

## **BCG comedy tastes survey methodology**

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This survey was promoted through a link on the British Comedy Guide's homepage, and through our social media channels (Twitter, Facebook, Instagram).

Naturally, this will bias [the results](#) in favour of those who use social media, and particularly in favour of those who follow the British Comedy Guide on these platforms.

It will also bias the results in favour of those who visit the BCG homepage regularly, and in favour of those who have the time (and sufficient interest) to fill out a survey about their comedy style preferences.

There is also an age bias in participants, as shown in the article's final graph, with the majority of respondents in the 40-59 age group.

Throughout the survey, the best efforts were made to prevent questions biasing the results:

- In multiple choice/ranking questions, the order of the options were shuffled for each individual, to prevent [primacy/recency bias](#).
- Questions were also phrased in as non-leading a way as possible. For example, "Which do you prefer? X or Y" as opposed to "X is better than Y. True or False".

Email addresses were obtained to ensure any repeat responses from the same individuals were deleted. Email addresses were then removed from the results, for participants' privacy.

Below is more information for some of the questions, where extra steps or certain approaches were required.

### **What age group are you?:**

This question was asked because those in different age groups will likely be more familiar with styles of comedy popular at different times. For example, those in the under 20 category are *generally* less likely to be familiar with comedy from the 1960s than those in the 60-79 category.

### **What do you prefer? Studio-audience/non-studio-audience:**

The options for studio/non-studio were phrased as:

"Studio-based sitcoms (e.g. where you can hear a live audience's laughter)"

and

"Non studio-based sitcoms (e.g. without a live audience and typically filmed on location)"

Obviously this is open to some interpretation. For example, much of "Red Dwarf", a studio-sitcom, was filmed *without* a live audience when, for example, special effects shooting

rendered this unfeasible. Footage was then played back to a live audience to record their laughter.

However, these descriptions are broadly accurate, and it was felt that naming specific shows as examples of each type would bias the results.

For example, a participant could think “Show X is a studio-based sitcom? Well I don’t like that, so I must not like studio-based sitcoms” or “Show Y is non-studio? Well I love that, so I must prefer non-studio”.

Essentially, we wanted to obtain people’s preferences about the style as a whole, rather than asking “which of these example shows do you prefer?”.

The options were also phrased as studio/non-studio **sitcoms**, because although the previous question discussed sitcoms/comedy-dramas, in this context the word sitcom was used to differentiate from other show types, such as panel or sketch.

**Please rank these formats in order of preference for comedy.**

Participants were asked to rank the following mediums in order of preference:

“Radio (e.g. radio panel shows, radio sitcoms etc.)”

“TV (e.g. TV panel shows, TV sitcoms etc.)”

“Written (e.g. newspapers, books, magazines etc.)”

“Live (e.g. stand-up, live sketches, stage shows etc.)”

“Online (e.g. social media videos and memes, online podcasts etc.)”

The ranks given were then assigned a number from 1 (least favourite) to 5 (favourite) based on their ranking. The mean score for each medium was then calculated, and these mean values ranked in order to obtain the results.

Once again, the examples given for each type were open for some level of interpretation (are podcasts radio or online? Is BBC Three TV or online?) However, the categories are generally self-explanatory.

**Please rank the seriousness of popular comedy in the following decades:**

This is the only question where the option order wasn’t randomised (i.e. all participants saw the options of 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s and 2010s in order). This was done as there is a logical, chronological order to these, and randomising this could cause confusion (for example, if all were in order except two that were swapped, but this swap in order wasn’t noticed).

The 2020s were not included, as it was felt that it would be unfair to compare only two years of the 20s with the 10 years of other decades. In addition, the earliest decade included was the 1960s, as it was felt that any decade before this was not likely to be remembered well enough for comparison.

Once again, the decades were each given a score from 1 (least serious) to 6 (most serious) based on their given rank. The mean score given for each decade was obtained, and then the means were ranked to give the results.

**Please state three words that if used to describe comedy (of any format) would make you want to watch it.**

**And**

**Please state three words that if used to describe comedy (of any format) would make you NOT want to watch it.**

These word clouds were generated using [wordclouds.com](http://wordclouds.com).

Upon entering the answers into the website, the number of times each word appears is added to a running total. The size of each word in the picture then depends upon the total number of times it has been written (i.e. the more mentions, the bigger the word.)

The software used to generate the word clouds does not recognise the same word in different cases (e.g. “funny” and “Funny”) as the same word. Furthermore, if a word has been spelt incorrectly (e.g. “funney”) it would be included as a separate word, and not added to the running total.

Therefore, the list of words had to be edited, with any upper-case letters and reasonably obvious spelling mistakes corrected.

In addition, only words said by at least three separate participants were included in the word cloud. This prevented any uncommon, irrelevant or inappropriate words from appearing.

This question was interpreted differently by different people. Some chose three separate words, whilst others chose three linked words (e.g. “laugh out loud”).

Where phrases were obviously linked, and wouldn’t make sense if written separately (e.g. “Mrs. Brown’s Boys”) they were linked to form one “word” in the cloud. However, “laugh out loud” would be kept separate, as “laugh” could be seen as a positive word on its own.

In addition, it appears that some participants viewed the question as “what words would be annoying if used in a comedy’s advertising,” rather than “what words would you use to describe comedy you dislike.” Hence “funny” appears in the words describing “bad” comedy.

Any answers along the lines of “I don’t know” or “one two three” were removed.

If one individual used the same word multiple times (e.g. “funny funny funny”) the copies were deleted and only one included, to prevent an unfair weighting being given to the words chosen by those not answering the question as it was intended.

Attempts were made to link obviously similar words, to ensure that words used often but phrased differently were still included. For example, “improvised” and “improv” were merged; “Swearfest”, “swearly” and “swearing” were merged etc.

However, this could only be done to a certain extent, as after a point it is ambiguous as to what words are linked, and how they are intended.

Finally, any time participants said they liked comedy to “not” be a word, this was prevented from being added to the running total. For example, if a participant said they liked comedy to be “not political,” It was ensured that another entry for “political” wasn’t added to the running total, as they clearly aren’t saying that they like comedy described as “political”.

Common sense has been applied in more specific circumstances (For example, where over three words were typed such as “x y z comedy” the word “comedy” was removed.)

Though best efforts were made to complete all of the listed corrections, these had to be done manually, and there were a large number of answers. In addition, many possible “corrections” that could have been made would have been ambiguous, and down to personal opinion, thus have been avoided in many cases.

A list of anonymised answers can be made available upon request.