Sample Student Comedy Assignment, First Draft: The Office

Great program, and a good start at the development of an original episode. I like that you’ve gotten this much done this early.

Everyone is behaving according to character, which is really important. However, you need to let your imagination loose in terms of each character’s outrageousness. As it stands, they are behaving in rather mundane ways.

You need a more complicated story. The focus should not be just on Facebook. Everyone knows about FB, and there’s not much new to say there. The thing about social media is that there is so much of it, and it can be confusing to anyone. So Michael should be trying to establish an overall online presence, and he should get involved not just with FB but with Twitter, Instagram, Linkedin, Pinterest, Tumblr and a couple of new ones that people haven’t heard about, or that they’re just starting to hear about. You could even make up a site or two for comic effect [One that everyone knows about except Michael].

Once you mix in these details, you should rewrite the episode summary so that it is sharper, more concise, and tells a well-rounded story with a stronger ending.

Then simplify the script, and you’ll really have something here.

TV Sitcom: *The Office* (U.S. 2005-2013)

Program Concept Summary

 *The Office* is a mockumentary sitcom, which details the lives of workers at the Scranton, Pennsylvania branch of paper-distributor Dunder Mifflin. The workdays consist of tedium, pranks, and a consistent clash of egos. This workplace parody explores how unique and kooky characters attempt to survive the monotony and foolishness that plagues their eight-hour workdays.

One-Liner: Corporate culture and clashing personalities make the workplace a microcosm of modern life.

Main Characters

* Michael G. Scott: deluded office-manager with little social awareness; though inappropriate, he ultimately means well
* Dwight K. Schrute: sycophant and power hungry salesman/beet farmer; office oddball, but very intelligent, self-sufficient, and successful
* Jim Halpert: under-achieving, mild-mannered prankster and salesman; well-liked and all around nice guy who shares a romance with Pam Beasley
* Pam Beasley: shy and well-liked receptionist turned saleswoman; enjoys pranks but comes off as boring and mild; grows more assertive with time and shares a romance with Jim Halpert
* Ryan Howard: temp worker forced to perform menial tasks; very uncomfortable with boss and other workers; develops contempt, becoming an egomaniac with self-destructive tendencies
* Erin Hannon: naïve, childlike receptionist who remains optimistic and friendly, though intellectually challenged; genuinely appreciates and loves her job and coworkers
* Kelly Kapoor: chatty and distracted customer service representative whose concerns (or lack thereof) echo those of a passionate teen girl; she shares an on/off destructive office romance with Ryan Howard
* Darryl Philbin: warehouse foreman turned supervisor who is responsible, ambitious, innovative, and competent; dislikes Michael’s disregard for safety and regulations, but is a more relaxed and fun-loving man in social situations
* Phyllis Lapin: quiet, but friendly and girly sales rep whose motherly exterior can give way to vindictive cattiness; she is rather risqué in her persona, but happily married and faithful
* Stanley Hudson: quietly hardworking but grumpy sales rep who demonstrates a consistent lack of interest in any of his surroundings; thoroughly detests Michael and spends much time completing crossword puzzles

My Original Episode Summary [That you invented, all by yourself.]

Title?

Include a one-liner and brief synopsis here.

A Plot

One-liner: Michael resolves to join Facebook because he feels like an outsider to his coworkers’ social lives. [That’s all you needed, although you could make up a funnier hypothetical social media site.]

While navigating the ins and outs of a Facebook presence, Michael struggles because few people are willing to reciprocate his communication attempts. Michael takes issue with how long it takes people to respond to his posts, and eventually calls on his coworkers for help, creating a special committee dedicated to improving his Facebook profile and increasing his number of friends and content likes. The committee is made up of people whom Michael considers his most trusted confidants and those who can raise his “cool” factor. Dwight is the only committee member dedicated to actually helping Michael, while the others wish to fool or make fun of him. [How does it end? Structure it like a story.] [All this could be included in your 2-Act, scene-by-scene summary].

B Plot

One-liner: Ryan and Kelly have broken up again, and Ryan is seeing someone new.

It is common knowledge that Ryan and Kelly have broken up again, and that Ryan is seeing someone new. Ryan refuses to reveal any information about this new person to the office, however, he forgets to guard his Facebook profile, despite his claims that he is tech-savy. The office discovers that Ryan is dating an unattractive woman, far beyond Ryan’s age. They are unsure what to do with this information, but decide to exploit this information and extract a confession from Ryan. [Simplify this conclusion, and give it meaning.]

