



# THE HACK'S A STARTER KIT HANDBOOK:

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Whoever said, "Dying is easy, comedy is hard" never went to a comedy club! Every night at one of the twelve million clubs (almost one for every sixteen Americans!) across the country, comics of all ages, races, and genders are proving that comedy is easy—if you know the secret.

The secret is:

## Originality is a sucker's game.

Think about it. While "Mr. Creativity" is holed up in a dark room with index cards, struggling to find that perfect joke, the hack (from an Indian word that means "opening act," by the way!) is sitting by the pool drinking mimosas!

## Which comic would YOU rather be?

It's not a difficult question, is it?

Best of all, anyone can be a hack! You don't need special skills. You don't need to invest in tools or uniforms. You don't need a microphone—the club supplies that. You don't even need material—other comics supply that. All you need is the courage to keep going.

And we've helped give you a start with the lessons below. Learn them, and your act will write itself. (Note: the hurried comic can just steal the examples.) Before you know it, you'll be getting laughs—big laughs—for material you thought was tired years ago. And you'll be hacking to your heart's—and wallet's—content.

## BEFORE YOU GET STARTED: A BEGINNER'S TIP

Make sure you have a car in good working order. The comedian who can drive the other comics to the club is a comedian who is assured of working.

## LESSON I: TOPICALITY

You're a comic—that means you're hip and "cutting edge" by your very nature. Make sure you keep it that way with plenty of topical humor culled from today's headlines, or, better still, from the acts of comics who once culled headlines that were once today's.

### A. CELEBRITY TRASHING

Talk about not needing originality! Celebrity trashing proves it. It's the comedic equivalent of shooting fish in a barrel—and it's just as much fun.

**Examples:** • Madonna—like a virgin? I don't think so.

• Can you imagine James Brown and Jim Bakker in jail?—oww!!! I feel good! (See Lesson III A.)

• What does Dr. Ruth know about sex? Stroke the penis, stroke the penis—she can't even reach the penis.

Or, to triple your celebrity output, use the "someone meets someone" formula:

**Examples:** • Dan Quayle—who's that? Pee-wee Herman meets Archie?

• Richard Simmons—who's that? Little Richard meets Liza Minnelli?

**Variation:** • Don King—who's that? Jimi Hendrix meets a toaster?

**Other acceptable celebrities:** Tammy Faye Bakker (makeup, jail), Zsa Zsa Gabor (ditto), Leona Helmsley (ditto), Michael Jackson (effeminacy).

## B. COMMERCIALS

Better known as the "Hack Happy Hunting Grounds."

**Examples:** • "This is your brain. This is your brain on drugs. Any questions?" Yeah, can I get hash browns with that?

• The Clapper—I didn't know Barbara Bush could act.

• Life Alert—"I'm falling and I can't get up!" Who asked you to try walking in the first place?

• These tampon commercials say you can swim, horseback ride, and hike. Who cares? What about sex?

## LESSON II: THE PREMISE

The premise is a surefire laugh-getter that does require some creative participation—but not much, fortunately.

### A. THE ATTITUDE/STEROIDS PREMISE

Anything is funny with an attitude; and just think how funny it would be on steroids.

**Formulas:** • \_\_\_\_\_ is just \_\_\_\_\_ with an attitude.

• \_\_\_\_\_ is just \_\_\_\_\_ on steroids.

**Examples:** • A Hyundai is just a Yugo with an attitude.



- A rock is just a pebble with an attitude.
- A poodle is just a rat on steroids.
- A weightlifter is just a regular guy on steroids.
- Quayle is just Agnew on steroids.

**Advanced example:** • Steroids are just vitamins with an attitude.

## B. THE DIFFERENCES PREMISE: MAN/WOMAN AND OTHERS

The word's out—some things in everyday life are different from other things in everyday life. And humor lies in those differences. The chief difference, of course, is between men and women:

**Example:** • Women don't high-five, but men don't exchange recipes.

**Other areas of concentration:** Buying tampons for girlfriend; the length of time women take with makeup/in the ladies' room; shopping; and, for any guy-related joke, this formula:

(Guy-bashing joke) Am I right, ladies?

