
- Eve Holt, Labour councillor in Manchester
- Nicholas Prescott, reporter at Manchester media co-op The Meteor
- Karen Chavez, a Colombian radio presenter living in Manchester while improving her English
- Chris Paul, former councillor and founder of City Life magazine
- Angela Yeoh who used to work at the Wall Street Journal in Beijing and now teaches light sabres, who joined from London

I paid for two professionals on the advice of Bright Club, to keep the mood light, musical comic act Chris Tavener and Erika Ehler, compere.



Kirsty Styles



Julian Tait



Eve Holt



Nick Prescott



Karen Chavez



Chris Paul

Nah, they're dodgy > 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 > Yes! Local heroes
(I'm really cynical) (I trust 'em completely)

In light of the key IPSOS MORI finding that people trust journalists less than estate agents, these questions were designed to test:

- a) whether people believed in journalists' intentions
- b) whether people believed journalists were able to live up to these intentions
- c) whether people believed they responded to what audiences needed

Finally, after the show, they were also asked:

Is standup comedy done by journalists engaging?

Nah, not right < 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 > Yes! It's riveting!

Findings

At the outset, the programme was designed to 'seek not only to gather data on how audiences receive the work, but also aim to understand the challenges faced by journalists trying to engage the public'.

Audience

- 17 of 33 people fully completed the survey, a further three half completed
- 70% of the audience said they had heard about the business challenges facing producers of 'high-quality journalism' in the UK
- Before the show, there was most trust in journalists' intentions (average 6.2/10), followed by their ability (5.2/10), followed by their responsiveness (4.7/10)
- After the show, all of these figures had increased by more than one point on the scale, with intention seeing the largest increase (from 6.2 to 7.6/10), followed by responsiveness (4.7 to 6.2/10), followed by ability (5.2 to 6.3/10)

To what extent do you believe journalists have good intentions?	To what extent do you believe journalists have the ability to live up to these intentions?	To what extent do you believe journalists respond to the needs of communities?	After the show, to what extent do you believe journalists have good intentions?	After the show, to what extent do you believe journalists have the ability to live up to these intentions?	After the show, to what extent do you believe journalists respond to the needs of communities?	After the show, is standup comedy by journalists engaging?
7	5	4	7	5	4	6
7	5	4	7	5	4	6
7	7	5	7	8	7	9
7	8	7	7	8	7	8
8	6	6	6	6	5	7
8	7	7	8	7	7	10
7	3	6	8	4	7	9
7	3	3	7	4	4	7
3	5	1	8	9	9	10
7	4	4	8	4	8	8

7	4	3	7	4	4	8
5	1	6	10	7	7	9
3	5	2	6	5	4	10
6	6	5	8	8	7	10
6	6	6	8	8	8	9
7	6	6	8	6	5	8
7	5	5	9	9	8	10
7	9	6				
3	3	3				
5	5	5				
Average	Average	Average	Average	Average	Average	Average
6.2	5.2	4.7	7.6	6.3	6.2	8.5

- The average (and highest) score was related to how engaging the show was

An audience member said:

"Out of interest, how should I go about supporting journalism? I do believe in the benefit of good journalism but can't help but get caught up on the instant stuff. So trying to figure out what to do."

Another said:

"I'm a journalist so the show didn't change my opinion of the industry, but found it very engaging and funny. More please!"

The performers

When classifying the initial motivations for applications to the programme, in answer to the survey question 'what attracted you to getting involved in this pilot?', they can where possible be split into five categories:

- Skills development (10/21)
- Audience engagement (3/21)
- Networking opportunity (2/21)
- Interest in comedy (2/21)
- Interest in journalism (1/21)

Of the 12 that self-identified as working in 'journalism', this is represented as:

- Skills development (7/12)
- Audience engagement (2/12)
- Unclear (2/12)
- Interest in journalism (1/12)

It's interesting to see that many on the face of it feel like

standup comedy would be a useful part of their skillset. On skill development, one said: "a sense of, and skill for, humour is all too often overlooked". On audience engagement, another said: "[I have] an interest in the format of comedy to talk about real issue in an engaging way".

