

## Want to be Part of Your Fave Netflix Show? Be More Like This Dude

Get some vital life and career perspective from a guy who helped write season two of “Master of None,” out today on Netflix!

As told to Chanel Parks (@chanelinezp). Photography by Nick Joseph



**Name:** Cord Jefferson

**The Best Job:** TV writer

**City:** Los Angeles, CA

**Shows He's Written For:** Season 2 of *Master of None*, NBC's *The Good Place*, and formerly *The Nightly Show*

**What He's Currently Listening To:** Paul Simon's *Graceland* and Sade's *Diamond Life*—"Sade sounds like spring and summer to me."

**His Spirit Emoji:** 🍌🍷, 🍷🍷, & 🍷🍷

Sweet recently caught up with Jefferson over the phone on his morning drive to work [*note: Sweet does not condone cell phone use while driving*], and he gave us some perspective on his career as a TV writer that is great for everyone.

**Read more about how you can try to be funny, why L.A. is so much cooler than New York, and of course, his favorite go-to snack.**

*Tip No. 1: You Never Know Where a Job May Land You*



When I was in college, I knew that I liked to write, but I never felt like writing could be a career for me. It felt like something that was always going to be a hobby of mine. I sort of started doing freelance journalism after college, and that started building up enough momentum that I decided to become a full-time journalist. I enjoyed my job, but then one day out of the blue, this guy who is a showrunner, Mike O'Malley, wrote to me and said that he'd read some of my stuff and liked it. He asked if I wanted to come be a writer for this show called *Survivor's Remorse*, which is executive produced by LeBron James. I told him I'd like to give it a shot, so I left my job as the West Coast editor of Gawker.

I don't think I ever set out to be a TV writer, but I also never set out to do just one thing.

To take the leap and enter this brand-new field where nobody knew me and I didn't really know anything about it was nerve-racking at first, but I really enjoyed the experience of that season and decided to keep going with it. Through that job I got an agent and a manager and started pursuing other opportunities. I met with Larry Wilmore in August of 2014, I believe, and it turns out I was one of the first writers hired for *The Nightly Show*. I've just been going with TV writing ever since.

*Tip No. 2: Your Skill Set Has No Limit*



My literary heroes that I've loved for so many years are people like James Baldwin and Joan Didion. When I would go and look at their careers, I'd see that what it meant to be a writer to them was very broad. They'd write an article about politics, then they would write a novel, then they would go write a screenplay and a book of essays. They never limited themselves to one aspect of what writing can be.

Everybody struggles with ideas of loss and love and things like that.

To me, that was always the most attractive thing about being a writer. I don't think I ever set out to be a TV writer, but I also never set out to do just one thing with this set of skills I'm developing. If you're a storyteller, you're a storyteller at the end of the day.

*Tip No. 3: Your Ideal Work Environment Could Surprise You*



Every show works differently. I'm writing for *The Good Place* right now and we're currently breaking stories [while filming]. By breaking episodes, I mean coming in and figuring out what the story is going to be for the episode and pitching jokes, story ideas, and characters. On *Master of None*, we wrote all 10 episodes before they ever started shooting. We just got together for four or five months and wrote all 10 episodes. This is different, because [*The Good Place*] is a network show, and there are more episodes. Every day is different, which I like.

People in the office laugh at me, but I don't care.

One of things that I like about TV writing is the collaborative nature of it all. Journalism is such a solitary experience. You write and report and interview people and then work with your editor, but a lot of it is spent in the solitude of your room or your office, just you and your computer. To work this job where most of the time you're interacting with actors and other writers and the showrunner and graphics people and costume designers, it's entertaining in a different way and allows me to develop and use different muscles that I hadn't used before.

*Tip No. 4: Even Your Weirdest Co-Worker Isn't So Different From You*



For *Master of None*, the Dev character is based very much on Aziz [Ansari]. One of the reasons I really like the show is that a lot of the struggles that that character was going through were ones I felt in my own life. They were struggles that I had faced and were things that I had thought about and discussed with my friends. Being able to personalize those characters by either thinking about things that you've felt or thinking about people that you know or experiences that you've had are going to help shape those characters in the long run. Every piece of fictional writing has some truth in it—at least a little bit, if not a lot.

I've met and worked with some of the funniest people working in entertainment, and some of their jokes still fall flat.

I think that people have this idea that human beings are vastly different from one another based on culture, ethnicity, and stuff like that. But I feel like a good writer understands that our inherent humanity is the same and ties us together. Everybody struggles with emotions and feelings. Everybody struggles with ideas of loss and love. So when you look at characters and understand that even though this character may be different from you, you have the things that make them interesting within you. For example, on *The Good Place*, there's Kristen Bell's character, Eleanor, who's very selfish. Now, I try not to be selfish, but I also have a little selfishness within me, so I try to tap into that selfishness when I'm writing for her, and I try to figure out how she might think about a scenario.

