

Not Theo Nion!

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Writing satire is a very personal thing and there are certainly a number of different forms and degrees of satirical work. This article is intended as a starter's guide to writing modern satire and is very much based on my own experiences and opinions.

Understanding Satire

Satire is usually intended to highlight a situation by seeing it objectified and criticised, often for comical value (though not always).

Apeing or parodying a *style* of writing is sometimes mistaken for satire but in order for the piece to be satirical, the actual subject of the material must be the focus. As always, this is a pretty murky area for debate but for practical purposes this is how I think of satire.

For me, satire can be split into two separate forms with many varying degrees in between.

1. The first form is the type of satire that has, in the past, been found in newspapers. This form often takes the form of editorial style pieces of very real situations, written in a very real manner. Personally I tend to dislike this style of satirising, mostly since it can be done so coolly as to make the reader unsure of whether the piece is actually meant to be satirical or not. To be fair, I'm also going to suggest that this is the most difficult form of satire to write.

For more examples, you could do worse than to consider buying something by Jonathan Swift. [Gulliver's Travels by Jonathan Swift](#)

2. The second form, and my own preference for both writing and reading, is satire that is diluted with a hefty dose of parody. Since satire need not necessarily be funny by nature, I find that it is usually best to mix satire with other forms of comedy.

Where to begin

In order to begin writing satire I'd suggest that a good all-round knowledge of current affairs is important. After all, the reader needs to have the same basic knowledge of your subject as you do or your satire definitely won't be funny!

It's also going to be important to ensure that your knowledge is also up to date. Since real life is often stranger than fiction, and events can quickly "out-bizarre" your own work (for example, one could easily imagine having written a satirical piece a few years ago with a dry headline along the lines of "Musclebound hero Schwarzenegger to enter politics!"), it's always a good idea to stay one step ahead of the quirkiness of real life.

The final thing you should probably do is to ensure that your basis for satire is concrete. It can be embarrassing for yourself and irritating to your audience if your satirical argument is invalid.

I can't offer any magical solutions to your writing, but some of the following guides may help focus your mind on the task of writing satire. Some of these points are painfully obvious upon reading them but they may nonetheless help you:

1. **Choose your subject wisely.**

No matter who your audience is, they need to have heard of the person you're talking about or the event you are describing. It's tempting when you have a particular interest to focus on that...but does your audience care to the same level? You may find it personally pleasing to write your story but you may also find it far more pleasing to know that you've shared your work with the optimum number of people!

However, it is also my opinion that too many people fall into the trap of satirising **very popular celebrities** or events, simply for the sake of it. If you do this, not only are you competing with many more people who are writing with the same subject in mind, but you also run the risk of your writing being impaired by a lesser personal interest in your subject matter. It is always tempting to write about a celebrity who's currently in the news, but **please** think about whether your idea really does interests you!

2. **Keep it simple**

If your intention is to parody something or someone by substituting names (for example) then it must be absolutely clear who or what your intended target actually is! As obvious as this is, you must focus on your intended audience. Are they going to be able to understand what you're attempting to do with your writing? As with all writing, ensure that you're not overcomplicating things in order to fulfill a personal agenda - some people like to use long words, I understand that, but please consider whether it actually enhances your material.

3. **Choose a good title**

A headline or title is the second most important thing for grabbing your audience's attention. Remember, you will also sometimes have to win over a publisher and not just your audience. Spend a good amount of time thinking of your title - more so if it doesn't immediately spring to mind. Do not compromise your title just because it seems unimportant compared to your 2000 word article.

4. **Do you have a good picture?**

If a headline is the second most important thing, an interesting picture to accompany your writing is (in my opinion) the most important thing. As depressing as it may seem since all your work goes into writing your article, it is, naturally, all for naught if the audience skips past your work for someone else's, based solely on the fact that they had a small picture of a man stroking a tartan horse.

However, be aware that since most publishers also understand this, it is likely that a picture will be provided (where necessary) if you cannot find a suitable image.

5. **Take your time & Pace yourself**

Most satire writers I have come across are very deliberate, steady working people. It can be tempting to write quickly so as to appear prolific but it is almost always a false economy to do so.

Whenever one writes it is obviously important to ensure that it is to the highest possible standard. So, in order to ensure a good standard, you must **re-read your work**. Over and over. Then read it again! If your work doesn't undergo numerous re-writes then you either have the good fortune to be a perfect scribe...or you're going to offer up work that is sub-standard **to your own potential**.

6. **Be aware that your work may get edited**

Editors are there to make sure that the content in their magazine, book, newspaper or website, best represents themselves as well as you. By publishing your work they are already saying that you are worthy - by editing it they are not intentionally making any statement about the quality of your work.

Editors will always have opinions on how to improve someone's work and whilst you may not agree with these opinions (assuming they have not drastically altered the meaning of your work), you must accept that their ultimate motivation is to enhance your work. Publishers will (hopefully!) know their audience best and therefore, for your sanity, you must accept that their intentions are only ever going to be to ensure that your story gets the maximum coverage it deserves.