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February 13, 2008, 1:40 pm

## Writers Return to Late-Night Shows

By [BRIAN STELTER](#)



What has Conan O'Brien been doing to pass the time during the writers' strike? Trying to break his personal best ring-spinning record, for one. On one episode, he enlisted the help of an M.I.T. physics professor, Peter Fisher, to improve his time. (Dana Edelson/NBC)

With the picket lines lifted, the previously writerless late-night television shows (especially “The Tonight Show” and “Late Night” on NBC and “Jimmy Kimmel Live” on ABC) are now able to book the higher-profile celebrities that had scorned the shows during the strike.

NBC was the first network to release post-strike guest listings on Wednesday, announcing a complete set of couch visitors for “Late Night with Conan O’Brien.” Some of the guests were booked regardless of the strike — like Matt Lauer, a co-host of “Today,” who on Wednesday will become the latest in a long line of NBC News personalities to visit Mr. O’Brien during the strike. But some members of the Screen Actors Guild, like Martin Short (booked for Feb. 14) and Nathan Lane (booked for Feb. 22), were probably only willing to come on once the writers returned.

The other NBC late-night show, “The Tonight Show with Jay Leno,” has not released updated guest listings yet. Mr. Leno’s chief competitor, David Letterman, returned to television last month with writers thanks to an interim agreement with the Writers Guild of America. Without the threat of picket lines, Mr. Letterman was able to book A-list talent while Mr. Leno was not. Despite the disadvantage, Mr. Leno has remained No. 1 in the late-night ratings.

But if Mr. Leno’s monologue seems, well, the same Wednesday night, it’s

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“Dexter” went under the knife ahead of its broadcast debut Sunday night on CBS. The curse words were replaced and the most visible moments of gore were truncated. But some critics believe the drama does not belong on broadcast television, with or without the edits, for a fundamental reason: the storyline encourages viewers to root for a mass murderer.
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1 comments

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The murderer’s row of CBS dramas — “CSI” and its spin-offs, “Criminal Minds,” “NCIS” and their ilk — will return next season.

### Comment of the Moment

“ Sure, people watched “Moment of Truth,” but I’ll be surprised if most of them choose to tune in again next week. The show is ultimately boring. Like other Fox reality shows (“Are You Smarter Than a Fifth Grader” and “Don’t Forget the Lyrics”) this one is dragged out beyond belief.”

— JK  
**‘Moment of Truth:’ More Proof That We Like to See People Squirm**

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because it is usually written one day in advance. According to [The New York Post](#), "jokes written by returning writers might not air until Thursday."

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3 comments so far...

1. February 13th, 2008 3:38 pm

This is great, now we can off of this pitiful infatuation with all those dead people in Iraq.  
C'mon writers, help us laugh again!  
— Posted by jay scott
2. February 13th, 2008 5:55 pm

Leno's jokes are better than Letterman's even without the writers. All he needs are better guests, he doesn't really need writers, although he claims otherwise.  
— Posted by Jeremy
3. February 14th, 2008 3:15 am

I like both, although Letterman seems more adroit in finding comedy in the mundane, .... as only great comics are capable of doing....  
— Posted by wella

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**About TV Decoder**

TV Decoder is a guide to television -- what's on, who's watching and why it matters. Brian Stelter covers the day's on-screen and behind-the-scenes developments, with insights into Nielsen ratings and the machinations of the TV industry.

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