When drilling down into the motivations of the seven people who had agreed to come on the training, the trained journalists said:

Why is working in the journalism industry important to you?	Why is making comedy important to you?
I just love telling the story but I particularly get a buzz out of interviewing people and getting good quotes - everyone has a story to tell. Likewise the public have a right to know about major decisions which affect them, and that's why journalists hold the relevant authorities accountable.	I like making people laugh - as much I enjoy laughing myself. Admittedly I'm not quite sure how this is going to tie-in with journalism just yet but I'm happy to learn more!
Journalism at its best provides relevant information for people to make better decisions for themselves and their communities. I am interested in ensuring that stories are told in ways that engage wider audiences, and not just groups that already agree with each other, across vital & challenging social issues.	I love making people laugh. Comedy is a way to open the imagination and sense of play that is essential for us to face tough issues and collectively find better ways to live together and flourish in a joyful, healthy & sustainable way.
Journalism allows people to know what's happening around them, both local and national thing. In addition, is a way of expressing for communities and get touch with governments.	Life without comedy would be really different. It is a essential part of human life.

What the above seems to present is a pretty common understanding of the role of journalists, like [that articulated by](#) the International Federation of Journalists. I'm not sure how much more this tells us about their motivation for doing comedy, except that, just like other humans, they personally enjoy it.

Chris Roberts from Bright Club, who has run a number of similar programmes with academics, and supplied the training materials and supported the performers throughout the process reflected on his experience after the show:

What worked?

- The audience connected best with cases that spoke from close personal experience and passionate honesty (Angela, Karen and Kirsty in particular), vulnerability was important
- People laughed a lot (so it was definitely a comedy night)
- The performers enjoyed it. Nobody ran away and nobody wept. Consider it a win

- 30-plus people through the door on a Wednesday night is a success
- I learnt about sides of journalism I hadn't before. Therefore the show was informative AND funny. A double win

What would you do differently next time?

- Acts that attended the first workshop were tighter and were more like comedy routines (Julian, Nick, Karen)
- I would make workshop attendance compulsory (but maybe offer it on more than one date)
- Some acts tried to cover lots of different ideas within their narratives (the news bubble, minority representation, public trust, lack of money) I appreciate that no problem acts in isolation from the others but a more concise focus on one point could have been more illuminating
- Start earlier. 7.30pm doors, 8pm start (sorry, I dropped the ball on that one)

I have not received feedback as intended from all participants, which limits the findings here.

Eve Holt said:

"Thank you Kirsty for providing the opportunity and push to do it. Made for a really enjoyable, if nerve-racking, evening. I felt so, so incredibly proud of everyone. Seriously guys, you were all brilliant. I am very seriously interested now in organising a stand up for politics night so let me know if you'd be up for helping out!"

Chris Paul said:

"Good for confidence. Quite a small process helped restore my love of writing. Have been very blocked on my academic work. Though not the same sort of task I have learnt or remembered some tools. Also contemplating book(s). Good process to help with that."

Julian Tait said:

"To be honest it was so different to normality I didn't really have any expectations. It was really enjoyable and something that we Open Data Manchester would be interested being involved in again.

"What worked for me was that it was a lovely cohort, you made everyone feel relaxed and looked after. The venue worked nicely although the barman was a bit grumpy. I think having a rehearsal worked.

"If anything I would give it a little more time for people to prepare and maybe have a rehearsal a few days before instead of the day before. Other than that it was fabulous darling."

Actual costs

- Kings Arms Salford theatre space, Sunday to Thursday evening in early May, including AV: £90
- Compere: £60
- Musician: £60
- Travel expenses for acts where needed: approximately £200
- Filming and photography: £0

= £410

Money raised

- £160

= -£250

Conclusions

Method

- Getting the performers felt like quite a challenge, particularly having two national journalists confirm only to drop out
- The idea of 'professional identity' or perception of reputation risk may present a problem for this public engagement format, although after the pilot people may be more willing
- Conversely, many journalists appeared to feel this was a natural extension of their skillset
- Many people could not make one or more of the dates, suggesting a professional issue with time versus other more pertinent commitments, which was anticipated and could not really be mitigated
- Two of the performers were not journalists and most were not fully practising journalists, which may not have presented the fullest or fairest picture of the profession
- More work could be done on the format to ensure people were ready to perform, such as adding another opportunity for training and building in a rehearsal as standard

Event

- Only 33 people came to be in the audience, with full capacity of 60, so before people arrived we agreed to lay out only 45 chairs
- This number limited the audience sample size
- Given the number of pageviews on Eventbrite, it may have been a location issue and I believe doing it in London where there are more journalists would be a good exercise
- The compere split the room and should have been briefed properly to ensure she was on board with the message; the music act tailored his performance well and the professional acts generally did keep spirits up as intended
- The data suggests the performances were better at emphasising journalists' intentions rather than creating a feeling among the audience that they were capable of fulfilling them, which may be problematic
- As my wider research suggested, in order for comedy to fulfill its full potential, it has to reach beyond a middle-class audience

