

How to Tell a Story Using... Humor?!

If two's a company, and three's a crowd, what are four and five? Nine!

The last time you were here, we gave many examples for using numbers in storytelling. If you haven't read that post yet, check that out [here](#)! (It's been a hot minute, after all. Sorry for keeping you waiting so long!) This week, we'll be moving to another tool you can use to craft engaging stories: humor! Now you know why I started with a joke!

There are many, many, many ways you can make someone laugh. (We've gone over some of these methods before; you can read about those [here](#)!) But however easy humor comes to you, it can be markedly difficult to master the balance between humor and information in a story. Too many jokes, and your audience may not take you seriously anymore; too little, and their attention will quickly jump to something else.

There are a few times where your subject matter may be too serious to catch your audience's interest. This happens most often, at least from my experience, when recounting a personal story. In order to add some pizzazz to your story, you can add some humor!

Warning: A little humor never hurt anyone...right?

Before you tell any joke, in any situation, you must think carefully about a few things to make sure no one will be hurt or offended by your "innocent joke". By thinking about these criteria, you will also make sure your jokes are truly funny and won't bore or confuse your audience.

1. For one, who is your audience? Are there any special circumstances they are in that would affect how they would react to your joke? (for instance, If you're incorporating a small joke into your school presentation, don't make it about "butts"...)
2. What subject matter does the joke include or even hint towards? Whether somebody is leaning into harmful stereotypes about people who aren't even in the room, or bullying people right in front of them, making jokes at someone else's expense is not okay. Avoid jokes about politics, death, stereotypes, or bodily harm.
3. What good will your joke bring into the world? Maybe you can make your audience think about something truly important, or you'll bring a smile to someone's face on a bad day. Whatever it is, make sure your joke will be well-received by your audience.

Okay, now that we've covered a few disclaimers, let's jump to some classic techniques to help you formulate the perfect joke for your story.

1. Play on words: This classic set up contrasts two different things by using a play on words. Here are some great examples from the Internet!
 - a. What's the difference between a poorly dressed person on a unicycle and a well-dressed person on a bicycle? Attire. ([Source](#))
2. Exaggeration: This type of joke is exactly what it sounds like. Start with something small and familiar to the audience, and pick some particular aspect of it. Then exaggerate that one aspect! (Tip: Using hyperbole can help you "up the drama" regarding a relatable concept. That's why it's a quick and easy type of joke to add into a story!)
 - a. Her hair was so long, Rapunzel would have been put to shame.
3. Understatement: This type of joke is the opposite of an exaggeration!
 - a. The other day, my friend threw a huge tantrum, complete with screaming and crying, because she had to take a test in her algebra class. I have a feeling she doesn't care much for math...
4. Surprise: This is simply when you use the element of surprise

to coax a laugh from your audience. (Lots of jokes use the element of surprise, but sometimes you can see a good joke coming and it's still funny. That's the case with callbacks!)

- a. Leaning closer, he stared deeply into her beautiful eyes. "Yup, it's conjunctivitis," he concluded and wrote a prescription. ([Source](#))

5. Homonyms/Homophones: Homonyms are words that have the same spelling and pronunciation but different meanings in different contexts. Homophones are words that sound the same. Using homophones and homonyms, you can make very interesting puns and wordplay, similar to the other play on words we discussed earlier.

- a. "Waiter, will the pancakes be long?" "No, sir, round." ([Source](#))

I hope you enjoyed these simple ideas you can incorporate into your presentations and speeches. Experiment with making your own jokes!

In the next installment of this series, we'll cover some interesting engagement tools you can use to improve the audiences' interest and active participation in your speech.