
From: [REDACTED]
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How To Tell A Joke
by Professor Jackie Martling

By definition, jokes are ridiculous. Some people love them and some people hate them, but they've been around forever, and will always be.

There are two groups of people at every party: The people in the huddle telling the filthy jokes and the people who are trying to remember a filthy joke so they can get in the huddle. Every joke has a "butt," be it the husband or the Jewish mother or the blonde. For the humor to happen, someone has to "get hurt" to some extent, preferably someone else. Mel Brooks' definitions of comedy and tragedy are: "Tragedy is when I stub my toe. Comedy is when you fall off a cliff."

If you love jokes, or even just enjoy telling them, a few subtle do's and don'ts may make you better at it. In fifty years, I've learned to do these things. It's like putting on guitar strings—after you've done it enough times, you eventually wind up doing it the best way. Just like Columbus, you intuitively find the best route to the Orient.

These rules pertain to the written joke as well as the spoken joke. You can use an actual name in a spoken joke but the written joke is better suited for putting in names to replace "the guy."

Trim the Fat

Long-winded stories packed with unnecessary details droned on by people telling jokes at the bar are mainly responsible for the joke getting a bad name. Only relate what's necessary. Playboy's Party Jokes are a huge offender: "The sultry young lass sauntered into a nightclub, smiling broadly, and sexily asked the bartender if he could possibly..." No! Told properly, that homopod translates to: "A girl walks into a bar and says to the bartender..."

Keep it Simple

Don't ever break up dialogue. It's, "The man says to the cop, 'Hey, which way did that kid go?'" Not, "'Hey,' the man says to the cop, 'Which way did that kid go?'" It just flows so much better that way.

Don't use any descriptive adjectives unless it's to distinguish one character from another. It's, "The fat girl says," only when it's to distinguish her from the regular-sized girl in the joke. Or it's, "The first worm says," to distinguish him from the second worm in the joke. Not "the humongous porky girl" or "the slimy, dirty worm," unless the description is necessary to the joke.

Also, locate your joke(s) in the present tense. It gives the joke an immediacy and makes it more exciting. It's very subtle, I know, but true and absolutely necessary. And every little bit helps you. Read or listen to any of my versions of jokes. It's always, "The barber says," never, "The barber said."

And Remember ...

Though sometimes you really can't dodge them, do your best to not include any words from the punch line in the body of your joke. It just makes the punch line more fun.

You can scoot through most of the body of a longer joke, but always make sure you're speaking slowly and clearly when you're giving information that's especially pertinent to the outcome.

And, very important, memorize the punch line. Know it well. Even say it out loud a few times so you can deliver it flawlessly with confidence and without stammering.

Obviously, after you've gotten your version of a joke together, you'll never have to think about these things again. But use these guidelines when recalling a joke someone told you before you re-tell it.

Five to 20 Remember

To remember jokes you want to tell in a series, make up a silly connector line or scenario involving the punch line of a joke and the beginning of the next one. The more absurd the connector line or the connecting scenario, the easier it'll be to remember.

Here are five great jokes, with a short idea between each pair to aid you in remembering them in that order. The connector(s) can be longer, even a whole silly scenario that links the two. After you catch on, pick five jokes that you love to tell and create your little silly in-between tales. You'll be shocked how well it works. And how you'll never forget your dopey little connectors. All you need to get started is to remember how to get started. Well, I'd say if you can't even remember the first joke, you should kill yourself. How should you do it? Go buy some cyanide.

A woman walks into a drug store and says to the pharmacist, "I'd like to buy some cyanide. I need it to poison my husband."

The pharmacist says, "Don't be ridiculous. I can't give you cyanide to kill your husband. You'll go to jail, I'll go to jail, you're crazy."

The woman reaches into her purse and hands the pharmacist a picture of her husband in bed with the pharmacist's wife.

The pharmacist says, "You didn't tell me you had a prescription."

(the woman has two prescriptions in her hand: One for cyanide, and one for condoms ...)

A couple has sex, and when they're finished, the woman looks in the box of condoms and sees only six left out of twelve.

She says, "What happened to the other five condoms?"

He says, "I, uh, made balloon animals out of them for my niece."

That night she tells a male friend what happened, and says, "Have you ever done that?"

He says, "Of course. All the time."

She says, "Really? You've made balloon animals out of condoms?"

He says, "Oh, no. I thought you meant did I ever lie to my girlfriend."

(balloon animals ... there are balloon animals on the wall with the fluffy toys, all around and in between the fluffy toys ...)

A guy meets a girl in a bar and they go back to her apartment. They go into her bedroom and from left to right, floor to ceiling, there's a whole wall full of fluffy toys. Floor to ceiling, side to side, fluffy toys everywhere. They get it on.

&nbs=; When they're done, the guy says, "How was I?"

She says, "Take anything from the bottom shelf."

(lying on the bottom shelf of hairy kewpie dolls, on its side, is a ballerina doll ... the drunk thinks it's a ballerina ...)

<=PAN style="mso-tab-count: 1"> There's a drunk at one end of a bar and a woman in a tight low-cut black dress at the other end of the bar. The woman's waving feverishly for the bartender and she's got an incredibly hairy armpit.

The drunk says, "G-gimme a drink, and give a drink to the ballerina over there."

The bartender says, "How do you know she's a ballerina?"

The drunk says, "Wh-who else could get her leg up that high?"

(her leg's up in the air, like a train gate that's up ... he's buying a train ticket ...)

A guy goes to buy a train ticket, and the girl selling tickets has an incredible set of jugs.

He says, "Give me two pickets to Titsburgh ... umm ... I mean, two tickets for Pittsburgh."

He's really embarrassed and the guy in line behind him says, "Relax pal we all make slips like that. Just the other day at breakfast I meant to say to my wife 'Please pass the sugar,' but I accidentally said, 'You annoying bitch, you wrecked my life.'"

So now you've got ammunition. You've got a string of five great jokes. Learn them. And go over the connectors—it's simple. When you want more jokes, e-mail me (jokeland@aol.com <mailto:jokeland@aol.com>) and get on The JokeLand E-Mail List, and you'll get free jokes a few times a month.

Head writer of the world-renowned Howard Stern Show from 1986-2001, Jackie Martling Tweets a daily joke at 4:20pm EST (@JackieMartling).