

The world is a tragedy to those who feel,  
but a comedy to those who think

## **The super-power of comedy**

### **Theories of humor (Why do we laugh?)**

- Superiority (Plato, Aristotle)
- Relief (Freud)
- Incongruity / Surprise (Schopenhauer, Kant)

### **Joke structure:**

Topic (News headline) – Angle (Personal opinion) – Punchline

### **Twelve tools to write funny**

1. Irony: Stating the polar opposite
2. Character (define comedic traits, act on them)
3. Making a reference (observational humor, link to pop-culture)
4. Satire: Holding up the mirror exposing human vice
5. Hyperbole: Taking it to the extreme
6. Parody: Imitate the style/voice of something for entertainment
7. Wordplay (puns, switches, repetition)
8. Analogy (comparison)
9. Madcap (nonsense, wacky, physical non-sequiturs)
10. Misplaced focus, misdirection
11. Shock – Black humor
12. Stating the obvious

### **Examples of jokes**

A joke can implement more than one tool.

I asked my North Korean friend how it was there, he said he couldn't complain.

(Tools: 1, 3 – Irony, current political reference)

“You know how the media are. They wait for a mistake and that’s all you are. It happened to Hitler. No one ever talks about his paintings.”

(Tools: 4, 5 & 2 – Satire, hyperbole & spoken by a distinct character whose personality traits we know well: Jack Donaghy in 30 Rock)

Kid: Mom, can I get a dog or a cat for Christmas?

Mom: No, you are getting turkey, like every Christmas.

(Tools used: 7, 9 – Wordplay, Wacky)

I relish the fact that you've mustard the strength to ketchup to me.  
(Tools: 7, 9 – Wordplay, nonsensical)

The plan was simple, like my brother-in-law Phil. But unlike Phil, this plan just might work.  
(Tool 8: analogy)

He fell for her like his heart was a mob informant, and she was the East River.  
(Tools: 3, 8, 11 – Sociopolitical reference, analogy, black humor)

First date:

Man: I work with animals every day.

Woman: How sweet! What is it that you do?

Man: I am a butcher.

(Tools: 10, 11, 12 – Misdirection, black humor, stating the obvious)

The only person who can shave 25 times a day is a barber.  
(Tool 12: Stating the obvious)

Tool 6: Parody example:

Scary Movies (they make fun of the Scream franchise and other horror movies)

Or watch this modern Jimmy Fallon sketch recreating “Who’s on first”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K0Jg7pvVzKk&t=90s>

Discuss what it has to offer upon the original:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sShMA85pv8M&t=64s> (Abbott & Costello)

Tool 2: Character

Jordan Klepper in The Opposition

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fE36KPRyt0Q>

(This can also be used as an example for satire. Which other tools does he employ?)

### **Why do we laugh?**

Relief Theory Example

“When I was in high school, I went out with my father’s best friend. And that’s embarrassing, you know, my father having a 14-year-old best friend.” (S. Silverman)

(Tool: 10 – Misdirection)

Incongruity/Surprise Theory

“My grandmother started walking five miles a day when she was sixty. She's ninety- seven now, and we don't know where the hell she is.” (Ellen Degeneres)

(Tool: 10 – Misdirection)

Superiority Theory

A man steps on a banana and falls.

(Tool: Physical comedy – Examples can be found in slapstick comedy: more performance based than written)

## Proposed activities

- Begin by using the tools described above to write a few “silly” jokes. Example: you can ask the question: “Why did the chicken cross the street?”, and ask the class to come up with funny responses by using a specific tool each time.
- Advanced activity: The students can think of a personal incident/story and try to come up with the comedic angle/spin to deliver it. Write a short paragraph and deliver it as a stand-up set, trying to employ the writing and performing techniques discussed in the workshop.
- After you have discussed the different tools used to creating a joke and what makes people laugh (theories of humor), choose some news titles that could potentially lead to a joke. Use them as set-ups and ask the students to employ one or more of the tools to come up with possible punchlines. First, help them identify their angle, their unique point of view by asking them questions.

### 5W & 1H

Ask questions about the subject: who, what, when, where, why, how?

## Useful links:

The 100 Jokes That Shaped Modern Comedy: <http://www.vulture.com/2016/01/100-jokes-shaped-modern-comedy-c-v-r.html>

100 More Jokes that Shaped Modern Comedy: [http://www.vulture.com/2017/02/100-more-jokes-shaped-modern-comedy-c-v-r.html?utm\\_source=kwp&utm\\_medium=p2&utm\\_campaign=kwp\\_y\\_092717\\_fb7\\_ad7&kwp\\_0=551347&kwp\\_4=1981170&kwp\\_1=829465](http://www.vulture.com/2017/02/100-more-jokes-shaped-modern-comedy-c-v-r.html?utm_source=kwp&utm_medium=p2&utm_campaign=kwp_y_092717_fb7_ad7&kwp_0=551347&kwp_4=1981170&kwp_1=829465)

Theories of humor: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theories\\_of\\_humor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Theories_of_humor)

## Important:

Comedy is a muscle. It is like being an athlete. Practice makes better. But comedy isn't easy. Even the best comedians say they need to write down 20 jokes about the same issue and maybe one of them will actually be good – if they are lucky. So don't be disheartened! Keep working. And most importantly: keep trying to find reasons to laugh!

## Food for thought – Discussion points

Why is comedy important today both for us as individuals and for society?  
Is any issue suitable for comedy? Are there any subjects that are off limits?

*And remember, comedy is a super-power that should only be used for good!*

Have fun!

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Fall 2017



Jokes that injure  
others, waste time,  
hurt records.....  
are never jokes  
**LET'S THINK TWICE**