

GETTING STARTED AS AN MC

The role of the MC

- Sets the tone and brand of the comedy club.
- Like the host of a dinner party they galvanise a room of strangers. Introduce their existing friends to new ones, and establish trust between them by getting the conversation going and setting expectations.
- Are the ally of the audience. Ensures comfortable room that's conducive to a great night of comedy.
- Sets the acts up for success, and mops up when they misfire. Gets audience listening and laughing.
- A safe, neutral pair of hands that acts as a friendly touchstone of the show.

The basics

- Play music before you arrive on stage. Loud music for the final track: they talk louder so laugh louder.
- Walk on with undeniable confidence. Don't let any glitch or technical problem fluster you. Act like nothing is going to get in the way of a great show tonight. Talk only when you're ready.
- Position yourself as the right person to be in charge that night. You're friendly, happy, positive, and relatable. We trust you to make the night fun!
 - N.B. Only the most experienced character acts make successful MCs. Don't even consider it.
- Introduce yourself as the MC. Don't mumble your name. Tell them how happy you are to be there.
- Start by galvanising the room. I find it easier to just get them to cheer something:
 - *"It's the Saturday late show! Make some noise!"*
 - *"Who's up for a great night of comedy this evening?"*
 - *"Give me a cheer if you're excited to watch Sara Pascoe tonight!"* (this one only works if she is on)
- If you're inexperienced: start with some material. Just enough to get them used to the cadence of jokes, and laughing, and to give yourself confidence.
 - Steve Martin: the best jokes are about the parking. Try and gag about the room, environment, context of the gig. *"I've always wondered what it'd be like to perform in the inside of a mirror ball"* will get a laugh if there are enough mirrors on the wall, even if if, when you think about it, the analogy doesn't work, and the joke isn't funny.
 - The hallmark of a hopeless MC is that they stubbornly run bits irrespective of the reaction of the crowd. You're not doing a spot. Just MC.
- Launch into the crowd, and address them as a group before you engage in a dialogue with one person.
 1. Find out who is keen to be spoken to: visual clues (body language, seat selection) are helpful, but it's better if they volunteer themselves: "Any students in?" "wooo!"
 2. Ask open ended questions. Ask interesting questions and you'll get an interesting answers.
 - "Do you like couscous?" - boring.
 - What do *you* think is the sexiest carbohydrate, sir? - can't help but give a funny response.
 3. Don't put pressure on yourself to be funny. Just chat to them. Don't even look like you're trying to make them laugh.
- Set the house rules and expectations. Mean it.
- Reminder for phones to silent. Tell don't ask.
- Introduce the acts to a room that's ready for them with zeal and joy. They're fantastic acts tonight.
- Tell them they're a great crowd and it's a great show.
- Don't pick battles or follow your ego: just win the war.

Before you step on stage

- Learn the room you're playing. You can't invite people into your space if you don't know it yourself.
 - Bar, toilets, sound desk, smoking area, &c.
- Learn the night: open mic, scratch night, showcase, corporate, solo hour all have hugely different MC requirements. Ask the promoter if unsure.
- Gather intel: Are these the regular punters? How much have they paid? Do they know the acts? Any elephants in the room? Any big groups in?
- Greet all the acts, and communicate with them beforehand. Practice saying their names. Learn their credits (if necessary - it usually isn't) and find out how they would like to be introduced. Be present.

Crowd work technique

- Don't chase laughs and "make jokes" until you gain confidence. Just have a sincere chat with the crowd.
- Ask audiences what genuinely interests you. Every audience member you speak to will be interesting. Find out how to make the audience fall in love with them. *They're the hero of their story: let them shine*.
- Especially when not a heckler: the general rule is to only make fun of a person's choices. Be kind.
- Repeat what the audience member says back to you into the microphone. It's essential everybody hears, and it gives you thinking time.
- It's better to be instinctive than it is to be correct in your responses. Swallow your ego if you don't understand something that's been said.
- Have an out. No matter how badly the chat goes, always have a short, reliable joke, story or anecdote that you can fall back on.
- If an audience member says something funny: laugh!
- Play the scene out. If a crowd member gives a couple of facts about themselves, make some creative leaps and play around. Be confident.

When it goes wrong

- There's no need to be rude about an act that didn't do well, but equally, you shouldn't be dishing out disingenuous praise. Address, and then move on.
- You absolutely have the right to kick people out if they are disrupting the show, but it should be a last resort.
 - Most hecklers mistakenly think they are helping, so sometimes allowing them to get a laugh or two, and firmly requesting they let the acts get on with their set works.
 - Leverage the rest of the audience. Make a reasonable request to the heckler(s), and get the audience to clap you in support. Let them subtly know they are outnumbered.
- It's better to admit you forgot an act's name than to make one up. You'll owe them a drink though.

Wrapping up a night

- Never do more material after the headliner.
- Thank all the staff who made the night happen.
- Remind the audience who they saw. Say the names clearly as people may want to look them up.
- Stick around for a drink and chat to your audience you still have a role to play after the show is done.

This is used as part of my (@olliehorncomedy) MC workshop
Basically none of this advice is originally mine, and I'm grateful to every comic who took the time to teach me these principles. Feel free to distribute this document at will. It's a huge privilege to host a comedy night, so the fact that you're taking it seriously enough to even read this is a great sign. Good luck, and enjoy!