Outputs

- More work needs to be done to analyse the content of the answers supplied by the participants ahead of the event, as well as the content of the performances themselves, to understand exactly how and why comedy might fit into journalists' toolkit
- Many people were keen to gain more skills to enhance their work, but this would have to be carefully managed to ensure that intention, ability and responsiveness come across better to the audience

- This kind of programme is not scalable in the way that digital journalism is - one audience member suggested a podcast, which would offer a means to scale this kind of output more widely

Appendix 1

Bright Club comedy guide

- 1) Remember to bring:
 - Microphone and mic stand (or a mic surrogate)
 - Ideally A3 paper and colour pens
- 2) Introductions and microphone etiquette.

Try not to use a mic stand as it is harder to keep your mouth up against the microphone when performing. Gesticulations or wandering around the stage will move your mouth around and the amplification could be lost. Holding the microphone comfortably in your non-dominant hand, just under your chin with your elbow tucked into your side is a nice casual position and locks the microphone to your face. It also makes you look like a comedian rather than a scientist or musician. Placing the microphone into the stand as the set winds down tells the audience the set is coming to an end and makes handing over the microphone easier between acts.

Exercise - Introduce yourself.

The aim of the exercise is to teach how to calmly approach a microphone and gently ease the performers into opening up to the group or an audience. All performers should get up, one at a time pick up the microphone, move the stand out of the way, take a deep breath and pause, then tell us:

- a. Their name
- b. Their background
- c. One truth and one lie about last Christmas (or another recent holiday). This doesn't have to be funny, it just has to be interesting.
- d. Replace the microphone stand, put the mic back, say "Thank you" and sit down
- e. (all performers and organisers should clap and cheer each person as they sit down)

- 3) General info about Bright club

Use this opportunity to remind everyone of the date of the event, the venue, ticket prices, the start time and finish time. Tell them about the compere and musician (if they are booked) and tell them about the general ethos of Bright club.

The Bright club ethos: Performers are all academics sharing their passion for their research with the audience. There are no right or wrong ways to do Bright Club but this is a comedy routine not a lecture. We appreciate that it is a scary event but every organiser has performed multiple times so we wouldn't ask you to do something we have not done ourselves.

Bright club is all about providing academic insight to a non-academic audience. Whilst not every joke has to be about your research we would hope you can craft a routine that speaks

specifically to your experience and shares either fascinating insights about your research or about the unexpected trials and tribulations of working in academia (whether it be the ego's or unique admin challenges of your experience). We would ask that you build something specifically insightful and unique to your experience rather than a generic comedy routine.

Bright Club is designed as a safe space for first time performers. We have a pro comic and musical act who are there to get the audience laughing, your job is to keep them laughing (half the battle won). Bright Club charges for entry. This reduces the likelihood of hecklers as by paying to attend you are invested in enjoying yourself. If you do get hecklers we have the pro's to deal with them on your behalf if we feel you need it.

This workshop will give you the tools to craft a routine for the show. We are looking for a 10 minute set. Realistically this is 7 minutes of talking when you account for laughter. That is what you need to write. Something that you can comfortably recite in 7 minutes! You can run a little over but please don't aim to.

We the organisers will run sets with you whenever you need. We will help you sculpt your sets between now and the performance and will advise about what might go well, what should be removed (occasionally) and what could be tightened up. Don't be afraid to be bold. With our combined experience we will help you know what comments and jokes will work with an audience. That said, some people can't take a joke and if someone takes offence at one of your comments we will stand with you as long as it is something you have run past us in advance.

