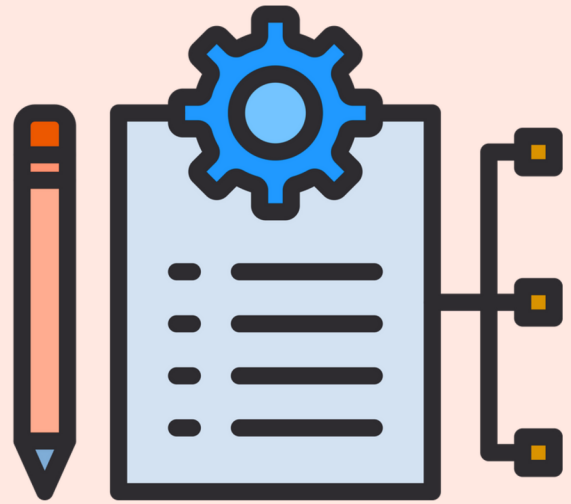




Humor Devices for Strategic *Communication*

*12 Proven Techniques for Speakers Who Want
to Be Taken Seriously... and Jokingly*

Table of *Contents*



01 - 02

Introduction

03 - 07

Incongruity

08 - 12

Association

13 - 17

Observation

18 - 19

Frequently Asked
Questions

20 - 21

Personalized Help

INTRODUCTION



Over the past decade, I've had the privilege of coaching hundreds of speakers, comedians, authors, and everyday professionals on how to use humor to be more engaging, memorable, and effective communicators (kinda like AndrewGPT but without the em dashes).

Whether I'm working with someone prepare a TEDx talk, deliver a corporate keynote, or simply try to make their next team meeting suck less, one thing consistently comes up:

People want to be funnier... but they don't know *how*.

That's where this handout comes in.

At the core of many effective jokes, punchlines, or funny moments is one of **three primary mechanisms**:

- **Incongruity:** creating a surprise or twist that catches people off guard
- **Association:** connecting two things in an unexpected or clever way
- **Observation:** pointing out a truth that everyone recognizes

HUMOR TECHNIQUES:



Each of these mechanisms sparks levity in a different way. **Incongruity** makes us do a double take. **Association** makes us go, “Huh, I never thought of it like that.” **Observation** makes us say, “YES, exactly!”

In this guide, you’ll find the **12 most common humor devices** I find myself teaching during one-on-one coaching sessions. They are **practical, repeatable, and effective** tools you can use to intentionally add levity, make people laugh, or simply be more memorable.

Each one is mapped to one of the core humor mechanisms, so you not only learn how to use them, but why they work.

Whether you're telling a story, crafting a keynote, or just trying to get through your next Zoom call, these devices can help you be funny(er) and more effective.

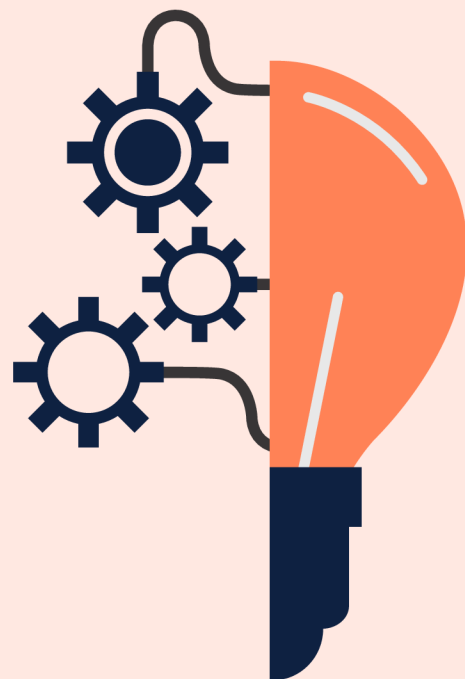
Let’s get funny.

INCONGRUITY

Surprises spark smiles.

Incongruity humor works by setting up expectations and then breaking them in an unexpected way. Whether it's shifting an established pattern, getting absurdly specific, or twisting a familiar word, these devices give your audience the jolt of "Wait, what?" that makes them laugh and lean in.

1. Comic Triple
2. Skewed Scale
3. Humornym
4. Humorbrag





1. Comic Triple

Definition:

A list of three items where the first two establish a pattern and the third one breaks that pattern in a humorous way. The third item is usually the shortest, most surprising, or most absurd, creating a punchline through contrast or escalation.

