

CHARM
OFFENSIVE.

How To Be Witty including:

- + The Reverse
- + Triples / The Power Of 3
- + The Flippant Hands Formula
- + Recognition
- + The Hyperbole Backpedal
- + Words In Their Mouth
- + How To Use Funny Word Combinations
- + Mixing Formal And Informal Tone



HOW TO BE WITTY

Editor's Note

You sit at your computer and start typing and just hope something even slightly funny comes out... But it doesn't. And that sucks, because you have a deadline to meet, and that "Editor's Note" isn't gonna write itself. We've all been there, am I right?! :-)

Thankfully, we need not rely merely on our spontaneous genius to write pithy, witty lines. There are formulas for that. With sufficient practice, those formulas become ingrained. They become part of your writing arsenal. You can deploy them reflexively.

This is by no means a definitive guide to a topic as gargantuan as being funny. However, it is practical, prescriptive and succinct. You can read this in an hour, but the real work comes from practice. You don't need to show your work to anyone. But you must write, and often.

This is a platitude, yes, but a true one, and one that is worth restating as you read this issue.

I highly recommend starting a journal in Google Docs. You don't have to write in it every day, but try to be as frequent as you can. Write about anything you want, but try to practise using these formulas. One way of doing this when starting out would be to write a journal entry and then edit it to add in some of the formulas discussed in this issue.

Keep practising. Remember: practice makes competence. And that is all you need.

Happy writing,

Jon

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Humour is not the main ingredient of your persuasive recipe, but it is one that adds a unique and enjoyable flavour and enhances the persuasive capacity of the entire meal.

IN-DEPTH BREAKDOWN

So What Gives?

To deal with all of this thoroughly, I'm going to run through a whole cavalcade of techniques, tips, and teachings on how to write humorous copy.

We'll start with some basics, and then move into some more advanced, nuanced, or even rarely-touched-upon areas.

The next line shatters the illusion. It pulls the rug from the listener or reader.

Some examples...

"I sold my house this week. I thought I got a good price for it but it made my landlord mad as hell." Garry Shandling

The Reverse

The most obvious, basic comedic starting point.

You'll recognise this immediately. You've done it countless times to your friends, probably without knowing what it's called.

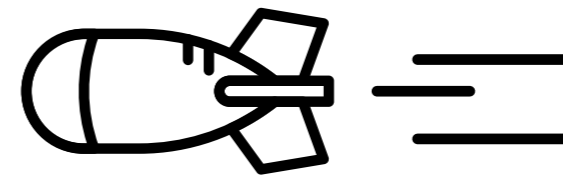
"I know you want to hear the latest dope from Washington. Well here I am." Senator Alan Simpson

The reverse has even been employed to great effect by a US President. In the 1984 election, Ronald Reagan knew his age would come up in the debates. Reagan was prepared and had this killer reverse planned. He got a cascade of laughter. Even his opponent burst out laughing.

Structure: Create Mental Image



Shatter Mental Image



These 'formulas' are taken from stand-up comedy, so they may not always transfer perfectly to the written word.

You can't emulate the exact same emphasis or rhythm there.

However, they can still be somewhat funny. At worst, they can help make your writing more punchy and enjoyable.

The first part of the reverse builds up a mental image - and creates an expectation of what is likely to follow.

"I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes my opponent's youth and inexperience." Ronald Reagan

How can you use this?

- + Think about the story you wish to tell in a letter or email. Think of something specific.
- + Write it out.
- + Then think of the Who, What, Where, When, Why, and How of your story.
- + Then think about which of those elements you can remove.
- + Then try to structure it so you have the 'mental image' first - followed by a second statement that shatters the illusion.
- + Then cut it down and make it as succinct as possible. Don't blabber. Keep it short.

By playing around with this, you can turn that story into something that will elicit a smirk, smile, or even a laugh.

IN-DEPTH BREAKDOWN

Before using it, I suggest testing it on some friends, associates, and mortal enemies.

Examples...

“What’s Jeff like? Well... I want to be fair to the guy. Let me make sure I say this right. He’s a fucking moron.”

More examples can be found here: <https://www.boredpanda.com/funny-unexpected-ending-tweets>

Triples / The Power Of 3

Try to create content that interests a variety of different people.

