



Hello! Thank you so much for tuning in to Beckett's Babies. We are so happy that you joined us! Every episode, we love to attach a playwriting exercise that we think might be helpful so that you can go forth and start writing your own play! Below is a playwriting exercise for our most recent episode. Grab a notebook and pen! Let's write!

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### Writing a Comedy Sketch

Hello listeners! It's me! Sarah Cho! For this week's playwriting exercise, I am here to share how you too can write a comedy sketch by understanding the basic structure of what goes into a sketch. Learn the rules and then break the rules. That's our life motto here at Beckett's Babies because we are troublemakers.

If you have never written a 10 minute play, writing a short sketch is a good place to start! It will help you to get acquainted with a basic structure that can translate to something larger (like a 3-Act Play). Let's get started!

### What is a Sketch Comedy?

Sketch comedy is a series of short scenes that is typically anywhere between 1- 10 minutes long. Some people may call these "skits" (but don't say skits because it will make some sketch comedians sad 😞 I don't know why but it has. I'll call them skits if I want to though). If you know shows like *Saturday Night Live*, *MAD TV*, or *Key & Peele* then you already know what sketch comedy is and that's more than half the battle.

## The Structure

Generally speaking, popular comedy sketches today are about 4 minutes or under (or 4 pages). Why? Any longer than 4 minutes, and you may run the risk of losing your audience. We only have the internet to blame.

The structure of a sketch comedy is broken down into about 4 parts: The Premise, Beat 1, Beat 2, Beat 3, and a Button.

### Premise:

Just like we do in playwriting, we want to start the sketch with a dramatic question. In sketch comedy, this is typically a problem that is being introduced and as sketch writers, we want to make the problem worse for the character. Why? Because it's funnier to see a character struggle like getting hit in the face with a pie when things don't go their way then to see them succeed and have all their dreams come true. We also like to call this "The Game". What is "The Game"? What is fun about this world and how can we make it more fun to play? **What is being *heightened*?**

### *Example:*

*Morning daytime talk show hosts learn that their show is cancelled and they must work really hard to not cry because the show must go on!*

### Beat 1:

Once we introduce the problem at the top of page 1, we go into the first beat of the scene. In this first beat, we want to establish a pattern that we want to be playing again.

### *Example:*

*The hosts have to introduce the first segment of the show but they begin to break and cry that they lost their jobs and have no idea what they're going to do next. How will they ever retire? What about job security? Will they have to work in the salt mines?*

### Beat 2:

After we establish the first beat, or the first pattern of the sketch, how can we heighten? How can it get worse for the characters? How can we top ourselves from the first beat? What we want to do in sketch comedy is to create hell for the characters because comedy is created from the reaction.

### *Example:*

*The hosts calm themselves. The producer of the show tells the daytime hosts that if they don't get it together, they're going to have to stop the show altogether.*

*The producer also lets them know they're going to have to move their car from their reserved parking spots before end of day. The hosts cry. Again.*

### **Beat 3:**

The 3rd beat of the sketch should have the biggest reaction of the sketch whether it's the situation of the problem or the characters. This is the point where the characters about to really lose it.

### *Example:*

*The hosts bring out the guest on the show. The hosts have lost their mind and can't stop crying. They don't want to be 'ugly crying' but they're 'ugly crying'. It puts the guest in awkward position and the co-hosts starts throwing their face into a bucket of ice water to calm themselves.*

### **Button:**

The best way to describe this is that the button of the sketch (or a 'tag' or an 'out') is usually the punchline of a joke. If the premise, beat 1, beat 2, and beat 3 is setting up the joke, the button is going to be the punchline.

### *Example:*

*A producer on the show run on stage to tell the hosts that the network isn't going to cancel the show. The hosts cheer! However, this is live television and the network saw how horrible the episode was so they're going to cancel indefinitely. The hosts cry again. End of sketch.*

And yes, all of this has to happen in 4 minutes or less (Crazy, I know). But if you can follow this structure and write it this economically, you may just be able to write that 10 minute play too.

Let us know what you think of the structure of sketch comedy. We'd love to know!

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