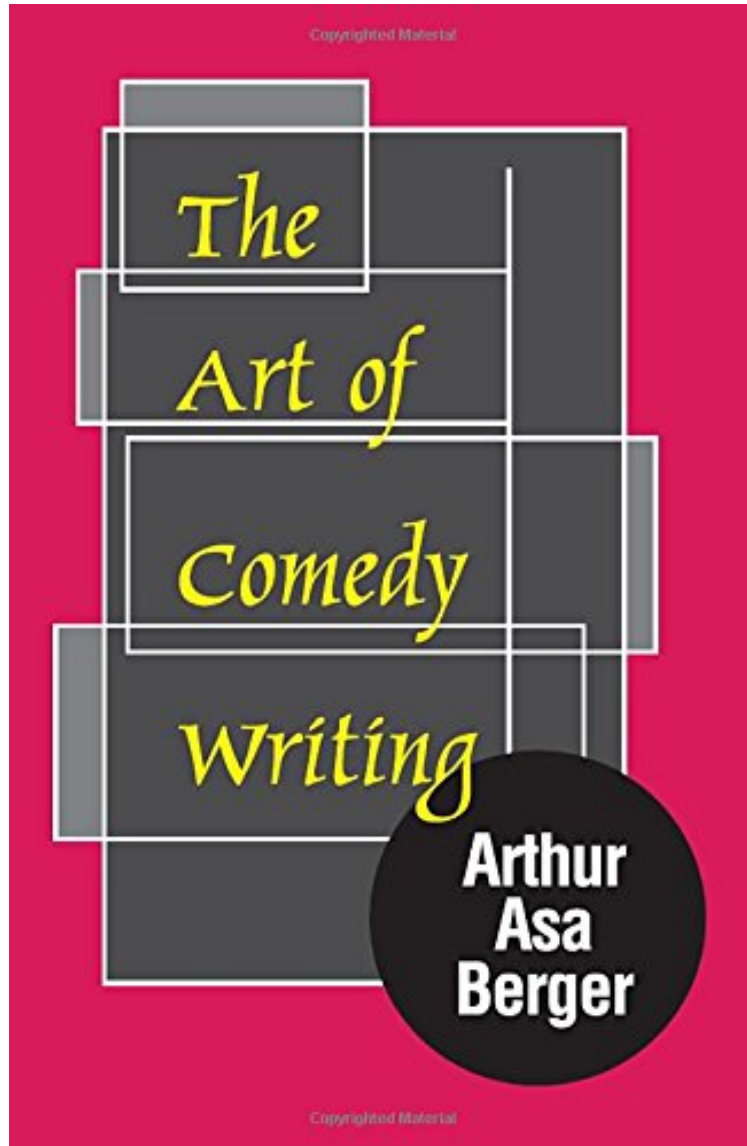


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# The Art of Comedy Writing

Arthur Asa Berger

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**Arthur Asa Berger : The Art of Comedy Writing** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Art of Comedy Writing:

Just as a distinctive literary voice or style is marked by the ease with which it can be parodied, so too can specific aspects of humor be unique. Playwrights, television writers, novelists, cartoonists, and film scriptwriters use many

special technical devices to create humor. Just as dramatic writers and novelists use specific devices to craft their work, creators of humorous materials from the ancient Greeks to today's stand-up comics have continued to use certain techniques in order to generate humor. In *The Art of Comedy Writing*, Arthur Asa Berger argues that there are a relatively limited number of techniques—forty-five in all—that humorists employ. Elaborating upon his prior, in-depth study of humor, *An Anatomy of Humor*, in which Berger provides a content analysis of humor in all forms—joke books, plays, comic books, novels, short stories, comic verse, and essays—*The Art of Comedy Writing* goes further. Berger groups each technique into four basic categories: humor involving identity such as burlesque, caricature, mimicry, and stereotype; humor involving logic such as analogy, comparison, and reversal; humor involving language such as puns, wordplay, sarcasm, and satire; and finally, chase, slapstick, and speed, or humor involving action. Berger claims that if you want to know how writers or comedians create humor, study and analysis of their humorous works can be immensely insightful. This book is a unique analytical offering for those interested in humor. It provides writers and critics with a sizable repertoire of techniques for use in their own future comic creations. As such, this book will be of interest to people inspired by humor and the creative process—professionals in the comedy field and students of creative writing, comedy, literary humor, communications, broadcast/media, and the humanities.

From *Library Journal*: Berger (*Blind Men and Elephants: Perspectives on Humor*, Transaction, 1994) combines some worthwhile generalities with some narrow specifics in this brief book. He ambitiously claims that it "will be of use to anyone interested in humor"—a boast that holds up in his first chapter, as he identifies and analyzes 45 techniques (e.g., comparisons, mimicry, the grotesque) used in dramatic comedies. His bold assertion that there are "no fewer, no more" than 45 techniques, however, begs challenge; for example, he identifies burlesque as a generic term that includes satire (included in his list), as well as travesty and lampoon (not in his list). Berger's other chapters analyze comic techniques in four dramatic classics: Plautus's *Miles Gloriosus*, Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*, Sheridan's *The School for Scandal*, and Ionesco's *The Bald Soprano*. While his interpretations can be helpful and interesting, readers also need to read the plays. More significantly, any book that addresses this topic inevitably suffers if it ignores modern comedic playwrights like Neil Simon, much less the world of television situation comedy. Mostly for academic theater collections. —Norman Oder, "Library Journal" Copyright 1997 Reed Business Information, Inc. *The Art of Comedy Writing* is a fascinating combination of instruction and entertainment. He provides an erudite discussion of his trademark 45 comic techniques, and fully informs regarding the nature and application of each technique. Berger has provided me with rich, new insights into the humor of these plays and made the experience so entertaining that I didn't want to do anything else until I finished the book. And then, I wanted to read it over again. This is a feast of learning and enjoying. —William F. Fry, Stanford University About the Author Arthur Asa Berger is professor emeritus of broadcast and electronic communication arts at San Francisco State University. He is the author of numerous articles, book reviews, and books on media, popular culture, humor, and tourism, and he is the series editor of *Transactions Communication and Mass Culture and Humor* series.