Structure:



“The rule of three, law of three, or power of three, is a writing principle that suggests that things that come in threes are funnier, more satisfying, or more effective than other numbers of things. The reader or audience of this form of text is also thereby more likely to remember the information. This is because having three entities combines both brevity and rhythm with having the smallest amount of information to create a pattern. It makes the author or speaker appear knowledgeable while being both simple and catchy.” Wikipedia.

The key to using the power of three for humour purposes is to disrupt the pattern on the third and final word.

Example:

“You can reach me on the phone, through email, or by deploying carrier pigeons.”

1. Normal 2. Normal 3. What?!

You can actually stretch this further and have additional ‘normal’ words. It’s still a pattern interrupt but sometimes it makes sense (and it just reads better) to make the set-up longer before the payoff. Five often works too, but three is almost always best.

This is useful when you have a long list of things you wish to mention, e.g. a list of products or services.

This formula is probably the easiest of all the joke formulas.

Don’t use it more than once in a particular email or letter, as the reader will pick up what you’re doing - and it will no longer be a surprise or funny. It will just look weird and like you don’t know what you’re doing.

Be sure to read your line out loud. You’ll get a sense for what works and what doesn’t.

The Triple Reverse

The triple reverse combines two formulas. Can you guess which ones?

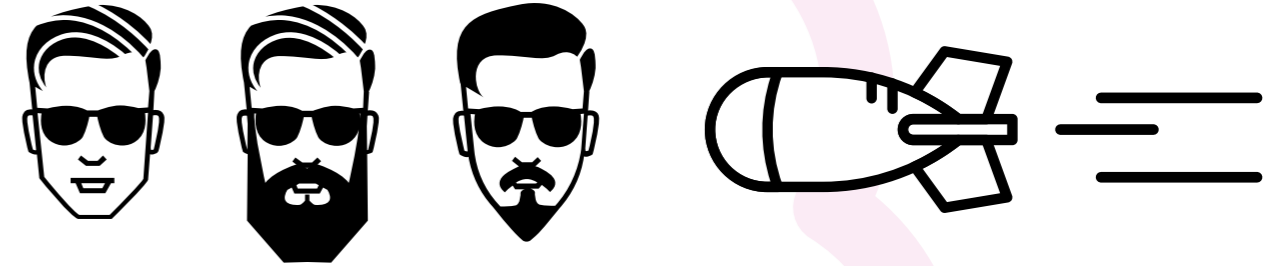
It is more difficult to use these formulas in copy as you don’t have the benefit of intonation.

However, it’ll still interrupt the reader’s flow - and then you have their attention for a few more seconds at least.

Learn more about it: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jrqqb1B7mJk>

IN-DEPTH BREAKDOWN

How To Be Somewhat Funny - The Triple Reverse



Set ‘Em Up With A Triple:

I’d like to introduce a man with a lot of charm, talent and wit.

Knock ‘Em Down With A Reverse:

Unfortunately, he couldn’t be here tonight, so instead...

I successfully invited myself onto a few podcasts with a cold email that started with:

“Greetings {firstname},

I wanted to introduce myself in a way that showed I was honest, witty and clever. Alas, I wrote this email instead.”

Herky Jerky Sentences And Understated Grandiosity

Sometimes my ads on Quora get blocked because their automated system has some quite tight rules about punctuation, grammar, and content. So I use a charming support request to get them manually approved. (It worked, more than once :)

“Whenever I do this, I get an awfully sad email telling me my ads, and with it, my dreams of relative prosperity, have been paused.”

This line works because it ties something pretty boring (my ad campaign status) with something BIG (my dreams).

The joke could have worked as:

“Whenever I do this, I get an awfully sad email telling me my ads, and with it, my dreams of prosperity, have been paused.”

However, the addition of the qualifier, “relative” adds a level of self-effacing charm.

My charming support request...



From: Jon
Jun 6, 8:43 AM PDT

Greetings esteemed Quora team,

I love Quora, I am quite fond of Quora ads too. I know I'm only spending meagre amounts but I'm hoping these meagre amounts will soon multiply exponentially into much larger, meagre amounts. And from there, who knows? :)

I jest.

I love the targeting available. I like that you've been quite picky about the punctuation and grammar in your ads.

Then I got rejected. Oh my.

It appears you don't like the use of product names in the body copy of your ads. E.g. "Charm Offensive Professional."

Whenever I do this, I get an awfully sad email telling me that my ads, and with it, my dreams of relative prosperity, have been paused.