Act I

It is Monday morning, and Michael overhears the office talking about Ryan in the break room. Curious – and because Ryan is his best friend – Michael enters the break room under the façade that he is making coffee in order to listen in on this juicy gossip. Pam and Darryl are leading the conversation, while Jim, Phyllis, and Erin are listening. Michael interrupts to ask how everyone knows so much about Ryan’s personal life, fearful that they all went out over the weekend without him. Pam tells Michael that nobody went out, and that they saw the information on Facebook. Michael resolves to create a Facebook profile, convinced that he will, from then on, always be involved in and knowledgeable about his coworkers’ personal lives. He returns to his office to create a Facebook account. Michael second guesses himself, calls for Dwight, and asks for his opinion. Dwight says that everyone has a Facebook and that it is the only way to maintain an online presence. Michael, resolute, signs up. He calls Ryan into the office and announces that he is finally online, and that this profile will compensate for their inability to hang out as often. Ryan does not think this meeting is worth his time, and remains looking at his phone. He quickly reiterates that he never wants to hang out with Michael, but the power of his assertion is lost when he becomes flustered by something that appeared on his phone. The audience sees that someone posted a photo to Facebook over the weekend that depicts a drunken Ryan making out with two older women. Ryan storms out, gaining Pam’s attention, who then asks Jim whether he’s noticed that Michael is really quiet today. Jim shakes his head, and Dwight answers that Michael is busy concentrating on joining Facebook. Pam and Jim look at each other immediately and smile, knowing that the morning’s conversation about Ryan permeated Michael’s thoughts. [You need to end Act I strong, with a joke that propels the audience into the complications of Act II.]

Act II

A few hours later, Michael calls a meeting, during which he announces the need for a committee to come up with ideas to boost his new profile. Dwight is chosen for his loyalty and efficiency, Jim for being the handsome, hip guy whom Michael thinks is most similar to himself, Kelly for constantly being on social media at work and therefore considered an expert by Michael, and Stanley for his ability to bring a tough, street-like draw to the profile. Michael attempts to persuade Ryan, but Ryan flees the meeting before Michael can finish his speech. Ryan asks Erin to cover for him, as he must suddenly leave the office. She agrees to do so, but confides in Pam that Ryan has left for the morning. Michael’s committee begins a telemarketer-type set up in the conference room to call Michael’s contacts and those of Dunder Mifflin to alert them of Michael’s Facebook account. Rather than selling paper, the individuals must now advertise and sell acceptance of Michael’s friend requests. While this is going on, we see that Ryan has traveled to a friend’s place and is violently thrashing on doors and windows, trying to enter the house. When his friend opens the door, Ryan implores him to remove the photo, but the friend refuses because Ryan and the older women remain in the background, while the photo’s foreground hosts the friend kissing an extremely attractive woman. Ryan is forced to leave, and the audience witnesses a brief interview with his friend. The women were, in fact, Ryan’s family members who were also extremely intoxicated. Michael, back at the office, oversees his entire operation, as it begins to mirror a telemarketing-sweatshop. Culminating in Dwight, Jim, Kelly, and Stanley’s fury at Michael, their task, and the individuals on the phones, their dismissal is brought about when Dwight throws a telephone at the window, shattering it. Ryan also returns to the office, shattering another window when he throws his laptop at it because he was unable to get the picture removed. Michael, a witness to all of the chaos, pardons Ryan but dismisses his committee after coming to realize that he cannot force people to accept his friendship online; he deactivates his Facebook account, stating that his hunger for online importance drove him away from who he really is as a person. [Again, you need to end stronger, funnier, and in a more meaningful way.]

The Office:

“Social Media by Committee”

by

Student X

ACT ONE

Scene A

Nice formatting! Just make your dialog box a little smaller, as I’ve edited it below.

Good first draft of a scene! It’s overwritten, of course. That’s good for a first draft, but death for a final draft. Don’t direct your actors so much. Trust them to know what they’re doing. And simplify everything so that the action and dialog tell the story by themselves.

FADE IN

INT. OFFICE – BREAK ROOM

There are three tables set up. Darryl, Jim, Pam, and Phyllis are sitting at the back table while Erin stands next to them. They each have some type of breakfast item.

JIM

I can’t even fathom what I saw. It was ungodly.

PAM

It’s actually quite exciting. I was online the day before yesterday and I saw this picture from an old friend of mine. It was him with some girl, but in the background I saw Ryan! [Format dialog like this. For comedy, it should be double-spaced.]

ERIN

Oh how nice, I didn’t know you and Ryan were longtime friends.

PAM

We’re not. I went to high school with someone who posted a picture that had Ryan in the background.

PHYLLIS

Well, what was he doing?

Pam shakes in her seat, clearly excited to tell the story.

Michael walks quietly into the break room.

PAM

You know how Ryan’s been so secretive about his new lady friend? Well we don’t know what this means, but he was kissing these two older ladies! He looked so wasted, I’m surprised we even recognized him. Well, Jim recognized him.

JIM

Wish I hadn’t.

ERIN

You guys! Ryan’s dating two women? That’s terrible! How can he do that?

DARRYL

It’s okay Erin, he’s not. Well, maybe he is. I don’t know. But it’s just a picture.

PHYLLIS

Yeah, he hasn’t said anything. I don’t know guys, maybe we shouldn’t pry.

MICHAEL

Do all of you have a Facebook?

ERIN

No I don’t have one! Online is a scary place. I wouldn’t want to chance it.

DARRYL

Michael, it’s just a way to chat online, it’s not actually anything big.

MICHAEL

Psh, yeah. I know. It’s just some startup that’s doomed to fail – like all the other ones.

MICHAEL (CONT’D)

Okay, well I’m getting back to work.

Michael leaves the break room. Everyone sips their coffee. A beat.

JIM

Darryl, you scared me there.

DARRYL

Wouldn’t want Michael online, knowing our lives, would we?

PHYLLIS

Guys, I’m worried we were a little mean.

PAM

Not at all Phyllis! Michael still likes us. But he should like us in person…not online.