**Example:** • Guys are pigs. Am I right, ladies?

Another difference is the one between dogs and cats, and can be summed up: *Dogs will do anything, cats don't care.*

**Example:** • Cats won't fetch a bone. "You fetch it. I'm getting something to eat. And take away this cheap shit and get me some real food." Dogs will eat lard and Spam!

## C. DICK JOKES (AND OTHER GENITAL HUMOR)

Everyone loves 'em! Use your imagination, or just use these:

- Examples:** • I'm three inches—of course, width isn't everything.
- I'm three inches—from the floor.
  - She said she wanted a good six inches. I'm not folding it in half for anyone.

Get the idea? And while you're down there, don't forget to take advantage of the "next frontier" in genital humor:

**Example:** • Condoms? Forget that. I'm climbing into a trash-can liner.

## D. AIRLINE HUMOR

Even if you walk to your gigs, a few airline jokes will let audiences know that you're an on-the-go, hip kind of comic—yet the classic structure shows you've done your vaudeville research:

**Example:** • I'm not saying the airline was cheap, but folding chairs and card tables?

## E. CAR HUMOR

What more can we say? It's always accepted, always appropriate. Just make sure you don't talk about your Rolls:

- Examples:** • I have a Hyundai, which is Korean for "piece of shit."
- I have one of those talking cars—it's a Yugo, it says, "Why didn't you buy a real car, moron?"

## LESSON III: RACE, CREED, SEXUAL ORIENTATION

The hack can get big laughs with these jokes, but to stay

out of trouble, remember to state that you're not responsible—it's your character.

## A. BASIC REFERENCES: A LIST

**Gays**—Anal sex; San Francisco; male celebrities in prison; AIDS (for extra punch). An effeminate voice is always a crowd pleaser.

**Examples:** • Last week I was in San Francisco. I dropped my wallet, and kicked it all the way to Oakland.

- I see you're drinking white wine. What are you, a fag?

**African-Americans**—Large sexual appendages, bad grammar.

**Women**—PMS.

**Iranians**—Work at 7-Eleven; cabdrivers who don't speak English.

**Chinese**—Can't drive.

**Japanese**—Taking over the the country; like to take pictures.

**Example:** • I was in Tokyo yesterday—I'm sorry, I mean Los Angeles—I went to Disneyland. There were no Japanese tourists because the camera shop ran out of film.

**Greeks**—see Gays

## B. PERSONALIZING IT: THE "HALF AND HALF" PREMISE

This premise could be called the "salad bar" of racial humor. With it, you can mix and match ethnic stereotypes for a big-laugh combination.

- Examples:** • I'm half Polish and half Irish. I want to drink but I can't get the cap off the bottle.
- I'm half Swedish and half Japanese. I want to have a sex change and then take pictures of it.
  - I'm half Vietnamese and half Chinese. Every time I eat a Great Dane, an hour later I'm hungry again.

## C. PERSONALIZING IT: SELF-TRASHING

The humor in this lesson can be considered objectionable. Learn to deflect these objections by directing the humor at yourself. You'll make everyone feel comfortable—not prejudiced.

- Formulas:** • I feel like the only \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_.
- I have to get back to your house before you do and \_\_\_\_\_.

**Examples:**

Black	Jewish
I feel like the only <u>chocolate chip</u> in the <u>cookie</u> .	• I have to get back to your house before you do and <u>measure</u> your suits.

## LESSON IV: BASIC REGIONAL REFERENCES

Overemphasizing where you've come from, or where you've been, points out just how "observational" a funnyman or woman you really are.

**Example:** • I live in Montana because I failed the test to get into Wyoming.

Other regions you should know include:

**New York**—You get beaten up every day.

**Los Angeles**—Everyone says “dude,” drinks white wine.

**The South**—Beverly Hillbillies, the word “y’all.”

**The Midwest**—Farms, state fairs, corn dogs.

### LESSON V: PROPS

Nothing perks up an act like props; for example, a simple pair of sunglasses can give you the power of a Stevie Wonder impression. So make sure props are a part of your act. Versatility counts, as in the following example:

**Prop example:** • Wig

**Uses:** • Top of the head—Mr. T

• Over the chest—A hairy guy

• Under one arm—Madonna

• On top of the other arm—A mole

Four jokes, one wig. That’s the power of props.