Is it possible to take a look at this?

Come on... Please? :)

I'm aware this adds to what I'm sure is already a massive to-do list. As such, I've attached a picture of a dog wearing a monocle. I trust this will charm you into submission.

Toodle-pip,

Jon

Attachment(s)
[goofy-dog-with-monocle.jpg](#)

It's because the stakes have been lowered. It's clearly a joke.

I'm saying one thing and meaning another.

I could say **"When my ads get paused, it's an inconvenience and delays my progress."**

But that's matter-of-fact and boring.

Instead, we want to construct a sentence that is grandiose (my dreams), and understated (of relative prosperity). This incongruence adds to the humour.

There is also the incongruence between how I describe what's happened and the reality.

"Awfully sad email" prepares for bad news.

"Have been paused." Oh. That's it?

The sentence construction is also important.

There are four commas in that sentence. I could have, of course, framed the sentence in a way that didn't use so many commas.

However, this is, of course, deliberate.

Read that sentence out loud:

"Whenever I do this, I get an awfully sad email telling me my ads, and with it, my dreams of relative prosperity, have been paused."

There's a 'herky-jerky'-like rhythm.

The final pause after **"relative prosperity"** makes the following line **"have been paused"** funnier.

It's anti-climatic.

I'm making a fuss and palaver over a tiny issue.

However, I'm obviously being playful with it.

And that's what makes this sentence disarming and funny.

Double Entendre

- + **The Double Entendre** is a figure of speech or a particular way of wording that is devised to be understood in two ways, having a double meaning.
 - + Typically one of the meanings is obvious, given the context, whereas the other may require more thought.
 - + Although it's common, double entendres don't always have to use innuendo!
 - + The double entendre uses a word in one sense and then switches its meaning for comic effect.
- "I hate alcohol. I can't stand drinking —I keep falling down."**
- + You can also set up a double entendre with context.

In this case, we understand that politicians 'run for office', and they become 'sitting politicians'. The final word breaks the pattern.

"A politician is asked to run, wants to sit, and is expected to lie."

The most sophisticated double entendres tend to be sarcastic statements that generally mean the exact opposite of what's being expressed.

"He's such a skilled professor he can tell you everything he knows in one breath."

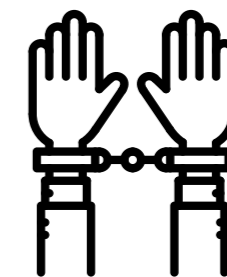
"Thank you for sending me a copy of your book. I shall waste no time reading it." Benjamin Disraeli



Exaggeration

Exaggeration can be used to add humour, especially to pain points.

When making a point about other suppliers having restrictive, long term contracts, the following line could be used:



"Many suppliers have contracts so restrictive they should come with a set of complementary handcuffs. Oh no. I don't want to give them ideas..."

I've used this line many times:

"We're looking to win clients over from those evil (ok maybe not evil... but not as good) other agencies."

This uses exaggeration, and follows up with an honest reassessment of the claim.

Funny Words

Some words can bamboozle the best of us.

If you use them sparingly, they're a great pattern interrupt.

They make people smile, or at least smile in their head while they read on.

Here are a few examples...

- + Bamboozled
- + Hoodwinked
- + Flummoxed
- + Tomfoolery
- + Horseplay
- + Antics
- + Shenanigans
- + Frolics
- + Besmirched
- + Whimsical

I know you can't use this device in all situations. However, it's surprisingly effective.

It's pretty universal.

It's hard to be offended by someone using unusual or enjoyable words.

Let me show you how you can insert a funny word into a boring sentence to make it more amusing.

I doubt many of you would write the following closing line in an email:

"I await your response with great interest."

It's a bit old fashioned.

I've seen this line in a lot of old handwritten letters.

The addition of one word can transform this into something that may elicit a smirk.

"I await your baffled response with great interest."

The word 'baffled' sticks out. It sounds funny, especially when surrounded by serious-sounding words.

Don't abuse this, as the reader will see it coming. Use it sparingly.

There's a bit more on this later; see if you can spot it.

The Flippant Hands Formula

This is a good joke formula.

It's a variation of one I teach in Have Your Way With Words.

And it's kind of a pre-loaded or pre-stated reverse.

On the one hand, X...



