

Synopsis

A NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER NAMED A BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR BY NPR Amy Poehler, Mel Brooks, Adam McKay, George Saunders, Bill Hader, Patton Oswalt, and many more take us deep inside the mysterious world of comedy in this fascinating, laugh-out-loud-funny book. Packed with behind-the-scenes stories—from a day in the writers' room at The Onion to why a sketch does or doesn't make it onto Saturday Night Live to how the BBC nearly erased the entire first season of Monty Python's Flying Circus—Poking a Dead Frog is a must-read for comedy buffs, writers and pop culture junkies alike.

Book Information

Paperback: 480 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books (June 24, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0143123785

ISBN-13: 978-0143123781

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 1.3 x 8.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 14.9 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 94 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #115,567 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #140 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Humor > Comedy #656 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Pop Culture > General #1972 in Books > Arts & Photography > Performing Arts

Customer Reviews

"A series of rich, intimate conversations about the ins and outs of turning funny ideas into real-world art. [Sacks] dives deep with everyone from Saturday Night Live lifer James Downey to Cheers creator Glen Charles to Mel Brooks, and every interview is refreshingly candid. Sacks asks the right questions to inspire lively conversations. As a sort of expert witness to comedy's history, he's reverent, though his subjects are also clearly chosen because they understand the absurdity of their own vocation. He pokes and prods just enough to reveal some guts, and most of the time they're just as fascinating as what's on the surface. A.V. Club, The Onion "A fascinating look into the ways stand-up comedians, directors, and even short stories authors write funny. An absolute must. Flavorwire "A greater look into the craft and business of comedy writing than you can find anywhere else. A comedy nerd

bible. Splitsider “Filled with intelligent conversations | Even if you’re not interested in a comedy writing career, at least you’ll get great suggestions for your Netflix queue. NPR, 2014 “Great Reads [A] pleasingly thick work, born to be well thumbed. Los Angeles Times “[Mike Sacks] conversations with humorists poke at some fundamental concepts of comedy without chloroforming any frogs. More revealingly, the book examines what kind of person comes to make a living putting funny words on paper. Wall Street Journal “[Short chapters offering ‘Ultraspecific Comedic Knowledge] should be of particular interest to anyone thinking about pursuing a career in comedy. The longer interviews should be of interest to pretty much anybody. The New York Times Book Review “[The true usefulness of ‘Poking a Dead Frog to an aspiring comedy writer is in its clear-eyed picture of the gritty inner workings of the comedy industry. Reading about how a joke goes from the mind of a writer to an episode of Community is like watching a magician reveal his secrets: Sure, it dispels some of the magic, but it inspires new reverence for the real skill that went into producing the effect. Slate “[An effort to understand what elicits the guffaw [and] an investigation of the comedic mind and how it works. Poking a Dead Frog also surprises as a how-to-get-in-the-business kind of book, a thread that holds valid entertainment value. Amid these [stories of] wild successes, we get insights into what is funny, why it is funny, and just how hard it is to write the perfect joke. If you have members of your family who dream of being a comedy writer, give them this book. Paste “[Unusually insightful] Sacks teases deep wisdom from comedy titans. Departures “[These] intimate discussions of comedy in all its forms are engaging, and Sacks’s obvious passion is contagious. Whether writers themselves or just fans of funny, humor-loving readers will relish Poking a Dead Frog. ShelfAwareness “[Fascinating interviews with some comedic heavy hitters] full of great moments that are funny, thought provoking, and poignant. If a casual humor enthusiast can appreciate the work this much, the book is going to be snapped up by comedy writers and aficionados. Library Journal, starred review “[An] excellent book [Sacks] once again displays his ability to get fascinating and honest interviews from comic luminaries. Publishers Weekly “[If you’re a fan of funny and who isn’t? you’re sure to find something of interest in Sacks’s follow-up to And Here’s the

Kicker. "No one generates more interesting, revealing, entertaining interviews than Mike Sacks. His love and knowledge of comedy are apparent, and, as a result, the fascinating and sometimes tight-lipped comedy greats open up to him in ways they rarely do. Poking a Dead Frog is a classic. Bob Odenkirk, co-creator of Mr. Show and former writer, Saturday Night Live. "This book is what I really look forward to in a book about humor: rich with words and humor, and funny stories with words. Thank you for your time. Will Ferrell. "These interviews go to dark depths and offer useful, applicable insight into how excellent comedy is written. If you read it, you're going to be better at writing comedy and may even wind up in a position where you can take jobs away from the younger interviewees. I specify the younger interview subjects because some of the older ones will die soon. Rob Delaney. "I wish I'd had a book like this when I was trying to break in. Also, a book on personal hygiene. Jack Handey, author of Deep Thoughts and The Stench of Honolulu. "There are few better interviewers than Mike Sacks. Poking a Dead Frog is a must-read for any comedy nerd or fan of pop culture history. Dana Brown, Vanity Fair.