### LESSON VI: IMPRESSIONS AND OTHER STAGE BUSINESS

Why do plain old jokes when you can do a *real* crowd pleaser and stand out from the pack?

#### A. IMPRESSIONS

One method for impressions is to put your characters in a funny situation:

**Example:** • “What if Jack Nicholson, Jim from *Taxi*, Clint Eastwood, and William Shatner went on a camping trip together? I’m not sure, but I think it would sound something like this . . .”

Whoever you do, make sure to milk your impression for all it’s worth:

**Example:** • “Thank you, ladies and gentlemen. That was Jimmy Cagney.”

#### B. OTHER CROWD PLEASERS

Rap	Juggling
Ventriloquism	Magic
Song parodies	Hypnosis
Acrobatic tricks	Tell the audience they were the best crowd all week.
Dancing	

### LESSON VII: HECKLERS

As a hack, you’ll often encounter guys who think they can do just as well. Even if they can, you’ll get the upper hand with a few snappy comebacks:

#### A. THE STATUS INSULT

**Examples:** • “Hey, look, pal, I don’t come down to McDonald’s and knock your burgers off the grill.”

• “What’s your name?” [Then follow up by repeating the question, while pretending to use sign language, as if the heckler were deaf.]

#### B. STRONGER STUFF

**Examples:** • “Hey, look, pal, I don’t come down to where you work and knock the dicks out of your mouth.”

• “Hey, look, if I wanted to listen to an asshole, I’d fart.”

### LESSON VIII: OBSERVATIONAL HUMOR

The comic who can notice the “little things” is a comic

who’s destined for a big payoff. Observational humor teaches us that no crumb is too small for kneading into the bread of comedy:

**Examples:** • On shampoo bottles they say lather, rinse, repeat. But they don’t say when to stop.

• Why do they call it toothpaste? You don’t glue anything to your teeth with it.

**Other areas of concentration:** Rest rooms, toilet paper, cereal boxes, the inconsistencies of *Gilligan’s Island*.

### LESSON IX: SEGUES

In the previous lessons, you learned one killer joke and routine after another. In this lesson, we cover what to say *between* jokes—the segues.

#### A. THE DISCLAIMER

Present yourself as someone who knows human nature:

**Examples:** • I couldn’t make this stuff up—it’s too real.

• The truth is funnier than anything I could make up.

#### B. “IT’S MY JOB”

Or present yourself as a man with a special creative pipeline:

**Examples:** • Folks, it’s my job to think this stuff up.

• Folks, that’s all I do all day is think about this weird shit.

#### C. SHORT AND STRANGE

It doesn’t take much to show that you’re both unusual *and* in control:

**Examples:** • Pretty frightening. • Kinda scary. • Not something you want to see every day.

### LESSON X: A GOOD CLOSER

A good closer is not just a necessity—it’s a source of pride to the hack comic. A crowd pleaser (see Lesson VI B) is always a good choice. But for a change of pace, consider the sentimental closer. With the addition of a few realistic details, such as place names, the following example will get the crowd on your side:

*“You know, folks, my dad’s not feeling well. Don’t worry—he’s not in the hospital or anything, he’s just feeling a little down about life. You get to a certain age, I guess, and you look around and ask: What was it all for? The money, the house, the cars. What does it mean? And you know, when I came into the club tonight, I was feeling bad, thinking about my dad, I guess. But when I got up here onstage and saw your smiling faces, I think I discovered what it’s all about. It’s about laughter. It’s about making even just one person feel better about their life. And if you believe in the power of love and in the ability to send positive energy out into the universe, I’d like to ask you to send a little energy in my dad’s direction. A little bit goes a long way. Thank you. And good night.”*

### CONCLUSION

Being a hack comic isn’t necessarily easy. You’ll hear envious comics call you “hack,” and you’ll know they mean bad things by it. But the rewards of money, travel, and the opportunity to harangue people in a dark room night after night far outweigh the drawbacks.

Remember: It’s about laughter. It’s about making even just one person feel better about their life.

Thank you. And good night.