Setup Hand

On the other hand, Y



Punchline Hand

You can see an example of where I do this - I really go over the top, too: <http://theinfluential.io/the-big-debate/big-debate-black-friday-cyber-monday/>

In this example, I load up the first "hand" with a serious, unfunny assertion.

The "punchline hand" then flippantly does the complete opposite as I pitch my wares. I've used this in emails before.

"On the one hand, I hate bombarding your inbox with offers all the time.



On the other hand, I do enjoy food and shelter. I hope you can forgive me."



The example below is similar. It uses comparison to derive humour.



I Am Developer
@iamdeveloper

1969:
-what're you doing with that 2KB of RAM?
-sending people to the moon

2017:
-what're you doing with that 1.5GB of RAM?
-running Slack

7:38 AM - 3 Nov 2017

The first example shows off how we achieved great things with very little (compared to what we have now.)

The second example shows how little we are doing now with how much we have.

This one is clever because it also uses **recognition**. The joke works because it specifically calls out Slack. People that know of Slack get that "ah yes. **That's true**" feeling. Even if they don't use Slack much, they will still get the joke.

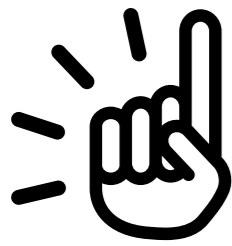
However, the formula works well without this additional element.

Instead, you create humour by being (jokingly) flippant, after appearing to be thoughtful and polite.

Here's a little formula you can use:

- + **Statement**
I've been debating whether to send this email or not all day.
- + **Setup 'Hand'**
On the one hand, I don't want to bombard you with "special" offers all the time. I don't want to be one of those horrendously annoying marketers...
- + **Punchline 'Hand'**
... On the other hand, I am quite fond of food and shelter.
- + **Optional Humorous Afterthought**
Greedy, I know. Can you forgive me?

There you go. The "flippant hands" formula for deriving humour from comparison.



Recognition

Recognition is one of the best routes to getting belly-laughs.

When it comes to writing humour, what is recognition?

- + The best definition I can come up with in the 10 seconds I've tried to is **"shared knowing"**.

It's when you point out a feeling that everyone has, but it isn't yet a cliché to point it out.

An example of 'clichéd recognition' would be **"Has anyone noticed how awful airline food is?!"**

That is unlikely to elicit laughter as we are all too aware of this. It's been the brunt of jokes for too long.

This removes the surprise element, and thus, makes it painfully unfunny to 99% of the people reading / listening.

However, there are plenty of other 'airline food' -type topics out there that haven't been mocked at scale yet.

Recognition is especially useful for self-effacing humour but it's not limited to it.

Using recognition is especially useful for crafting in-jokes for your particular sector

How do you find these little nuggets of 'shared knowing'?

For example, in the digital marketing / entrepreneur sector, there's plenty to poke fun at:

The overuse of scarcity, e.g. **"only 5 PDFs remaining"**.

The overuse of using specific earnings to promote products, e.g. **"I work with 6/7/8 figure entrepreneurs"**.

The prevalence of life coaches who are in their early 20s.

The transient nature of digital trends, e.g. **"where have all the cryptocurrency experts gone?!"**

Or you can look inward.

What has happened to you that is likely to have happened to others?

E.g. **"I launched a course that I put SO MUCH EFFORT into and... it didn't exactly fly off the shelves."**

If you can find these areas of shared knowledge and understanding, you have the basis for a joke.

Then it's a matter of putting this into a structure that makes it a joke, rather than a statement.

Write out a 'script' of your amusing internal dialogue. Or use one of the other joke formulas.

Here's a few I've written on the fly:

- + **Triple Reverse:**
I'm so sad, directionless and without hope. I guess it's time to buy tons of shit I don't need.
- + **Triple:**
Oh no. I feel it coming. It's time to feel sad, hopeless and to buy tons of shit I don't need.
- + **Reverse:**
Feeling sad and hopeless? NEVER FEAR! Postpone your gloom by buying a ton of shit you don't need.
- + **Reverse (alternative):**
I'm dealing with recurring thoughts of sadness and hopelessness in the best way I know how: by buying tons of shit I don't need.
- + **Flippant Hands Formula:**
On the one hand, I know buying tons of shit I don't need is not, in fact, a reliable long-term solution to resolving my occasional feelings of sadness and hopelessness...
On the other hand, I'd LOVE a kettle that changes colour as it boils.

