



## Spice Up Your Presentations With Humor: *The Secrets Of Writing A Killer Joke!*

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**E**veryone knows it's a good thing to use humor in presentations. And since we all agree on the importance of humor, I'm going to go right to the nuts and bolts and show you how to write a stand-up comedy style joke.

Stand-up comedy involves a very specific joke-writing format. As far as I'm concerned, it's the quickest, most efficient way to get laughs. The goal of a stand-up comedian is to get as many laughs per minute (LPMs) as possible. Doing this involves brevity and good, tight editing.

### **Anatomy of A Joke**

So let's start with an overview. A joke must have at least one of two elements - exaggeration or surprise. Thus a good way to tell if a joke will work is to ask yourself if it contains some sort of exaggeration of reality, some sort of unexpected twist, or both.

A joke also consists of two components. The first is a *setup*, which is a short statement about your topic. A good setup never takes longer than 20-30 seconds to deliver. By topic, I don't necessarily mean your presentation topic, although it can be. But your topic can also be anything - airline food, getting up early in the morning, etc. Your setup is also not meant to be funny,

because if it is, then the second part of the joke, the punchline, has nothing to contrast to.

The setup also contains your attitude to your topic, either stated or implied. Do you think your topic is weird? Stupid? Does it frustrate you? Bug you? Your attitude is what gives rise to the humor in the punchline. Often your topic isn't what's funny, it's how you *feel* about your topic that gets the laugh.

The second part of the joke is the *punchline*, which contains the unexpected twist. The punchline justifies your setup. So if your setup is "It's tough to eat healthy," the punchline has to tell listeners why this is so.

Now let's look at a complete joke:

**Setup:** It's tough eating healthy. I've been doing the vegetarian thing, and I do like a good vegetarian meal.

**Punch:** But I like it with pork.

This setup is a purely factual statement with an attitude ("It's tough"), and the punchline contains the unexpected twist.

**Remember:** In your punchline, the punch word comes last. The punchline to the last joke is "But I like it with pork," not "Pork is what I like it with."

So here are some examples of generic setups you can use to generate punchlines:

The thing I love about \_\_\_\_\_ is...

The thing I hate about \_\_\_\_\_ is...

The reason I give presentations about \_\_\_\_\_ is...

The reason it's important to \_\_\_\_\_ is...

The best thing about \_\_\_\_\_ is...

The worst thing about \_\_\_\_\_ is...

It's hard to \_\_\_\_\_ because...

It really drives me crazy when \_\_\_\_\_ because...

I've always been good at \_\_\_\_\_ because...

It's tough \_\_\_\_\_ because...

(Fact or observation).  
So what that means is...

You may need to add a bit more to these setups to make them work for you, for example:

**Setup:** I'm a parent, and the best thing about being a parent is...

### Generating Punchlines

The best way to

generate punchlines is to come up with five or six for each setup, then choose the best. For example, the original punch to the vegetarian joke was "But I like it with meat," but I found the word "pork" got a bigger laugh. For some reason, some words are funnier than others.

To minimize the risk of trying a new joke, I always run it by my comedy buddy for feedback. I also try each joke three times before I decide if I'm going to keep it. A good joke should work about 90 percent of the time, and it takes a few trial runs to really know if that's the case.

Also, a joke is intellectual property, so it's not okay to use someone else's joke and pass it off as your own. If you do use someone else's joke, you need to attribute it to the source, whether it's a comic you heard on TV, a joke you heard at a party, or something you read in a book.

It's a good idea to

make sure your jokes have some relevance to your presentation. Fortunately, this gives you a lot of latitude. I always start off by talking about myself and how I came to speak on my topic. So if you teach conflict resolution, one of your setups can be: I teach people how to deal with conflict, and the great thing about that is...

Writing good jokes is a process of trial and error. After a while, you get more of a sense of what's funny. So at first, if you have a 20 percent success rate, you're doing pretty well. And the great thing about that is...

*Counsellor and stand up comic David Granirer leads Stand Up For Mental Health, a program teaching stand up comedy to people with mental illness as a way of building confidence and fighting stigma. For more information call (604) 205-9242 or go to <http://www standupformentalhealth.com>*

*For information on his humor in the workplace presentations go to [www.psychocomic.com](http://www.psychocomic.com)*