*Tip No. 5: Overcome Insecurity With Trust*





Part of being a writer in general, or any kind of creative person, is trusting your taste and believing that what resonates as funny, emotional, or dramatic to you is something that will resonate with other people, as well. Writing comedy is something that I'm still nervous about and I've been doing it for years! Every time I turn in a script, I'm nervous. I'm sweaty when people are reading my work just because you never know if something that you think is funny or smart or dramatic is going to feel that way to other people reading the work.

*Tip No. 6: Everyone Fails! Don't Take It Personally*

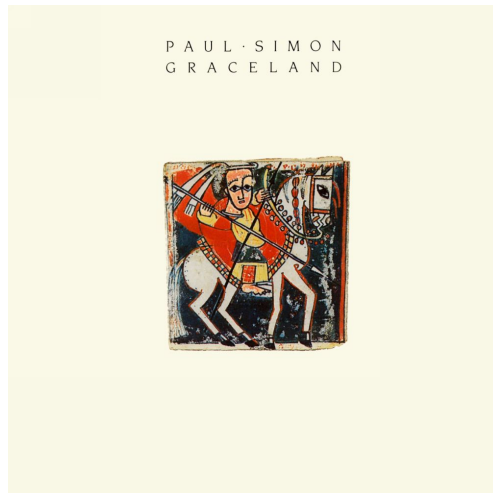


One of the things that has been helpful for me is seeing that everybody misses. I've met and worked with some of the funniest people in entertainment, and at the end of the day, some of their jokes still fall flat. That's part of the work. You throw something to see if it sticks. If it doesn't, you go back to the drawing board. Also, understanding that that's going to happen from time to time is part of the learning curve.

If you have a better idea than Aziz, then that's going in the script.

In writers' rooms, people always say that criticism isn't personal, and I believe everybody when they say that. But it's hard not to take it personally, because these are your ideas. Of course it's

going to hurt your feelings a little bit. I think the key is to build a callus up over that, so that taking it personally doesn't prohibit you from putting out your ideas again when the time comes.



"I bought Paul Simon's 'Graceland' on vinyl recently and I've been playing it nonstop."

A specific anecdote is that Aziz is incredibly famous, incredibly successful, and has created his own show that's hugely critically acclaimed. But in the writers' room, Aziz is very open about the fact that if you have a better idea than him, then that's the idea that's going in the script. He's very open about the fact that he just wants to make the best TV show possible and not have all the power over what's going to win.

*Tip No. 7: Be Particular About Your Work Snacks*



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@KenTremendous

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"I'm not doing it to be dainty. I'm doing it because I want a bigger bite." --  
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**Ken Tremendous** ✓ @KenTremendous

One of my co-workers, @cordjefferson, is eating string cheese by cutting chunks of it off with a knife.

The epitome of public shaming.

My favorite snack to eat while working is string cheese and Triscuits. Everybody makes fun of me because I don't like to pull the cheese off in strings. I like to cut it with a knife. I don't want a tiny piece of string, I want a bigger chunk of cheese to put on the cracker! People in the office laugh at me, but I don't care. It's how I like to eat it. It's a good, quick dose of protein during the day and it doesn't make me feel exhausted in the afternoon. It's like a quick shot of energy.

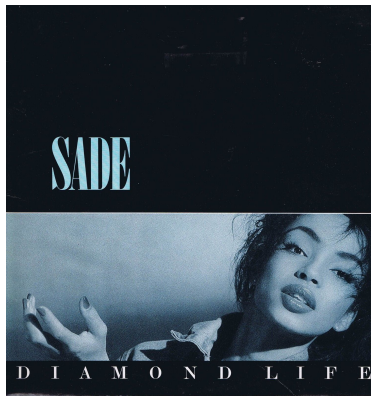
*Tip No. 8: West Coast Might Be the Best Coast...*



I was born in Tucson, Arizona, so warm weather is incredibly important to me. I like to be in the sunshine, and I like to eat dinner outside and walk, even in January. So the West Coast feels more homey to me.

I've lived in both New York and L.A., and I think that New York is a wonderful city. I first moved there when I was starting out as a writer and I had no money. It was cool because none of my friends had any money either, so I lived with three of my close friends from Arizona. There was four of us living in a three-bedroom place. We shared everything. We got pizza. We went out together. We were all broke. It felt really exciting to be broke with all these other people in their early 20s and staying up until all hours of the night—that felt really, really exciting.





“It’s getting warmer out, I’m hanging out on patios, people are having parties outside, and I feel like Sade sounds like spring and summer.”

But here’s something that I always tell people: If you were tremendously ambitious, if you really, really wanted to, you could wake up at 5 in the morning, in the desert of Palm Springs, drive to Big Bear and ski, then drive to Santa Monica and surf at the beach and finally end up in downtown Los Angeles to have dinner at world-class restaurants and go to fancy cocktail bars. All in a 24-hour period.

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**Don’t forget to stream Season 2 of *Master of None* on Netflix today (it has great binge potential) and follow Cord Jefferson on Twitter and Instagram [@cordjefferson](#).**