- + **Herky-Jerky:**
My experiment has shown me that spending tons of money on shit I don't need, is not, in fact, an effective long-term method of resolving protracted mental health issues.

The process:

- + Find an area of shared knowledge or understanding (the 'Recognition' element - this is what results in that **"Ah-ha, I do that!"** moment).
- + Make sure it's not been the brunt of countless jokes in popular culture.
- + Make sure enough people will get it. E.g. If I sent my mom a joke about the overuse of scarcity bias, she would probably not find it hilarious. Make sure your audience gets it. This shouldn't be too hard. Just message some of your peers.
- + Make it funny by using a reliable joke formula.
- + Post it on social media and bask in the glory of your social media engagement, including the sought-after 'haha-react'. BOOM!

summon the courage to join me on this rebellious journey. And by "join me on this rebellious journey", I mean "hand me your hard-earned money as soon as possible without hesitation."

Here's how to make this joke work.

- + Make a statement in an overly flowery, hype-y, exaggerated or understated way.
Think of it as the "PR" version of what you really want to / should say.
In this case, it's **"I'm hoping you'll summon the courage to join me on this rebellious journey."**
- + The next line calls out your own crafty phrasing. **"And by" [X], I mean [Y]."**
And by **"join me on this rebellious journey"**, I mean **"hand me your hard-earned money as soon as possible without hesitation"**.

It's another example of having two contrasting sentences and using the 'flippant' formula to derive humour.

The key to The Hyperbole Backpedal:

1. The set-up phrase needs to be unusual.
In this case, it's **"join me on this rebellious journey"**. It's purposefully designed to obfuscate.
It needs to contrast with the punchline, which is blunt and to the point.
2. The more honest description needs to be surprising.
In this case, I admit my goal is to extract money from the reader. It's about the contrast.
From [hazy/unclear/flowery/hype-y] to [crystal fucking clear].

The Hyperbole Backpedal

Here is a bit of copy from the funny landing page I created for my disarming copywriting course, Have Your Way With Words.

So here we are. I'm violating pretty much every possible rule for writing sales letters with reckless abandon, hoping you'll



Words In Their Mouth

+ One way to derive humour is to parody the devices used in a given form.

For instance, in sales emails and sales letters, you'll often find the use of imaginary but plausible quotes.

For example, on a fitness programme website, you might find this quote inserted and centered on the page:

"But I just don't have time to eat healthily and exercise..."

And then the sales prose would respond to that objection with the reasons why their programme is perfect for someone in their circumstances.

The quote is 'the reader on the page.'

People know these quotes are made up, so they suit a broad audience.

You can tinker with this device to derive humour.

+ One route is to make the quote rooted in what you think the reader might be thinking, then express it in an exaggerated way.

This example is on the sales page for my disarming copywriting course, Have Your Way With Words.

After going through all the course's content and benefits and bonuses, we come to this quote in red:

"WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO GET TO THE PRICE, JON?!? HURRY UP! I HAVEN'T GOT ALL FAFFING DAY."

Alright, pottymouth.

As you wish..."

It's a funny little line that maintains their attention and keeps them smiling.

A note on swearing:

I initially used "FUCKING" but decided "FAFFING" was even better as the following line says "Alright, pottymouth" and I'd used "fucking" later down the page in a funnier joke. I changed this one to make my use of profanity later on more surprising.

Use swearing in moderation. Done sparingly, it can still shock. It's a spice you can add every now and then.

Here's another example of how to use the "words in their mouth" technique.

In a sales email, you'll often see rhetorical questions being posed such as:

"Do you have problems navigating the ever-changing world of social media?"

I know I do sometimes. But I've got something AMAZING that will blow your mind when it comes to..."

How To Use Funny Word Combinations

There are a few different ways I pair two (or three) words together to create humour.

The sound and the satisfaction.

The first is to combine two inherently funny words for whatever reason. Creative insults, for example:

"You filthy miscreant."

"Filthy" is a word that conjures all manner of connotations.

"Miscreant" is archaic.

Combined, you have an insult that is almost Dickensian.

Another example, and one that may go some way as to explaining my enjoyment of such insults, is one my brother aimed at one of my best friends when we were 17 or so. My friend had asked Gary, who was wearing a brand new suit,

"is that your school blazer, Gary?"

"It's an 800 quid suit, you facetious little cunt!"

