

## Comedy Writing: Inspired by Michael Palin & P G Wodehouse

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**Dates** Wednesdays 26 April, 3, 10, 17, 24 and 31 May 2023

**Times** 18.00–20.00

**Location** Harry M Weinrebe Learning Centre

**Level** All levels

**Class size** Maximum 16 participants

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### Course description

Whether you want to get into comedy writing or are already writing sketches, sitcoms, humorous prose or articles, this course will inspire you with an exploration of two greats of 20th century comedic writing – Michael Palin and P G Wodehouse. Between the two iconic writers, they wrote TV shows, movies, novels, short stories, songs, diaries, articles and more.

In this course led by comedy mentor and director Chris Head, you will get close to personal documents from the Library's collection and go behind the playful and technical brilliance of Palin and Wodehouse. You will analyse and discuss their work, drawing out comedic writing techniques to explore in your own work with weekly creative prompts and feedback sessions throughout the course.

Curator Greg Buzwell will be your host through a tour of Michael Palin's personal archive of original scripts, diaries, photographs and ephemera. You will explore his role in creating some of the most brilliant comedy of the 20th century, from *The Frost Report* to *Ripping Yarns*, via Monty Python's *Flying Circus* and *Life of Brian*. Greg will also give you a tour of the P G Wodehouse archive, with extensive material dating from 1900 to 2005, including manuscript drafts and notebooks relating to Wodehouse's fiction and essays including *Jeeves and Wooster* and the *Blandings* stories.

You will be invited to choose additional texts for us to explore from the successors of these two greats, such as Sue Townsend, Douglas Adams, Helen Fielding, Bill Bryson and David Sedaris. We will also look at contemporary TV comedy scripts and clips from the likes of *Not the Nine O'clock News*, *Goodness Gracious Me*, *Smack the Pony*, and comedians Catherine Tate, Key and Peele, Tracey Ullman, Mitchell and Webb, Fry and Laurie, Rowan Atkinson and more.

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### Week One – Fundamental comedy techniques

This week we will discuss some of the comedy nominated by you, which can be anything from comedic fiction to journalism. Through this we will uncover fundamental comedy writing techniques such as misdirection, rule-of-three, bathos and comic structure.

### **Week Two – The Michael Palin archive**

This week curator Greg Buzwell will give you an up close and personal tour of the Michael Palin archive including *Monty Python* scripts, his personal diaries and all sorts of stimulating material from his career. We will reflect on lessons from Palin's work for our own comedy writing.

### **Week Three – *Monty Python*, *Ripping Yarns* and modern comedy**

This week we'll look at clips from Palin's *Monty Python* work and other shows of his such as *Ripping Yarns*, analysing how the comedy works and how comedic techniques are applied. We'll also look at more contemporary comedy related to the themes and approaches of Palin's work.

### **Week Four – A close look at your work**

This week is your opportunity to share your comedic writing, and to get creative and practical feedback from Chris as well as your fellow participants. Your work might be a script, fiction, non-fiction or anything else that you have been inspired to produce during the course so far!

### **Week Five – The P G Wodehouse archives**

This week Greg will give you a tour of the Library's Wodehouse archive, including handwritten and typed work from draft manuscripts and notebooks. We will delve into his working process that produced such gems as *Jeeves and Wooster*, and the iconic comedy writer will inspire your creative writing prompt ahead of the final session.

### **Week Six – Your comedy prose**

This week you will share the outcome of your final creative prompt and receive inspiring and practical feedback for your future comic prose and scripts.

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## **Tutor**

**Chris Head** is a comedy director, script editor and author. His second book, *Creating Comedy Narratives for Stage and Screen*, is published by Bloomsbury Methuen. Chris has worked as a coach and mentor for various award winning comedy writers, and has script-edited sitcom scripts commissioned by Channel 4, a BBC Radio 4 pilot, and comedy plays and shows at the Edinburgh Fringe Festival and Soho Theatre, which he also directed.

[www.chrishead.com](http://www.chrishead.com)

**With tours by Greg Buzwell.** Greg is Curator of Contemporary Literary Archives at the British Library. He has co-curated three major exhibitions for the Library – *Terror and Wonder: The Gothic Imagination*; *Shakespeare in Ten Acts* and *Gay UK: Love, Law and Liberty*. His research focuses primarily on the Gothic literature of the Victorian fin de siècle. He has also edited and introduced collections of supernatural tales by authors including Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Edgar Allan Poe and Walter de la Mare.

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## **Previous Skills, Knowledge or Experience**

None required. You may wish to bring a laptop or notebook. Laptops are available to borrow, please email [adultlearning@bl.uk](mailto:adultlearning@bl.uk) to book one.

**Facilities**

This course takes place in the Harry M Weinrebe Learning Centre located in the lower-ground floor of the British Library. Please note that the Learning Centre will open to participants 15 minutes before the stated course start time. Tea and coffee will be provided at the start of each session.

**Accessibility**

Please email [adultlearning@bl.uk](mailto:adultlearning@bl.uk) if you have any accessibility needs and we will do our best to meet them.