

# How to Get on Stage for the First Time

*By Christopher Molineux*

When people take my stand-up workshops they often talk about what a great fear they have about doing stand-up. The fear of public speaking and stage-fright in general are broad subjects but in terms of bridging that initial gap and actually putting yourself on stage I would like to provide something of a roadmap to anyone who is interested. The first key to this process is demystifying it; break it down into a few tangible elements. There are three main areas that you can put time and effort into that will ease you into your first stand-up performance that much more comfortably: construction, delivery and situation.

1. **Construction:** Put together your material in advance – you will probably be doing a five minute set so put together the right amount of material and really get to know it. I say get to know it rather than memorize it because the process of word for word memorization can tie people up. If you have a style like Steven Wright you will have to do quite a bit of memorization but most styles are more flexible. In the time immediately before you go on stage refer a list of the subjects you are going to talk about( eg: drinking, Christmas, dieting, Mexico) rather than a total script. Putting together material is too broad a subject for me to cover in detail here but remember:
  - a. you should be doing material because you think it's funny, not just because you think a crowd might laugh at it.
  - b. to go through and edit your material several times – go through it sentence by sentence and determine “is this part essential to understanding the bit?” and ” is it funny?” If it is neither.... Get rid of it! Keep things trim.

Once you have put together some material, edited out the non-essential parts and feel you can remember it all you are on the way.

2. **Delivery:** In comedy, how you say things can sometimes be more important than what you are actually saying. Try to take note of what things define the way you speak and what people find amusing. You can work on delivery in casual conversations. If you have a subject you want to do some comedy on, talk with people about it – not necessarily as “a comedy piece” but just as a normal topic of conversation. Get comfortable on the topic, how you like to speak about it and what seems to amuse people. If you are inclined to doing voices, acting things out, telling stories, using facial expressions etc. pay attention to yourself when you are doing them and remember that you will probably have license to really use them on stage. So figure out some of the characteristics that you have and start getting control of them.
3. **Situation:** Take control of the situation that comedy takes place in so it doesn't take control of you. In a general sense, you should seize any opportunity you have that involves standing up and speaking to a group of people, if there is a microphone and lights involved, even better. This doesn't have to involve any comedy at all, it is more about being comfortable in front of a group of people, holding their attention, using a microphone, having lights on you etc. etc. In the specific, you should go and see some live comedy shows, figure out which venue you might be able to perform in and get to know it. Get to know the people who organize the comedy show, get to know what type of crowds go there, meet some of the comedians, get to know how they perform and ask their advice, most are happy to give it.

Know what you are going to do, how you are going to do it and the situation that you will be in – it's that simple. If you pay attention to these things you'll be far more comfortable on that stage when you finally get there – and, I'm happy to answer any questions you might have about the process in the meantime – good luck and..... enjoy!!