There is something satisfying about it.

If you say it out loud, it works. And it sounds better with the inclusion of 'little'.

If that were removed, it'd still be shocking. We probably still would have laughed. But with it, it adds a level of specificity that adds the humour.

+ At the moment, my best advice for making things sound 'right' is to say them out loud.

Perhaps try your brand new creative insults on your partner... see what they think?

Then it discreetly goes into a pitch of some sort.

Again, you can play with this device by using the 'words in their mouth' formula.

Let's respond to the rhetorical question posted but not in the way that's expected.

Let's make the 'voice of the reader on the page' defer from what's expected.

I often use understatement.

Would you like to see my brand new B2B Sales Mini Guide?

"yeah ok i guess," I hear you SCREAM.

Well, today is your somewhat lucky day. I've put together...

Instead of using the quote device for hype, I've used it to add levity. We can win and maintain attention in this way.

Let's look at that sentence in full.

"yeah ok i guess." Imagine saying this out loud. This isn't something anyone says enthusiastically. I've even used all lowercase to stress the lack of enthusiasm. That's a little trick I often use.

"I hear you SCREAM." This is the complete opposite to the setup. Even SCREAM is in all caps to add emphasis.

The next sentence then suggests "today is your somewhat lucky day."

The addition of 'somewhat' adds further understatement.

You can then continue with the most blatant pitch you'd like.

All of these little tactics enable you to inject some levity into your copy.

It gets attention and maintains it.

It makes you more likable.

And more memorable.

IN-DEPTH BREAKDOWN

Words that 'disagree' with each other are also useful.

The second way I use word pairing creatively is to create "almost oxymorons".

+ **Oxymorons** are words placed in sequence that contradict each other.

Here is a post I made about oxymorons in the Charm Offensive group:

"I'm sure you'll find this post borderline fascinating.

This is just my unbiased opinion of course.

The principles of humour are an open secret.

No more will your attempts at humour be met with deafening silence!

Instead of bombing, you'll be able to come up with lines that land like a Peacekeeper missile!

Keep practicing and use the best ones in your final draft.

It'll help you develop your own original copy.

I'm 99% certain of it."

(My favourite of the above is 'borderline fascinating' btw...)

You don't always need to have a 'perfect' oxymoron though.

You can create humour by placing two words together that almost contradict each other.

They do seem to disagree somewhat.

They wouldn't sit at the same table at a dinner party, let's say...

They're not combinations that are opposites, but they're somewhat in conflict with each other.

I was on a coaching call with someone recently, and the guy asked me about my processes and systems and such.

I told him about my system, "I keep doing stuff and then only keep doing what works." and told him it was possible my approach was perhaps "recklessly efficient".

He laughed and said, "you have the best lines like that."

It made me realise I probably do this a lot. I examined some copy of mine and yep, I use such combinations frequently.

It's almost like a mini-joke.

It's not quite a joke, but it's two somewhat-contrasting words, separated by speech (whether out loud or in our heads).

Such a pairing is unusual enough to disrupt the reader, hold their attention, and perhaps make them smirk. (Or more, should it be an especially amusing combination).

A better example (he's a professional writer, okay!), is from Peter Serafinowicz.

I'm going to show you a fun example. 'Peter Serafinowicz - Internet Ham' - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1r3tx3IEsN4>

Go and watch it, as the next bit of this spoils the funniest line of the video...

.....* helpful anti-spoiler dots*.....

The best line in that sketch is "You'll soon come to love the weird taste of internet ham."

The most important word in that sentence is "weird."

Try removing it. It removes pretty much all the humour.

Because "weird" is not an adjective one uses to describe the taste of the food we like.

This example is from a silly sketch show, but you can use the same principle without being so absurd.

You'll notice I do this kind of thing all the time.

Being able to pair words together in satisfying and conflicting ways is one of the most important parts of writing funny copy. Its comedy condensed to a pithy phrase.

If you can get this, you can probably get all of the other humour stuff.

IN-DEPTH BREAKDOWN

The Silly Challenge

This is where you tell the reader that one item out of a list isn't real and it's up to them to figure it out.

However, the fake item is utterly absurd, making it obvious the challenge is a joke.

A good example of this can be found in a cold email from John Holt, a comedian and magician who listened to one of my training sessions and wrote a variation of my "Magic Letter" (see my original magic letter by clicking bit.ly/CharmLetter)



From: John

"Greetings...