Examples:

- Being a project manager is all about managing expectations, timelines, and **your urge to scream into a pillow.**
- My company has a mission statement, a vision statement, and **absolutely no idea what anyone actually does.**
- I came, I saw, I **immediately left.**

When It's Good to Use:

- Any time you have a list, such as bullet points, benefit statements, or you're Santa Claus.
- When introducing yourself in person or online (such as your LinkedIn header).
- You have multiple commas in a sentence and none of them are funny.

How to Create It:

1. Choose a topic from your speech or look for lists that you already share.
2. Write two straightforward or expected examples to establish the pattern.
3. Add a third example that breaks the pattern with a surprise, twist, or rampant disregard for any precedence whatsoever..

“ Tip: Read it aloud to check the rhythm and leave a short pause before saying the third item.



2. Skewed Scale

Definition:

The use of incredibly specific or vague vagueness of a detail in a way that catches the audience off guard. The surprise comes from the scale—either being absurdly precise or wildly non-specific.

Examples:

- “In case of emergency: **RUN!**”
- “We’re open from **8:03 a.m.** to **1:57 p.m.**”
- “It’ll be ready in anywhere from **3 minutes to 9 business days.**”

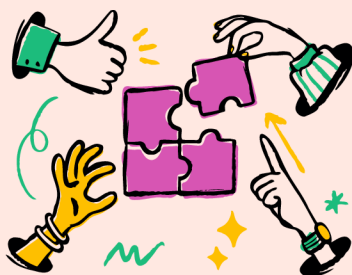
When It’s Good to Use:

- When you want to create a quick moment of surprise or silliness.
- Great for punchlines, captions, instructions, or visual jokes.
- Effective in settings where people expect standard text, numbers, or formats.

How to Create It:

1. Start with an idea that has an expected level of detail, often including a number or timeframe.
2. Explore both what the most absurdly precise and hilariously vague options would be for that idea.
3. Pick the one that is more startling or makes you smile.

“ Tip: Make sure the shift in scale feels surprising or over-the-top for the context, but still communicates the necessary information.



3. Humornym

Definition:

A humorous synonym that creates incongruity by replacing a common word or phrase with something unexpected or playful. The novelty of the synonym creates a moment of levity, and signals that your communication ain't the yooj.

Examples:

- Instead of "let's brainstorm" → **can we play for a moment?** (h/t to Sam Horn)
- Instead of "email" → **corporate carrier pigeon**
- Instead of "funny word," → **humornym**

When It's Good to Use:

- In written communication like email subject lines, bios, and presentations.
- To add personality to otherwise dry or repetitive content.
- As a way to grab attention and signal a more engaging tone.

How to Create It:

1. Review any sentence devoid of humor and pick one ordinary word to replace.
2. Brainstorm 2–3 fun or unusual alternatives.
3. Swap the original word for your favorite twist.

“ Tip: Read the line out loud to make sure the sentence still makes sense even with the humornym.



4. Humorbrag

Definition:

A technique where you share an accomplishment or impressive credential, then layer it with a clever, humorous twist that highlights your personality. The goal is to showcase achievements while sounding approachable, confident, and likable. Unlike a humble brag, which hides the brag in complaint, a humorbrag embraces the brag and makes it fun.

Examples:

- My TEDx talk has 15+ million views, **only half of which were from my mom.**
- I've been featured on *BBC*, *VH1*, and *The Daily Show* **(in the audience).**
- My clients include IBM, NASA, the FBI, and **my daughter's lemonade stand.**

When It's Good to Use:

- When you want to build credibility without sounding egotistical.
- In bios, intros, or anytime you're listing credentials.
- As a way to appear competent and relatable at the same time.

How to Create It:

1. Identify something impressive or noteworthy you want to share (e.g., awards, views, clients, appearances).
2. Write a short, factual statement that communicates that success.
3. Add a humorous line that builds warmth while reinforcing confidence, such as a comedic extension, caveat, or overexplanation.

“ Tip: Make sure the humorous add-on keeps the tone light and doesn't completely negate the value of your achievement. The shift from proud to playful should feel quick and deliberate.

ASSOCIATION

Connection creates comedy.

Association humor draws its levity from linking things together in unexpected ways. Whether it's using a phrase that sticks in people's heads, referencing pop culture, or bringing your passion to a boring topic, these devices make your message more memorable by connecting it to something already familiar.

