

Writing Humor

“How do I write a funny story?”

Humor is not something glued on to your writing, it emerges from your story. Remember, you are not writing a joke book, unless, of course, you are.

Humor in a story may reflect the unexpected, the slightly out of whack response, or the oddities of the situation.

Jack Smith writing in an article for *The Writer* magazine (August, 2014) listed five humor techniques:

“Understatement, overstatement, irony, paradox, juxtaposition.”

This is a fine article on the elements of writing humor. It includes quotes and advice from several leading authors regarding their thoughts on humor.

Life is full of opportunities to find humor. *The key is to observe what is going on.*

A recent TV advertisement urged viewers to buy a 12” frying pan. As a bonus, they would include a 10” lid. This is funny because who wants a lid smaller than the pan?

Gallows humor is used to deflect a dark situation or relieve tension.

“You face a firing squad in the morning.”

“Then I won’t have to clean my room today.”

The rule of three is a comedic standard. We expect a sequence to be the same, but when the third element is unexpected the response can be humorous.

“Mom said I could have a pet as long as I took care of them. I had three pets: a cat named Kitty, a dog named Puppy and a rock called Rocky. After a month I got rid of the first two.”

We expect things to go a certain way, when they don’t, the results can make us laugh. Think about the TV home video programs viewers send in. They are funny because something unexpected happens. Someone bounces on a trampoline and hits the overhead light fixture. A fat lady sits on chair and the chair breaks.

Humor can come from unexpected sources. In doing research for your story, be alert for little bits of information that can be turned into a humorous event.

During the American Revolution, King George of England was planning to address the English parliament the next morning. He practiced his speech over and over, announcing the good news that General Cornwallis had defeated George Washington at Yorktown.

News arrived later that evening from America that General Cornwallis had surrendered to Washington. Imagine the King's advisors arguing about who would tell His Majesty the bad news.

"You tell him, I don't want him mad at me."

"No way, he might kill the messenger."

"Maybe we could slip a note under the door and run away."

"Maybe we should tell the leaders of Parliament. That way the King would be mad at them."

"Go get the man who brought us the news. Make him tell the King."

"Let's pretend we don't know. Let the King find out for himself."

"Or maybe we should tell the Queen and let her deliver the bad news to her husband."

Humor can be in the words, the situation, or a reaction to the actions of your characters.

Humans live in an imperfect world. Try as we might, things go wrong. Think about the stores and situations that made you smile and laugh. These will give you insights to enriching your own writing.