...To give you an idea of what I can do, I've included some recent testimonials, only one of which is completely fabricated (see if you can guess which one):

1] "Everyone was amazed with your ability to make people belly laugh whilst performing brilliant tricks. Thank you for helping make our event stress free!"

2] "Our guests were in a combination of hysterics and bewilderment throughout the performance. One of them said "whatever you paid for that guy... it was worth it".

3] "John was the perfect addition to our celebrity cage fighting awards night. To see him perform card tricks for Benni from Abba while having the Dalai Llama in a headlock was amazing. And the look on former Secretary-General of the United Nations Boutros Boutros-Ghali's face was a sight to behold."

4] "John doesn't leave anything to chance. I was so impressed with the professionalism that he showed throughout the event. Any fears that I had were put to bed when I witnessed him working the crowd into a frenzy. He will leave your guests flabbergasted!"

It is an excellent version of my letter and demonstrates "The Silly Challenge" brilliantly.

Mixing Formal And Informal Tone

This is a fun little trick I use a lot.

I realised recently I learned it from one of my best friends growing up.

You can mix formal, serious words with informal ones to create funny sentences.

I'll start a sentence using words that are often used in formal (or at least sensible) correspondence.

(I'm aware of these formal expressions because of the many 'cease and desist' letters I've had over the years. Ho ho ho.)

"I trust"
"I await"

I'll then complete these assumptive sentences with something unusual that isn't what the reader expects.

"I trust this will charm you into submission"

"I await your profanity-filled response"

It almost fits the standard joke formula.

[Set up] - [Punchline]

[Formal] - [Informal/Unusual]

This builds the expectation that the rest of the sentence is going to continue down the same path.

The reader is then misdirected as the remainder of the sentence isn't congruent with the setup.

You can play with this format further just by adding an unusual or 'enjoyable' word to an otherwise serious sentence, as you've seen with "I await your response with great interest..."

You can take this further.

Attached is a 'gag' reference letter my brother

got given from an old employer as a leaving present. Yes, he actually used to be a civil servant for a while.

It was printed on government headed paper, building the expectation of formal copy.

The structure of the document and the opening lines build on this expectation.

"Dear Sir or Madam,

REGARDING: MR GARY BUCHAN

I have known Gary Buchan since he came to work in my team in March 2000.

I am unsure why Gary has picked me to provide a reference for him. Perhaps he feels that of all the managers within this organisation, I am the one he has offended the least. I would wish to disabuse you of this notion straight away...."

It goes on - but I wanted to focus just on this bit.

I love that line "I would wish to disabuse of you of this notion straight away."

It's such a serious statement but is hilarious in the context.

It's especially amusing when the reader learns the piece is obviously a wind-up a few sentences later.

This is an area you can have a lot of fun with.

Look at the form of a specific document or media type.

How can you play with the expectations of that form to misdirect the reader?

You can play around with the syntax of formal dialogue and make it funny.

Humour is about many things, two of which are surprise and incongruence.

This is a great way of being able to deliver both of these.

Going The Scenic Route

- + **Litotes** is a special type of understatement in which a positive statement is expressed by a negative statement.
- + Use **litotes** to add emphasis or discretion to a statement.

A few examples:

Instead of "he's unpleasant": "he's not the friendliest person".

Instead of "I had a bad day": "It wasn't the best day of my life".

Instead of "she's rich": "she's not poor".

Instead of "I'm old": "I'm not as young as I once was".

How To Be Witty: Recap

The Reverse

- + Create mental image → Shatter mental image

Example: "I know you want to hear the latest dope from Washington. Well here I am."
Senator Alan Simpson

Pro Tip: Make it as succinct as possible. Don't blabber.

Triples / The Power Of 3

- + Sensible + Sensible + Silly

Example: "You can reach me on the phone, through email, or by deploying carrier pigeons."

Pro Tip: Don't use it more than once in a particular email or letter, as the reader will pick up what you're doing.

The Triple Reverse

- + Sensible + Sensible + Sensible → Shatter mental image

Example: "I wanted to introduce myself in a way that showed I was honest, witty and clever. Alas, I wrote this email instead."

Pro Tip: Don't use it more than once in a particular email or letter, as the reader will pick up what you're doing.