- 5. Mnemonic
- 6. Pop Culture Connection
- 7. Passion Metaphor
- 8. Callback





5. Mnemonic

Definition:

A memory aid using acronyms, alliteration, or rhythmic phrasing to help people remember key concepts more easily. When infused with humor, it becomes even stickier and more engaging.

Examples:

- **SohCahToa** → trigonometry reminder that Sin = Opposite over Hypotenuse, Cosine = Adjacent over Hypotenuse, and Tangent = Opposite over Adjacent
- **Lefty Loosey, Righty Tighty** → which direction to turn something to either loosen it (left) or tighten it (right)
- **Humor MAP** → how to apply appropriate humor at work by understanding your Medium, Audience, and Purpose (MAP)

When It's Good to Use:

- When you want your audience to easily recall a framework or process.
- In workshops, trainings, or educational settings where retention matters.
- As a way to turn technical content into something more memorable and fun.

How to Create It:

1. Identify a key idea you want people to remember.
2. List the 3-5 most important components of that idea.
3. Create an acronym, rhyme, or alliterative phrase that links them together.

“Tip: Make sure the mnemonic is easy to say and spell, and don’t force it. If the letters don’t flow, try switching the word order or using a metaphor as a bridge.



6. Pop Culture Connection

Definition:

A device where you link your message or idea to a well-known song, movie, character, celebrity, or cultural moment. It creates instant familiarity and gives the audience a mental shortcut for understanding your point.

Examples:

- Those particles act as tiny little umbrellas, so you can just imagine a bunch of **Mary Poppins'** floating down from the sky.
- Our budget plan is basically the **Fast & Furious** franchise because it has way more installments than anyone asked for.
- This AI tool is like the **Beyoncé** of our tech stack: flawless, expensive, and a little intimidating.

When It's Good to Use:

- When you want to quickly connect with an audience through shared cultural references.
- As a way to explain dry or abstract ideas through familiar touchpoints.
- To add a quick, light jolt in the middle of an explanation.

How to Create It:

1. Think of a part of your message that you could be spruced up.
2. Choose a pop culture example your audience will instantly recognize (TV, movies, music, celebrities, etc.).
3. Identify a humorous parallel between the reference and your topic.
4. Craft a short, punchy sentence that references the pop culture example and makes the connection.

“ Tip: The stronger the contrast between the pop culture reference and your topic, the funnier the connection. Just avoid overused or outdated references unless you intentionally call out their absurdity.



7. Passion Metaphor

Definition:

Explaining something abstract, boring, or unfamiliar by connecting it to something you (or your audience) are passionate about. The emotional charge and familiarity of the metaphor adds humor, clarity, and relatability to your point.

Examples:

- Teaching people to use humor **is like teaching my daughter to ride a bike**: it's can feel a bit scary, starts out wobbly, and ultimately is a skill they'll be able to use the rest of their life.
- Giving feedback **is like baking a soufflé**: too harsh and it collapses, too soft and it never rises.
- Managing a team **is like hosting a family reunion**. There's always one person who doesn't RSVP, one who brings drama, and one who just came for the food.

When It's Good to Use:

- When you want to make abstract or complex ideas more tangible.
- If a topic is very serious and you don't want to soften it with jokes, you can find humor in the passion metaphor while the learning lessons stay serious.
- As a way to incorporate more of your own passions into your presentation.

How to Create It:

1. Pick a concept you want to explain and list out 10 attributes about it.
2. Think of a hobby, fandom, or passion you love and list out 10 attributes about it.
3. Look at both lists and draw parallels between the two using specific details.

“ Tip: The metaphor should be interesting but also still make sense to your audience (not leave them more confused).



8. Callback

Definition:

A reference back to something said earlier in the same set, story, or presentation. The humor comes from the audience's recognition of the earlier mention and the clever way it is brought back, often with a new twist.

Example:

- In my TEDx talk, I establish that my grandmother thought **WTF** meant "**Wow, That's Fun.**" At the end of the talk, I say, "It all starts with a choice... to be like my grandmother, to look at the world and think, '**WTF - Wow, that's fun.**'"
- If you joke early on about your dad always **calling you**, if someone's phone goes off, you can say, "That's probably my dad **calling me** right now."
- If you can't think of any others, ask **AndrewGPT**.

