

# Muse Released: Introduction to Roman Comedy



## Paper #1: Roman Comedies and American Sitcoms



While Roman comedy owed its inspiration to Greek New Comedy, modern Americans owe their most popular and available form of comedy, the situation comedy or “sitcom,” to the Roman comedies.

*Sitcoms, or comedic dramas, are a specific sub-genre of comedy which relies upon on-going stories with recurring characters and settings that focus on everyday life.*

Just as you can search for elements of Classical architecture in public buildings, you can also search for elements of Roman comedy in American sit-coms. And for this first paper, that is just what you are going to do.

### Instructions:

- Be sure that you have read (and re-read, if necessary) Plautus’ comedy, *The Brothers Menaechmus*, and that you understand and can recognize the elements of Roman comedy.
- Choose a favorite sit-com on television. It can be current, or an old one like *The Honeymooners*, as you see in the picture above. Sitcoms are available at the public library if you do not have network tv but do have access to a DVD player or VCR. Sitcoms are also available on Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu, etc., if your family has one of these services. There are also many sitcoms available via computer through YouTube. ***\*Make certain that your choice meets with your parents’ approval!***
- Be sure to ***choose a sitcom and not a movie or a show of another genre***, because not all modern entertainment carries the roots of Roman comedy, and choosing a non-sitcom may prevent you from completing the assignment properly.
- Pop some popcorn. ***\*This is optional.***
- Using your mad detective skills, watch a few episodes of your chosen sitcom, keeping your eyes peeled for typical elements of Roman Comedy.
- ***Don’t be a broccoli!*** Take notes on the sitcom as you watch – particularly of things to use as examples in your paper.
- Sitcoms, like Roman comedy, are funny because they are relevant to daily life. ***Think about your sitcom.*** Why is it funny? Would it be funny to someone from another culture? Would it have been funny years ago? Is it funny to all members of your family or only some? Will it be funny in the future? What elements help a sitcom or Roman comedy stand the test of time? What kinds of scenes or characters are exaggerated? Why might this be? Etc. *(These are just some sample lines of thought. You do not have to address all of these questions. You are free to choose your own analysis.)*

Write an 800-1400 word, double-spaced paper including the following things:

- A **brief** description of the sitcom of your choice. This should only be *a couple of sentences* which very *generally* describe the basic setting, characters and situation of the show.
  - ***Do not fill up your paper with a description of your sitcom. This will make me cranky.***
- Identification of the elements of Roman comedy that you saw in your show, *complete with examples of how they showed up*. You should be able to identify at least three elements. If not, pop some more popcorn and watch a little more.
  - *Not every sitcom will have every element of Roman comedy, but any sitcom should have at least three.*
- Some *analysis* of your sitcom vis-à-vis Plautus and Roman comedy.

Submit your well-written and well-edited paper to me NO LATER THAN 7:00 pm ET on Friday 2/10.

## COMMON ELEMENTS OF ROMAN COMEDY:

- Focused on domestic issues/daily life
- Stock characters – stereotypical of distinct groups, limited in number
  - *You do not have to find the exact same stock characters as in Roman comedy. Stereotypical or stock characters are unique to their individual culture.*
- Stock plot devices and themes
  - *e.g. overheard conversations, recognition, frustrated lovers, situations turned upside-down and then made right again*
- Exaggerated characters, settings and situations
- Fast-paced, lively action, not that long
- Includes puns, jokes and often physical comedy
- Luck or chance plays a role
- Happy ending