

What is funny? A metaphysical question, believe it or not.

Something is funny because...

1) It is expected: A woman buys a white coat she has been saving up for for ages. She tells the shop keeper she has dreamed of wearing it for months and been saving up. The shop keeper says that this is the last one in stock. We see the woman's gleeful face as she tries on her new lovely white coat. We cut to a scene of a park keeper painting a bench black... oh and let's really overstate it... he's painting the bench black by the zebra enclosure in a zoo. We know what's going to happen already. The comedy is in the anticipation and expectation as we build up to the inevitable moment where she sits on the wet black bench in her new white coat and ends up with black stripes across her back.

2) It is unexpected: A hunter is out hunting rabbits. He finds a rabbit hole and sends his dog down. After five minutes of nothing he sticks his head down the hole to find the rabbit and dog playing cards.

Or let's go for a twist... That same woman buys her white coat and approaches the wet black bench.

"Look out!" yells the zoo keeper.

" Oh thanks," says the woman, "I almost sat on that."

An escaped lion leaps in from the side and mauls her.

3) It is familiar: For example, when your teachers reuse their expressions over and over, where it becomes humorous.

4) It is unfamiliar: Imagine that very same teacher coming in dressed like a clown, speaking a foreign language. Didn't say that coming.

5) Slapstick: Joe picks up a large wooden board. Fred behind him says "Hey Joe, careful with that board!" Joe turns around saying "What?" and whacks Fred in the face with the plank. This is the root of the Three Stooges humor.

6) Parody: Parody is where a work deliberately mimics the style of another for comic effect or ridicule. This includes impersonations and copying the target's mannerisms.

7) Spoof: Spoof is light parody or gentle imitation. Is it not necessarily intended to ridicule or make fun of the thing being spoofed, but the comedy happens in the recognition of the piece being spoofed.

8) Satire: Satire is where a section of society or politics is deliberately mimicked and mocked in order to poke fun at them and point criticism using humor. SNL and the Simpsons sometimes go to this level. Often they are in the Parody/Spoof realm. Where the line is crossed is subject to debate.

9) Irony: Irony is where the opposite of what is expected happens or where someone says the opposite of what they mean. The lack of harmony between something that is expected and the reality.

10) Sarcasm: Sarcasm is where an insult or quick remark is fired at someone with the intention of causing injury. It is often used in response to an initial statement or comment in order to pour scorn on the stated

idea or statement. Sarcasm often features irony (for instance, someone drops a tray and someone else shouts "Ooh, that was SO smart.")

11) Farce: This is where comedy is achieved through exaggeration and extreme characters in preposterous circumstances that seem to spiral out of control and become ever more ludicrous. This is often the root of sketch comedy such as Key and Peele, and The Kids in the Hall.

12) Black Comedy: This is a dark comedy where a light humored touch is applied to very dark and serious subject matter in order to ease the pain or make some specific point by juxtaposing the humor and the sadness. It is often confused by comedy created by Black people. That is a homonym.

13) Surrealism: Throwing together completely disjointed concepts and random ideas to weave together something bizarre. This is the root of the humor of Monty Python.

14) Timing: Probably the most mysterious part of performance comedy. In any performance comedy a rhythm is established and people often talk about beats. A beat is a small pause put in place to enhance a joke... sometime after the punch line to enable the audience time to react and get the joke, but often a pause is placed before a line to build expectation. It can also be used to throw in a double punch line. The punch line is delivered. (Laugh) (Pause) ...Second punch line follows on that audience weren't expecting these beats are often called 'pregnant pauses' as they are full of expectation.

15) Misunderstanding: Joe is holding a large nail on a piece of wood. Fred is holding a large hammer.

Joe: "When I nod my head, you hit it."

Joe nods.

Fred hits Joe over the head with the hammer.

16) Pun and wordplay: Often times synonymous with clean humor, children's humor, and, "Dad jokes".

A: My dogs got no nose.

B: How does he smell?

A: Awful.

17) Mock epic and travesty: These are actually literary terms used in discussion of straight literature and plays however but they can be employed very effectively in comedy. Mock epic is basically where something very trivial is treated as if it were high and lofty and important on a grand scale. This is the foundation of the humor on the TV show, "Seinfeld".

18) Double entendre: This is similar to pun and wordplay, but often, "dirty". An old man with an umbrella is having trouble with opening it and so he says to some woman in a short skirt, "Can you help me get it up?" and she says "Oh my, it is a big one!"

19) Stereotypes: Stereotypes work because we immediately recognize the character and so we are familiar with what sort of person this is without too much information needing to be given. The problem is that they very quickly become old and repetitive and so you have to try and spot new stereotypes or add a twist to an old one to avoid the joke looking tired.

20) Taking something out of context: Everyday objects used for other purposes or people assuming roles they should not occupy. i.e.) Banana used as a gun in a bank raid, Hospital cleaner called in to help with brain surgery.

21) Characteristic swap: Attributing human characteristics to animals and objects or attributing animal/object qualities to humans.

22) The infectious wisdom of the fool

A wrong opinion is expressed and catches on with others. Often a wise person will say something and a fool will hear it and misinterpret it loudly. A second fool hears it and agrees and so the wise person then has to race about correcting it to prevent the foolishness from spreading.

23) The flawed plan: character is discussing a plan but it is obvious to the audience that one glaring aspect of it is doomed to fail. This can either be due to information the audience has been told elsewhere or it can simply be that the character is overlooking something blatantly obvious.

24) Paralleling reality

Taking a familiar framework but replacing all the elements. The situation is familiar but the details are bizarre. The hotel sketch is a good example of this... we recognize the set up and the social norms at work, but there is a mini-bar full of various types of beans rather than alcohol, but this appears to be accepted as proper by the characters involved.