

Tyler Jackson, B.A. English, 2010

By Sarah K. Miller

Technical Writer/Comedian

“Standup is a style of writing and performing unlike any other. It’s frustrating, it’s terrifying, but it’s also the most rewarding thing I’ve ever done.”



Tyler Jackson graduated in 2010 from WKU. He worked a series of full time jobs before he found a position at a place called Cognitive Arts. “It’s essentially a technical writing job,” said Jackson. “They get contracted out by companies to make training materials, so basically I interview people and learn about their jobs, then shape that information into a teachable format—usually guides for a training class or a script for a web-based class or something like that. It’s a pretty decent job— I actually get to use my writing degree. I’m always working on something different. Every project is like learning how to do a new job. Some of the folks here even make training videos and video games.” He said this job is just the day job for him as a means to pay bills.

Jackson spends most of his time as an up-and-coming standup comedian. “I do a lot of writing, reading, doing shows on the road. I’ve been part of several comedy festivals and run a few successful and respected standup shows around Chicago and in Louisville, Kentucky.” Jackson said that his English degree has aided his career path as well. “Being a comedian, I write constantly. Being an English major certainly helps me dig deep into my thoughts, analyze details, and look at things from different angles. I have to consistently be original and fresh— the discipline of writing constantly, every day, is a HUGE asset to me.”

He said that a lot of the writing process is just keeping your eyes open for weird things you see or strange thoughts you have and remembering to write them down before they leave your brain. “It’s a lot of just training your brain to wander and being open to new ideas. That, and repetition. A lot, lot, lot, lot of repetition. Once you have an idea down, you keep telling it, rewriting it, working on timing, chopping out extraneous words, telling it some more, rewriting it again, figuring out how to say everything just right, telling it again, telling it ten more times, doing five more drafts, changing one word, telling it again. Standup is a style of writing and performing unlike any other. It’s

frustrating, it's terrifying, but it's also the most rewarding thing I've ever done. Holy cow, when you make a room full of people laugh on the regular, you feel like some kind of wizard that's figured out some universal secret and now you're trying to use that secret to get on Conan.”

Jackson is a regular on multiple different shows and runs his own show called “Late Late Breakfast.” His show has been touring around the country all summer and just started a second show in New York City. “We're going up there to host a special edition of the show in the New York Comedy Festival, actually! It's an interesting show — I've always been kind of obsessed with Oulipo-ish things — the idea of applying systems of rules and constraints to creativity and expression. The show is kind of an outlet for that — we make people perform standup within a system of weird rules. It's crazy what kinds of things applying constraints to creativity and performance can bring out of people — even bad sets are funny when people get really into the rules and games.”

His advice for current students is to find a career path that is gratifying. “Don't be afraid to do what you enjoy, even if it's terrifying. I dropped out of medical school to devote more time to standup (it's cool, I absolutely hated medical school). A few years later, I moved to Chicago to pursue it, even though I had zero plans about how to live up there. If you're smart about things, you'll get by. I'm not saying quit your lucrative job to jump headfirst into your experimental theater — you can be realistic and still take time to pursue things. Making a living from creative work is hard and takes years. Take some time off to go to that conference. Go to shows in the evening. Create. Perform. Work. Maybe it WILL grow into something that you can devote your life to. Don't be afraid to move. Don't hesitate to try new things. Maybe you'll find something you love, right? I had no idea I'd be doing standup until I tried it for the first time and was like, ‘WOW THIS IS THE THING FOR ME.’ Also, don't date anyone that craps on your dreams.”

