

Slapstick

Low comedy asks for little, if any intellectual skill in the script writing. Slapstick is an excellent example of this form as it is largely a physical humour, which like farce, asks for ridiculous situations.

The origins of the word slapstick may have first begun with the Commedia dell'Arte, which flourished in Europe in the 16th to 18th Centuries. It is rumoured the Harlequin-like character Arlecchino literally used a stick to whack others in performance. The slapstick was merely a paddle – two sticks tied together at one end designed to make a loud noise. Eventually the name stuck, but the stick disappeared, so today we rarely see the slapstick itself.

Instead, modern slapstick asks for tripping on banana peels, accidentally walking into unseen objects and banging heads together. It is often a violent form of comedy, with the violence being an integral factor in its success. *The Marx Brothers* and *The Three Stooges* were masters of slapstick and their films are full of outlandish physical gags and preposterous plot developments. The dumb Harpo was often the victim of much Marx Brothers entertainment. Other famous comedy teams such as *Laurel and Hardy* and the films of the *Keystone Cops* also employ hilarious use of slapstick. More recently (and less violently), the character *Mr Bean* effectively used simple slapstick in many episodes of the television series of the same name.