Mike Sacks is the author of three previous books including And Here, as the Kicker: Conversations with 21 Top Humor Writers on Their Craft. Currently on the editorial staff of Vanity Fair, he has also written for the New Yorker, the New York Times, Esquire, GQ, McSweeney's, Vice, and Salon.

If comedy is linguistic magic, then Poking a Dead Frog is a wonderful peeling back of the curtain. What makes funny funny? Do some people just have the knack? Or, as Monty Python's Terry Jones says, how do you combine three ideas to produce not a fourth idea but a star? There are as many answers as there are interviews in this book. I was interested to find comparisons between the writers, such as: be extremely personal, and bust your ass. Not only will comedy writers love this book, the advice contained within applies to writers of all stripes. A joke is, after all, a super compressed story. And several of the interviewees have a literary slant, my favorites being George Saunders, Bruce Jay Friedman and Mike Schur. You can tell these lucky unfortunates are both intellectual and neurotic. Therein lies the beauty. Mike Sacks has clearly put in his research. His interviews read like something out of the Paris Review, only about comedy. I know from Brad Listi's podcast that Mike has at least a twenty hour talk with the comedians, which

allows the conversations to delve deeply into craft, hard work, luck and inspiration. Sacks is interested in comedy's history as well. The talks with older writers are gold. It's fun to trace the comic lineage from The Lonely Guy's Book of Life to Seinfeld to The Office. One thread that has changed since Sacks's last book is the widespread use of the Internet as a means to launch a comedy career. The democracy is exciting, but one thing is for sure, being funny is hard work.

"Dying is easy. Comedy is Hard," is an old show business truism. It's tempting to want to write comedy because the experts make it look deceptively easy. But after reading "Poking a Dead Frog" it becomes clear that writing the funny words that seem to have been just tossed off casually hide a lot of hard work. Just as deceptively easy is the art of interviewing, and Mike Sack's skills as an interviewer may soon make him as famous as some of the people he interviews. Mike Sack's research is meticulous, his style candid, and his questions intelligent and thoughtful. His passion for the subject of comedy writing is obvious. I highly recommend reading "Poking a Dead Frog." The book is not only an education in what it takes to be a successful comedy writer, but also an example of how a gifted interviewer can make all the difference. By treating his subjects with respect and asking the right questions, he gets honest and open answers.

This is an outstanding book that becomes a reference for repeated reading. An immense variety of comedy writers share what they believe to be the basis of their humor and of humor in general. Along the way, most cite works of popular and classical literature, earlier movies, and prior television shows. These in turn become a source of books that I want to read and videos that I want to view. Some prior reviewers have given this book lower ratings, because they did not find it "funny." They miss the point. Philosophy of humor and not actual jokes is the purpose of this superb work.

If you love comedy, whether as an audience member or as someone who would like to perform and write, this is the book for you. All in all, for the latter, the most frequent advice is to start with stand up and keep getting up there until you learn what works and what doesn't. If you're persistent and make people laugh, you're on your way to being noticed. If you want to write, then rewrite and rewrite until you develop a package that's unique and funny enough to submit to your favorite show. Sounds simple? Of course not.

This is an amazing book backed to the brim with excellent comedy writing advice, interesting insight, and entertaining interviews. Lots of material here; I've already found myself going back and combing through some of the better interviews and looking up references that I had never heard of. It's great and if you are here reading this review, chances are this book is exactly what you are hoping it will be.

If you have even the slightest interest in comedy, no matter the medium, you will find something to love in this book. Mike Sacks is an excellent and talented interviewer who draws out the best in his interviewees. He asks pertinent and entertaining questions and his subjects are fascinating to boot. I cannot recommend this book enough to all of my friends and even bought copies as gifts before I had even finished the book.

This book turned out to be more advice for writers; not quite what I expected. I still enjoyed it. It was still interesting to hear from various writers and their philosophies. I even picked up on some great "life advice." So although I was looking for something to make me laugh more, this was still an interesting read.

Enjoyable, easy read on the multiple ways comedy writers got into their specific niches, and the diverse niches. Not as many jokes as Freud's "Jokes and their relation to the unconscious," but provides a good feel for multiple slices of the industry. Several interviewees say, don't choose this as a career unless you have to. "Seems a common advice for many of the arts.

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