

## The Late Show with Stephen Colbert Writer's Submission Packet

Hello, talented person and/or sentient AI program! We are looking to hire a staff writer to join us at the Late Show with Stephen Colbert. You've already demonstrated an ability to read, so you're off to a great start.

### Overview

When looking at your submission, we're looking to see:

- Are you funny, curious, and connected with the news of the day?
- Do you have a strong point of view and opinion?
- Can you capture Stephen Colbert's voice?

### Requirements

Please send your packets to [recruiting@cbs.com](mailto:recruiting@cbs.com) by 6pm EST on Tuesday, June 28th. You must also sign and return the submission agreement (attached) or we cannot consider, read, or even glance at your packet.

You may write your submission in any program you like, but we ask that you submit it in a PDF format. Also, it is VERY important that your name, email, phone number – any identifying information – appear ONLY on the cover page. This cover page will be removed before the Head Writers and Producers read your packet. In the interest of fairness and impartiality, all submissions will be read blind.

### Content

We are asking for examples of the following:

#### TWO COLD OPENS

The Cold Open is a short 30-60 second pre-taped scene that airs before our credits roll. They often feature Stephen backstage, or in the office, preparing for the show. At times, they are reacting to the news of the day, or interacting with a guest, other times they're just wacky weirdness. Please script out two of these scenes.

Here are some examples of recent Cold Opens. If YouTube makes you watch an ad, we are sorry. We hate those darn things too.

- How Much Does A Gender Neutral Bathroom Cost - <https://youtu.be/w38cLPaZ7nA>
- A Brief History of Laughing at Trump - <https://youtu.be/NalhsVGno88>
- Jude Law & Order - <https://youtu.be/hG-rKleDx5E>
- Stephen Meets the Mother of Puppies - <https://youtu.be/YNgU4BtWQuU>

#### FIVE MONOLOGUE JOKES

Our monologue is where we take smaller bites of the most immediate news of the day. We tend to do two to five jokes on various elements of any given story. In the monologue we don't use many elements - Stephen will occasionally throw to a video clip to explain a story, or read a pull quote from a news article, or maybe grab a prop. Please give us five monologue jokes total, on whatever story or stories you'd like. Think of them as mouth-tweets for TV.

Here are some examples of recent monologue segments we've enjoyed, to give you a flavor of what they're like.

- June 15<sup>th</sup> Monologue - <https://youtu.be/dYMG4byo5Ic>

- June 7<sup>th</sup> Monologue - <https://youtu.be/Xn5LHWXrdh4>
- June 6<sup>th</sup> Monologue - <https://youtu.be/gEyTvF1KZ0c>

### **OHNE TOPICAL NEWS SEGMENT**

In our topical news segments, we dig a little more into the news. Whether it be a deeper look at a story, or framing a news item in a larger context. Because these are often at the desk, we can include a lot more elements, such as over-the-shoulder graphics (OTSs), more elaborate props, or even characters that emerge from beneath Stephen's desk.

Overall, rather than merely dissecting a story, we like to have some game or destination to help illuminate it. For example, if somebody in the news says something ridiculous (we're looking at you Kanye), Stephen will embody those traits and heighten them to an outrageous level. Or we might conclude with a fake ad, or a call for the audience at home to do something, a song, or a huge string of sandwich puns. The script should feel like it builds to something that encapsulates what you've just told. Think of it as taking the news apart and using the parts to build something even crazier.

Please give us one scripted Topical News segment. Looking for some examples? Well look no further than a little bit further than this sentence.

- Let Kanye be Kanye - <https://youtu.be/aAYEgf2lt2c>
- Here comes Trumpy Boo Boo - <https://youtu.be/fTnlm2cEyQU>
- Stephen's got a Bone to Pick with Guinness - <https://youtu.be/HQlQA67HQhk>
- All-You-Can-Trump Debate - [https://youtu.be/WpKiP\\_gmDS8](https://youtu.be/WpKiP_gmDS8)
- Bernie Sandwiches won New Hampshire - <https://youtu.be/c6RVKcGhCM>

### **THREE CONFESSIONS**

Our confessions segment is where Stephen, from safe behind his desk-confessional, admits to faults and asks for the audience's forgiveness. These aren't sins, per se, but things that feel wrong somehow. We have also found that it is more valuable to have confessions that feel true and relatable ("I only floss on the morning I go to the dentist.") to buy us the rare trip to CrazyTown ("If I got two cats, I would name them 'Cat One' and 'Cat Three' so everybody felt sorry for me."). Please give us three confessions.

Linexamples below:

- Midnight Confessions V - <https://youtu.be/Wd9aOZV0Sgc>
- Midnight Confessions VI - <https://youtu.be/0YE2ZOtjER8>

### **TWO PITCHES FOR SEGMENTS (AT LEAST ONE GUEST SEGMENT)**

These are just ideas for something funny you'd like to see on the show. You don't need to script them out, but explain how the bit would go, and provide a few examples of jokes that they would include. They shouldn't be more than a few paragraphs long, a page, tops. And no fiddling with the margins and font size.

Many of our bits are "refillables" - like the "Midnight Confessions" segment above - which are essentially joke buckets that can be used over and over again. Others in this category include "Life Hacks", "Big Furry Hat" and "First Drafts." If you've got an idea for a brand new refillable bit, feel free to pitch it. You could also pitch less-topical scripts for Stephen at the desk, or easy-to-produce digital shorts.

At least *one* of these pitches should be something for Stephen to do with a guest - it could be a sketch, a song, or a game for them to play during the interview. In general, we've found it makes the most sense to take our cues from the guest - their backgrounds, interests, and acting styles may lead to something bigger.

