

Humor in the Classroom: The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

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What the Research Says

- Scholars of Instructional Communication have devoted substantial research answering the question:
 - **How does humor influence the education process?**
- Most of the research has focused on the “positive” aspects which means that there are “negative” aspects.

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Negative Aspects of Humor in the Classroom

- When humor is done improperly or too frequently, it can detract from learning. It can simply confuse the students which may reduce the credibility of the instructor.
- Inappropriate humor offends and distances students from the instructor. Never use humor that targets sex, race, gender, political views or that criticizes a student for ignorance, poor performance or personal beliefs. Never.
- Sarcasm is like poison in the classroom

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Negative Aspects of Humor in the Classroom

- Since humor is subjective and a matter of perception, teachers can do it poorly. (Pinheiro, 2016)
- Humor doesn't tend to work well if the students don't already have a close relationship and immediacy with their professor. (Pinheiro, 2016)
- Humor can end up being the primary focus of the lesson.
- Humor can distract from the seriousness of the lecture/course.

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Positive Aspects of Humor in the Classroom

1. Humor during instruction can help break down barriers to communication between Professor and student. (Deiter, 2000)
2. When humor reinforces content it can help students better retain subject matter (Deiter, 2000)
3. Humor can improve student performance by reducing anxiety, boosting participation and increasing students motivation to focus on the material. (Stambor, 2006)
4. **Humor has the potential to diffuse tense situations as well as avoid or reduce anxiety in classroom interactions.** (Klein A., Moriarty C., 2017)
5. Humor can be beneficial if it is tied to the lesson's material, properly timed and ethically sound. Good humor signals that the educator is approachable, personal and willing to accept intellectual creativity. (Pinheiro, 2016)

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Physiological Benefits Derived from Humor and Laughter in the Classroom (Ocon, 2015)

Humor and laughter in the classroom:

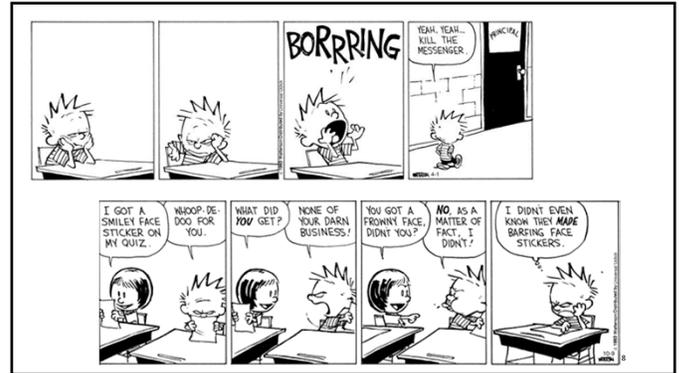
1. Relaxes muscles and reduces chronic pain.
2. Stimulates circulation.
3. Improves respiration.
4. Exercises the lungs and chest muscles.
5. Increases the production of (hormone) endorphins.
6. Boost the immune system.
7. Stimulates the cardiovascular system.
8. Lowers the pulse rate and blood pressure.

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Major Benefits of Using Humor in the Classroom

- Breaks down communication barriers between professor and students.
- Makes students more relaxed by reducing anxiety.
- Encourages students to listen.
- Indicates that the teacher is human and can share experiences with the class.
- Makes students less intimidated and less inhibited to ask questions or make comments.
- Promotes student creativity by encouraging them to “take chances, look at things in an offbeat way...”
- Builds group or class cohesion. Results in higher student evaluations.

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Major Benefits of Using Humor in the Classroom

- Creates a more positive, fun, interesting environment that promotes class attendance and student performance.
- Improves students' attitudes toward the subject and the instructor.
- Makes teaching more fun and enjoyable for the instructor.
- Increases comprehension and cognitive retention, since students have less stress and anxiety.
- Has a positive affect on the level of student attention and interest: "it is physically impossible to laugh and snore at the same time."
- Creates a positive climate for learning and enjoyment. Brings a sense of pleasure and appreciation.

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Major Benefits of Using Humor in the Classroom

- “Creates a common, positive emotional experience that students share with each other and the teacher.”
- Improves the mental wellbeing of students and the instructor.
- Reduces self consciousness and boosts self confidence.
- Lowers student defenses and provokes imagination.
- Creates a positive student-instructor relationship. Promotes student open-mindedness.
- Can be used to illustrate course-related concepts.
- Keeps students engaged and involved with the course materials.

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Balance

- Balance in the classroom is critical for those wanting to use humor.
- For humor to be most effective in an academic setting, it must be specific, targeted and appropriate to the subject matter. (Garner, 2006)
- Instructors need to focus on learning FIRST and have humor that will help meet that goal.
- “Students don’t necessarily want Jerry Seinfeld as their instructor.” (Pinheiro, 2016)

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Humor Orientation

- Some people have a predisposition to be funny, called humor orientation. (S. Booth-Butterfield and Booth-Butterfield, 1991)
- Humor orientation is about the ability to produce humorous messages, not the ability to appreciate humor.
- “...the teaching style of the instructor should be consistent with his or her individual humor orientation.” Wanzer & Frymier, 1999
- Not everyone is funny. “...there are few things worse than an unfunny person trying to be humorous.” Ziv 1988

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What does an unfunny faculty do?

- Have someone else who is funny participate!!
 - Cartoons
 - Video
 - Quotes
 - Stories
- Can you become funny?