When It's Good to Use:

- In longer stories or presentations where you can establish and revisit an idea.
- To tie a set or talk together with a sense of structure or payoff.
- To create the sense of an "inside joke" that builds connection and community.

How to Create It:

Option 1: Callback to something that already exists.

1. Review your existing material for punchlines, themes, or phrases that stand out.
2. Find a spot later in the content where you can reference that original idea.

Option 2: Add in a "callforward" to make a later idea land better.

1. Think of a funny idea, line, or moment you want to land later in your talk.
2. Look at an earlier part of your program and create a quick line, phrase, or reference that can plant the seed for that callback to come.

“ Tip: In both approaches, the goal is for the second mention feel like a clever surprise and a satisfying connection back to a familiar idea.

OBSERVATION

Truth triggers laughter.

Observation humor shines a light on what's obvious but often unsaid. Whether it's taking an idiom at face value, justifying a strong, mundane opinion, or simply acknowledging what's happening in the moment, these devices work because your audience recognizes themselves in what you're pointing out.

9. Literal Lens

10. Slapstick

Act Out

11. Justified

Opinion

12. Callout





9. Literal Lens

Definition:

Taking something that's meant figuratively or conceptually and interpreting it in a ridiculously literal way. It relies on taking things at face value—deliberately missing the intended meaning to create humor.

Examples:

- They say we need more buy-in from the team. I'm starting to think **I should invoice them.**
- Let's take a step back. Not literally. **There's a potted plant behind you.**
- My boss told me to roll with the punches. Which is fine... but can we talk about **why there are so many punches to roll with in the first place?**

When It's Good to Use:

- When your audience is overloaded with jargon or abstract language.
- To make stale corporate phrases feel fresh and funny.
- As a way to show you don't take yourself, or your language, too seriously.

How to Create It:

1. Identify common metaphors, idioms, or abstract business phrases.
2. Imagine what would happen if they were taken literally.
3. Add a short, vivid line that paints that literal version or reacts to it.

“ Tip: Don't overuse this, once or twice in a talk keeps it clever and fresh.



10. Slapstick Act Out

Definition:

Using your voice, body, or facial expressions to physically act out an exaggerated situation or concept for comedic effect. This technique adds visual punch to your words, without needing to be a full-on clown.

Examples:

- When describing your stress level, you **drop your shoulders, cross your eyes, and mime hyperventilating into a paper bag.**
- Pretending to open a “surprise” email with **over-the-top fear and flailing.**
- Acting out how someone responds to a “Reply All” disaster **by pantomiming vomiting.**

When It’s Good to Use:

- When you want to add energy or contrast to a story or description.
- If your talk could benefit from a visual or physical break.
- To connect with an audience in a more human, less scripted way.

How to Create It:

1. Identify a moment in your story or talk that feels emotionally charged.
2. Think of a physical gesture, face, or act-out that would heighten or contrast that moment.
3. Rehearse it to find the right level of exaggeration that feels authentic, not cartoonish.

“ Tip: You don’t need to be a gymnast or mime. Small, intentional actions like an eyebrow raise or slow, awkward side-step can get just as big a laugh as falling off a chair.



11. Justified Opinion

Definition:

A strong, personal opinion that is justified with overly detailed, absurd, or deeply invested reasoning. The humor comes from the contrast between the topic of opinion, conviction of your belief, and the surprising or ridiculous logic behind it.

Examples:

- The most powerful tool in any office isn't Excel. It's the calendar invite. Because **if you don't understand Excel, you can just schedule a meeting with someone who does.**
- Slack is just email **with commitment issues.**
- Milkshakes are the best dessert. It's the **most efficient form of dessert, all you have to do is suck.**

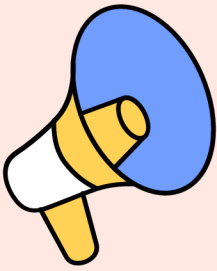
When It's Good to Use:

- When you want to inject personality into a topic or speech.
- In moments where the content needs a comedic opinion or surprising take.
- As a way to share your perspective without sounding too preachy or confrontational.

How to Create It:

1. Choose a strong, specific opinion you genuinely or ironically hold.
2. Amplify the passion or absurdity of the opinion slightly.
3. Back it up with logic or reasoning that's unusual, playful, or oddly insightful.

“ Tip: Let the audience know (through tone or delivery) that you're in on the joke. The more passionate your justification, the funnier the contrast between opinion and reasoning becomes.