4) General guidance on what goes into a set.

a. Powerpoint is allowed (if we have a projector). Let us know in advance. We recommend no more than five slides and no slide should have more than one word, one picture, one meme or one quote on it.

b. Write a script of your performance but only learn the important bits. A Seven minute set should be perhaps four stories/ideas, each should be condensed down to perhaps two or three one word cues. Learn specific wording only when it is essential for the delivery of a joke/punchline. If it is essential to the act drill it over and over until it rolls off your tongue.

c. Beware jargon and threshold ideas. Don't assume an audience will have a deep understanding of something you know well. Make sure all difficult terms are explained simply to keep the audience engaged. This is a great source for jokes- explaining a complex idea with a simple (and sometimes poor) analogy. If you are concerned about threshold ideas or jargon in a set ask a friend or ask the organisers before the set and they can help.

d. When telling a story, be specific. If you had a conversation with someone give them a name and a height and some context. Building them as a person means the audience can imagine them better and

draws them into the story. That said, amalgamate characters to simplify a story. If you had a conversation with five people is it important that it was five? Could it have been one person? It would keep the storytelling easier.

e. Swear to your heart's content but always with purpose (by all means dial it up higher than you actually need to). Be descriptive and blunt and enjoy it. However, making a swearword really land requires them to be used sparingly elsewhere.

f. If you forget something carry on. Don't stop and go back as it risks losing the audience. Nobody else knows what your set was supposed to be.

g. Don't attack the audience. Quickest way to turn an audience is to attack them.

h. Consider your audience. Are your comments aligned with the audience? Are you inadvertently attacking them? What message will get through and how should you phrase it?

i. Consider who is the "victim" of the joke. Be careful who you are making fun of and how you are making fun of them. Make sure you are always punching up.

j. Consider your status. Consider how you present yourself and how that will be interpreted by an audience. Consider if you are talking to or at your audience. Soapbox preachers don't go down well. By all means be a dickhead but be a self-aware dickhead.

k. Interact with your audience if you dare. Show of hands, direct questions or group activities (as long as they are not distracting and are engaging) all keep an audience engaged. If you want to get a volunteer involved then always ask their name and always ask the audience to give them a round of applause when you are finished.

l. Don't be afraid to adlib when on stage. If something works run with it if you can.

m. If they laugh. STOP TALKING! firstly, no-one will hear the next joke. Secondly, soak it in and enjoy it.

n. BE PASSIONATE. If you are interested and excited by something the attitude you put across will drag the audience along with you. This is as important as having jokes in your set. We will talk about emotional regulation later.

o. Enjoy it.

5) Three As

a. Afterthought

Subverting expectation is a really common joke format; the bait and switch. You set up the audience with an expectation then subvert it in a direction they did not expect. The classic example is "I love

children... but I could never eat a whole one". This builds as an important tool along with the other two A's to build a successful comedy routine. A comedy routine is in essence a rollercoaster of a story with unexpected twists, turns and escalations taking the audience from something familiar to something absurd in tight bending arcs.

Exercise - Positive/Negative game.

Everyone should write down a banal positive statement like "the sun is warm" or "I love my job". This then needs to be followed by a nasty afterthought that subverts the expectations of the first comment like "I can almost feel the mass extinction on my skin" or "It's the best excuse I have to avoid my wife". Go around the group and ask everyone to read out their examples. Organisers should have a go too.

b. Attitude

Playing with emotional levels is important. It tells an audience more about your feelings on a subject than your words. Switching between emotions or emotional levels is always funny (especially if the emotion contrasts with the audience's expectation) but the change must be palpable to the audience. Explore and play with this as you develop your set.

Exercise - Fear/Love/Hatred/Lust game.

Split the performers into two groups. Group 1 must perform to group 2 and vice versa, organisers should be split between groups too and get involved also. Each group will be given two of the four emotions listed above. As a group, they must silently convey the emotion one at a time to the other group, slowly dialling up the intensity from 0 (barely recognised) to 10 (hammy as hell) with one member of the opposing group dictating the intensity level. No touching or talking is allowed. The guessing group must at the end guess the emotion being conveyed.

Work out the emotional level you are happy to perform at and then dial it up one level more.

c. Anecdote

Comedy routines, especially for Bright Club are all about experience and sharing your unique perspective/insight/passion with an audience. What funny, odd, intense experiences have you had relating to the topic you are talking about. What message do you want to leave the audience with and what experiences or stories lend themselves to this.

Exercise - Mind-mapping.

Each performer will get 20 minutes to work on a mind map of their routine. They should start with a word or idea central to the routine they want to build like "nuclear power" or "is journalism

important". From here they should fork outwards to keywords or stories (their own or anecdotal) that are funny and interesting and they should continue to spread outwards. Remember the other two A's, what afterthought or opinions about stories/people/endings can you subvert?

After 20 minutes we will ask each performer to share their map. As a group we can then discuss the potential of the set. What areas we liked, what areas we didn't understand and what angles or ideas they might have missed. These mind maps should be taken home by performers and can serve as the basis for developing sets.