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Humor Theories - Definition

- **Incongruity theory** states that a surprise or contradiction is essential for humor. (Banas, 2011)
- **Superiority theory** argues that laughter arises out of the sense of superiority experienced from disparagement of others. (Banas, 2011)
- **Arousal theory** conceptualizes humor as a complex interaction between emotion and cognition. Humor itself is a pleasurable emotional experience called mirth. (Banas, 2011)
- **Anything that is perceived to be funny, comical or amusing. Perception is the key. It's only funny if our students say so.** (Deiter, 2000)
 - "...the kindly contemplation of the incongruities of life and the artistic expression thereof." (Berk 1998)

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Application...

The next two slides are a table (Banas, 2011) of humor types, a description of each, representative research and it's appropriateness for the classroom.

From this table I will share things I have done in the classroom.

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Humor type	Description	Representative Work	Appropriateness for the Classroom
Affiliative; Solidarity-based	Amusing others, building solidarity, relieving tension	Hay (2000); Martin et al. (2003)	Appropriate
Psychological needs/Self-Enhancing	Humor used to defend oneself, regulate emotions, or cope with problems that arise during the interaction	Hay (2000); Martin et al. (2003)	Appropriate
Power-based humor	Establish boundaries and create status differences	Hay (2000)	Appropriate
Humor related to class material	Stories, jokes, or other humorous content related to class material	Frymier et al. (2008); Kaplan and Pascoe (1977); Wanzer et al. (2006)	Appropriate
Funny stories	Events or activities connected in a single event related as a tale	Bryant et al. (1979); Bryant et al. (1980)	Appropriate
Humorous comments	A brief statement with a humorous element	Bryant et al. (1979)	Appropriate
Seeking funny others	Encouraging humor use in others or seeking out other people known to be Funny	Wanzer et al. (2005); Cornett (1986)	Appropriate
Humor unrelated to class material	Stories, jokes, or other humorous content not related to class material	Frymier et al. (2008); Wanzer et al. (2006)	Context-dependent
Self-disparaging humor	Making one's self the target of the humor	Frymier and Thompson (1992); Frymier et al. (2008); Wanzer et al. (2006)	Context-dependent
Unplanned humor	Humor that is unintentional or spontaneous	Martin (2007); Wanzer et al. (2006)	Context-dependent
Jokes or Riddles	Build-up followed by a punchline	Bryant et al. (1979, 1980); Martin (2007); Ziv (1988)	Context-dependent

Humor related to class material	Stories, jokes, or other humorous content related to class material
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Blood Bank – IgM description...

1. Cold reacting
2. Good complement activator
- 3. Pentamer**
4. ABO, Ii, Lewis, MN, & P



Grrrrrrrrrr...

Voice caricature...

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Humor related to class material	Stories, jokes, or other humorous content related to class material
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Blood Bank Trauma: Who wants to hit the Professor with your car after last weeks exam?

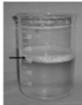
Blood Bank: Component Prep, Cryoprecipitate

Renal Disease: Kidney stones – signs, symptoms, etc.

Renal Disease – Protein in the urine...

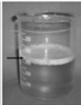
Time after micturition

A 5 minutes



4600 mg/24h

B 15 minutes



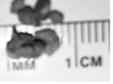
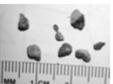
4600 mg/24h

C 5 minutes



246 mg/24h



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Humor related to class material	Stories, jokes, or other humorous content related to class material
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I teach pieces parts of Clinical Chemistry – most blood bankers are not chemists so this was and is difficult for me so when I am losing them I get creative:

Furfural
Bodansky
Wroblewski
What are these?

Great names for a CAT!




STAT lab test – simulated lab at WSU.

Humor type	Description	Representative Work	Appropriateness for the Classroom
Puns	Structurally or phonetically words or phrases having two or more meanings were used simultaneously to play on the multiple meanings	Bryant et al. (1979)	Context-dependent
Low humor	Acting silly, stupid, or absurd in specific situations	Wanzer et al. (2005)	Context-dependent
Nonverbal humor	Using gestures, funny facial expressions, vocal tones, etc. for humorous intent	Wanzer et al. (2005)	Context-dependent
Impersonation	Doing impressions or mimicking voices of famous characters	Wanzer et al. (2005)	Context-dependent
Language or word play	Witty or clever verbal communication including using slang or sarcasm	Wanzer et al. (2005)	Context-dependent
Laughing	Laughing of varying intensity as a means to make others laugh	Wanzer et al. (2005)	Context-dependent
Using funny props	Using funny props such as cartoons, water pistols, funny cards, etc.	Wanzer et al. (2005)	Context-dependent
Visual illustrations	Use of pictures or items expected to promote humor	Bryant et al. (1981)	Context-dependent
Humorous Distortions	Use of irony or comical exaggerations	Bryant and Zillmann (1989)	Context-dependent
Test items	Using items on tests and assessments that contain humor	Ziv (1988)	Context-dependent
Aggressive; Other-degrading	Manipulating or denigrating others, ridicule, or mocking	Frymier et al. (2008); Martin et al. (2003); Stuart and Rosenfeld (1994)	Inappropriate
Offensive humor	Humor based on the race, ethnicity, sex, political affiliation, or sexual orientation of another	Frymier et al. (2008)	Inappropriate

Nonverbal humor	Using gestures, funny facial expressions, vocal tones, etc. for humorous intent
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I would like to introduce you to my youngest son, Jacob Daniel Zundel.




The red arrow indicates the red blood cell transfusion line.



Research Reminders

- "It is essential that the humor used be directly related to the class content." Alicja Rieger, 2012
- "Comedy must complement - and not distract from - course material." Berk, 2002
- "If the goal of instructional humor is to increase learning and retention of course material... the instructional humor should illustrate a concept..." Ziv, 1988

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