12. Callout

Definition:

A technique where the speaker draws attention to something unexpected, ironic, or awkward happening in the moment. This creates humor by breaking the fourth wall and acknowledging what the audience is already thinking.

Examples:

- (*Tech fails*) "Ah yes, the classic 'next slide, please' moment. **Truly the jazz of corporate presentations.**"
- (*Cold room*) "This room is *cold*. Raise your hand **if you can't feel your hands.**"
- (*Self-commentary*) "That joke was mostly for me. And honestly, **I crushed it.**"

When It's Good to Use:

- When something unscripted or unexpected happens (tech issues, late arrivals, weird room setups).
- When the energy in the room needs a reset or reconnection.
- When you want to build rapport by showing you're aware and in-the-moment.

How to Create It:

1. While you're speaking, stay present and scan the room for anything that may be on the minds of the audience.
2. Use short, observational language to point it out without sounding mean.
3. Add a humorous twist that feels light, inclusive, or self-deprecating.

“ Tip: The best Callouts feel spontaneous but come from a practiced awareness. You can even prep a few lines in advance for common moments (e.g. muted mics, late slides, post-lunch energy dips).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Q: You didn't include [insert technique here], like story, sarcasm, or irony. Why not?

A: Great question. This list focuses on the **12 most common, coachable, and easy-to-apply humor devices** I help people use in workplace presentations and professional communication.

There are many other techniques (at least 127 more) that are useful... but some of them are harder to teach quickly, rely more heavily on delivery style, or are better suited for specific audiences or settings.

Storytelling, for example is one of the most powerful communication tools available. But it is often a container that holds multiple devices, which is harder to explain well in a simple text guide.

Q: Will using these make me sound too formulaic?

A: Not if you use them as a starting point while adding your own voice. Yes, your first attempt at any one of these techniques may sound robotic or forced, but the exercises are just to get you started. From there, you can refine and edit to make it sound more natural.

For example, I used the Comic Triple exercise to come up with the joke, **"I listen to podcasts at 2x speed because it's faster, more efficient, and it makes more people sound like me."** However, when I say it on stage, I realized it comes off better as, **"I listen to podcasts at 2x speed. Not only is it faster, but also more people sound like me."**

The exercises are just a starting point. Wherever they take you from there is up to your personal style.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



Q: How many of these devices should I try to use?

A: These tools are meant to enhance your natural communication, not replace it. So you want to balance using different devices depending on your medium (how you are communicating), your audience (what they expect), and your purpose (what's your goal in using humor). Think of them like the seasoning in a meal. Used thoughtfully, they improve the flavor. Used all at once, they might overwhelm your audience leading to bad Yelp reviews (or people never coming over for dinner).

Q: Is there a limit to how often I should use the same device?

A: Repetition can be effective... in fact, callbacks rely on it. But too much of one device can become predictable. For example, if you use a comic triple in every paragraph, your audience may start to anticipate the pattern. Try to vary your approach so your audience stays engaged.

Q: What if I just want to be "naturally funny" or funnier in conversation?

A: These tools still help. Humor often feels natural when you have practiced it enough that it becomes part of your default communication style. Even casual jokes in conversation rely on the mechanisms of incongruity, association, and observation.

The best way to become "naturally" funny is to build your awareness of what makes people laugh, test things in low-pressure environments, and reflect on what feels authentic to you. As you build your skill with these devices, you'll start to naturally include them in your everyday life.



HUMOR **IS A SUPERPOWER**

Humor has the ability to transform more than just your message. It can shift how people experience your ideas, how they remember your content, and how they connect with you as a human. It doesn't require you to be the funniest person in the room. But it does require you to care enough to engage, connect, and make work a little more enjoyable, for you and your audience.

Whether you're getting someone to laugh, smile, or simply listen a little more closely, humor is one of the most effective tools you have for creating impact.

WANT PERSONALIZED HELP?

Whether you're trying to make your keynote more engaging, your meetings more memorable, or your emails less boring, adding humor can help.

If you'd like personalized guidance on how to apply these techniques to your own presentations, I offer both one-on-one and group coaching. We'll work together to find what fits your message, your audience, and your unique voice.



Want to see if it's a fit?

Book a free clarity call to talk through your goals and explore the best next step for you.

Let's make your message more effective... and a lot more fun.

humor.me/claritynsa