Be realistic - entertaining though it may be, we would not ask Helen Mirren to juggle flaming torches while freestyle rapping updated verses to the Grandmaster Flash's "White Lines." No, that will have to exist only in my dream journal, I'm afraid.

We are asking for two segment pitches, at least one of which is for Stephen to do with a guest. For the purposes of this packet, please pitch based on a guest who has been on The Late Show in the month of June. If you'd like to see examples of previous guest bits, YouTube awaits:

- Ping Pong Eyeball Theater - <https://youtu.be/LFNXwR8ss8U>
- Lin-Manuel Miranda and Stephen perform "Button!" - <https://youtu.be/uhFeQSBZUSk>
- Steve Buscemi stars as John Kasich in his Latest Film - <https://youtu.be/BqVrpFXXdB0>
- Nick Offerman Community Calendar - <https://youtu.be/9j4E3Rzk6YE>
- Stern Father with JK Simmons - <https://youtu.be/kwUvnd-y3U>

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## A Little Extra Guidance

When deciding what to write about, choose topics that you're genuinely interested in or passionate about. We are looking to hear your voice in addition to your jokes, and curiosity is a trait we value highly. The story should still be timely and relevant, of course (though fascinating, we will not be doing any monologue jokes on the 1922 New York Straw Hat Riots). And pick your subjects carefully. As we say: don't punch down. A victim shouldn't be the target of your joke.

Back up your story - explain where your information is coming from, and include your sources. Do your research, make sure you're not relying on a slanted point of view. The New York Times or Washington Post is a more reliable source of information than CarlsConspiracyCorner.blogspot.com. And as a rule, if you're introducing any new information, always follow it up with a good hard joke.

You should also bring your emotional point of view to the story. Objectivity is, objectively, more boring than when somebody is telling a story with conviction. Ask yourself how you feel about the story, and what the best way is to convey that emotion as comedy. By the way, sarcasm is not an emotion: it's a mask.

That being said, the tone of our show is rarely angry. The world is a strange and crazy place and in general we find it much more satisfying to laugh at it.

Be economical in how you write. Avoid overly florid language, and get your point across clearly. Alone at a computer, you can forget that you're asking a human to say your sentences aloud on TV. Try reading your material out loud - you'll notice things immediately that make it difficult for somebody to perform, or for an audience to understand. If it helps, pets or stuffed animals make a great fake studio audience.

So to review: Be inventive, be funny, be clever, be passionate, be informed, be curious, be careful, be thoughtful, be empathetic, be deliberate, and be yourself. Shouldn't be hard, right? If we didn't think you had the ability, we wouldn't be asking you to write this submission. Good luck.

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## Appendix: Optional Script Formatting

We do not require submissions be written in our particular script format, but here it is in case using it would make you feel more comfortable:

- 1 - Our scripts, much like your grandparents' emails, are written in ALL CAPS.
- 2 - Anything that isn't spoken aloud is written in PARENTHESIS. This includes prompts for who is talking, as well as any stage directions.

(STEPHEN)  
WELCOME TO THIS SAMPLE SCRIPT, I'M STEPHEN COLBERT.

(STEPHEN CROSSES TO DESK, GESTURES TO IT)

(STEPHEN)

... AND THIS IS MY DESK.

3 - All ELEMENTS (graphics, footage, props, music, etc.) are indicated in brackets, starting with the word TAKE: and then the element in question.

4 – VIDEO CLIPS are indicated with SOT. Cuts between footage are indicated with (FLASH). Always give the details as to who is talking and where the footage is from. You can even include the URL at the end of the element.

[TAKE: SOT: DONALD TRUMP, 5/16 RALLY: " EVERY TIME YOU TURN ON ONE OF THOSE AIRCRAFT CARRIERS IT COSTS YOU PROBABLY A MILLION BUCKS." (FLASH) "THE CAPTAIN WOULD SAY "WE WANT TO SHOW YOU HOW GREAT THESE ENGINES ARE WORKING." "NO, I DON'T WANT TO HEAR IT! JUST DON'T!" - <https://youtu.be/Q76cCg5Ur2M?t=12s>]

5 – VIDEO WITHOUT SOUND is written as VO.

(STEPHEN)

LAST WEEK IN LONDON,

[TAKE: VO: FOOTAGE OF BOATS CLASHING ON THE THAMES - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZBCg\\_jrz68](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hZBCg_jrz68)]

PRO AND ANTI-BREXIT PROTESTORS CLASHED BOATS ON THE RIVER THAMES.

6 – FULLSCREEN GRAPHICS are written as FF, and OVER THE SHOULDER GRAPHICS (news style) are indicated with OTS. Mockups should be marked as such. Source graphics should be indicated if possible.

[TAKE: FF: MOCKUP: IGGY AZELEA'S HEAD ON CARTOON ZIGGY'S BODY]

[TAKE: OTS: JOE BIDEN IN SUNGLASSES EATING ICE CREAM - <http://verysmartbrothas.com/images/imrs1.jpg>]

7 – A title that appears over the LOWER THIRD of the screen (or Chyron) below Stephen should appear as L3.

(STEPHEN)

I ENCOURAGE ALL OF MY VIEWERS TO SWALLOW WHOLE WALNUTS!

[TAKE: L3: "WARNING: DO NOT SWALLOW WHOLE WALNUTS"]

8 – Props should be indicated as PROP.

(STEPHEN)

UNFORTUNATELY FOR YOU, DEVIL, I HAVE MY TRUSTY VIOLIN!

(TAKES OUT VIOLIN)

[TAKE: PROP: VIOLIN]

9 – Music cues or sound effects should be indicated as CART.

[TAKE: CART: "DEVIL WENT DOWN TO GEORGIA" PLAYED WELL ON FIDDLE]