Herky-Jerky Sentences And Understated Grandiosity

- + Something grandiose + something understated
- + Incongruence between what's happened and reality

Example: "Whenever I do this, I get an awfully sad email telling me my ads, and with it, my dreams of relative prosperity, have been paused."



IN-DEPTH BREAKDOWN

Pro Tip: Read it out loud and look for a 'herky-jerky'-like rhythm.

Double Entendre

- + A figure of speech or a particular way of wording that is devised to be understood in two ways, having a double meaning.

Example: "I hate alcohol. I can't stand drinking—I keep falling down."

Pro Tip: Don't have to use innuendo. The most sophisticated double entendres tend to be sarcastic statements that generally mean the exact opposite of what's being expressed.

Exaggeration

- + Can be used to add humour, especially to pain points.

Example: "We're looking to win clients over from those evil (ok maybe not evil... but not as good) other agencies."

Pro Tip: You can also use visual language. E.g. "Some suppliers lock their clients into such restrictive contracts, they may as well come with a set of complementary handcuffs."

Funny Words

- + Some words can bamboozle the best of us. If you use them sparingly, they're a great pattern interrupt.

Example: "I await your baffled response with great interest."

Pro Tip: Don't abuse this, as the reader will see it coming. Use it sparingly.

The Flippant Hands Formula

- + Setup Hand: On the one hand x... Punchline Hand: On the other hand y...

Example: "On the one hand, I hate bombarding your inbox with offers all the time. On the other hand, I do enjoy food and shelter. I hope you can forgive me."

Pro Tip: Try to find points of recognition that aren't overdone, such as "How crap is airline food?"

Recognition

- + Shared knowing - when you point out a feeling that everyone has, but it isn't yet a cliché to point it out.

Example: "Feeling sad and hopeless? NEVER FEAR!

Postpone your gloom by buying a ton of shit you don't need.

Pro Tip: Make sure it's not been the brunt of countless jokes in popular culture. Make sure enough people will get it. Message some of your peers.

The Hyperbole Backpedal

- + From [hazy/unclear/flowery/hype-y] to [crystal fucking clear].

Example: So here we are. I'm violating pretty much every possible rule for writing sales letters with reckless abandon, hoping you'll summon the courage to join me on this rebellious journey.

And by "join me on this rebellious journey", I mean "hand me your hard earned money as soon as possible without hesitation."

Pro Tip: The set up phrase needs to be unusual. It needs to contrast with the punchline, which is blunt and to the point. The more honest description needs to be surprising.



IN-DEPTH BREAKDOWN

Words In Their Mouth

- + Parodies the devices used in a given form.

Example: Would you like to see my brand new B2B Sales Mini Guide? "yeah ok i guess," I hear you SCREAM. Well, today is your somewhat lucky day. I've put together...

Pro Tip: Use swearing in moderation. Done sparingly, it can still shock. It's a spice you can add every now and then.

How To Use Funny Word Combinations

- + There are a few different ways I pair two (or three) words together to create humour. The first is to combine two inherently "funny" words for whatever reason. Creative insults, for example:

Example: "You filthy miscreant."

Pro Tip: My best advice for making things sound 'right' is to say them out loud.

- + The second way I use word pairing creatively is to create "almost oxymorons". Oxymorons are words placed in sequence that contradict each other.

Example: "I'm sure you'll find this post borderline fascinating."

Pro Tip: You don't always need to have a 'perfect' oxymoron though. You can create humour by placing two words together that almost contradict each other

The Silly Challenge

- + This is where you tell the reader that one item out of a list isn't real and it's up to them to figure it out. However, the fake item is utterly absurd, making it obvious the challenge is a joke.

Example: "John was the perfect addition to our celebrity cage fighting awards night. To see him perform card tricks for Benni from Abba..."

Pro Tip: Make it obvious which answer is incorrect. Make it absurd. Go nuts. :)

Mixing Formal and Informal Tone

- + Mix formal, serious words with informal ones to create funny sentences.

Example: "I trust this will charm you into submission. I await your profanity-filled response."

Pro Tip: Practice writing formal letters to get a sense of the style and tone.

Going The Scenic Route

- + Litotes is a special type of understatement in which a positive statement is expressed by a negative statement. Use litotes to add emphasis or discretion to a statement.

Example: "It wasn't the best day of my life."

Pro Tip: Use this to talk up your achievements, or gently belittle your opponents.





CHARM
OFFENSIVE.