Don’t Get Too Spicy: Effective Use of Humor in the Gen Z Classroom

Sarah Lane and Alison Shea
LOEX Conference 2023
Who we are

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How did we end up here?

HADM 2720 Information Retrieval and Research Methods (2022SP)

Welcome! I'm so glad to have you in our class, and look forward to sharing some of my excitement about researching with you over the next few weeks!

Information is everywhere - how do you go about finding the most reliable, accurate, and unbiased information to allow you to think critically and write professionally?

This course introduces some of the electronic tools - both on the internet and through the library - necessary to locate, access, evaluate, and analyze information available online, and will focus on how to assess the right balance of free and fee-based resources.

✓ 2 credit, general research methods class with focus on business information

✓ 18 students enrolled Spring 2022

✓ Condensed 7-week class 9:40-10:55am M and W

✓ Overall - and historically - very positive evaluations
What we'll cover

1. Humor in the Classroom
2. Gen Z Humor
3. Incorporating Humor into the Classroom
4. Questions
Humor in the Classroom
Benefits of using humor in the classroom

• “Humor, appropriately used, has the potential to humanize, illustrate, defuse, encourage, reduce anxiety, and keep people thinking”

Research on humor

- There's a lot of it

- Psychology of humor, comedy, humor as a pedagogical tool, use in library classrooms, etc.

- This program does not aim to instruct on how to be funny
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Humor type</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Representative work</th>
<th>Appropriateness for classroom</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Affiliative; Solidarity-based</td>
<td>Amusing others, building solidarity, relieving tension</td>
<td>Hay (2000); Martin et al. (2003)</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Psychological needs/Self-Enhancing</td>
<td>Humor used to defend oneself, regulate emotions, or cope with problems that arise during the interaction</td>
<td>Hay (2000); Martin et al. (2003)</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Power-based humor</td>
<td>Establish boundaries and create status differences</td>
<td>Hay (2000)</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor related to class material</td>
<td>Stories, jokes, or other humorous content related to class material</td>
<td>Cornett (1986); Frymier et al. (2008); Kaplan and Pascoe (1977); Wanzer et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funny stories</td>
<td>Events or activities connected in a single event related as a tale</td>
<td>Bryant et al. (1979); Bryant et al. (1980)</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humorous comments</td>
<td>A brief statement with a humorous element</td>
<td>Bryant et al. (1979)</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Seeking funny others</td>
<td>Encouraging humor use in others or seeking out other people known to be funny</td>
<td>Wanzer et al. (2005); Cornett (1986)</td>
<td>Appropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humor unrelated to class material</td>
<td>Stories, jokes, or other humorous content not related to class material</td>
<td>Frymier et al. (2008); Wanzer et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-disparaging humor</td>
<td>Making one's self the target of the humor</td>
<td>Bryant and Zillmann (1989); Cornett (1986); Frymier and Thompson (1992); Frymier et al. (2008); Wanzer et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unplanned humor</td>
<td>Humor that is unintentional or spontaneous</td>
<td>Martin (2007); Wanzer et al. (2006)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jokes or Riddles</td>
<td>Build-up followed by a punchline</td>
<td>Bryant et al. (1979, 1980); Martin (2007); Ziv (1988)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
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<td>---------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Puns</td>
<td>Structurally or phonetically words or phrases having two or more meanings were used simultaneously to play on the multiple meanings</td>
<td>Bryant et al. (1979)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low humor</td>
<td>Acting silly, stupid, or absurd in specific situations</td>
<td>Wanzer et al. (2005)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonverbal humor</td>
<td>Using gestures, funny facial expressions, vocal tones, etc. for humorous intent</td>
<td>Wanzer et al. (2005)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Impersonation</td>
<td>Doing impressions or mimicking voices of famous characters</td>
<td>Wanzer et al. (2005)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
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<tr>
<td>Language or word play</td>
<td>Witty or clever verbal communication including using slang or sarcasm</td>
<td>Wanzer et al. (2005)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laughing</td>
<td>Laughing or varying intensity as a means to make others laugh</td>
<td>Wanzer et al. (2005)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using funny props</td>
<td>Using funny props such as cartoons, water pistols, funny cards, etc.</td>
<td>Wanzer et al. (2005)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual illustrations</td>
<td>Use of pictures or items expected to promote humor</td>
<td>Bryant et al. (1981)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humorous Distortions</td>
<td>Use of irony or comical exaggerations</td>
<td>Bryant and Zillmann (1989)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test items</td>
<td>Using items on tests and assessments that contain humor</td>
<td>Ziv (1988)</td>
<td>Context-dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aggressive; Other-denigrating</td>
<td>Manipulating or denigrating others, ridicule, or mocking</td>
<td>Frymier et al. (2008); Gorham and Christophel (1990); Martin et al. (2003); Stuart and Rosenfeld (1994)</td>
<td>Inappropriate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offensive humor</td>
<td>Humor based on the race, ethnicity, sex, political affiliation, or sexual orientation of another</td>
<td>Frymier et al. (2008)</td>
<td>Inappropriate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I would like to make my course on "information retrieval and research methods" for undergraduate business students more humorous. Specifically, I would like to know how I can make my class on business information research funny.

Making a class on business information research funny can be a great way to engage undergraduate business students. Here are some suggestions to add humor to your course on information retrieval and research methods:

1. Use humorous examples: Incorporate funny or relatable examples when explaining concepts or demonstrating research methods. For instance, instead of using generic examples, relate them to funny or absurd business scenarios that students can relate to.

2. Include humorous videos or memes: Integrate humorous videos or memes related to business or research in your presentations or course materials. These can serve as icebreakers or attention grabbers to lighten the mood and create a more enjoyable learning environment.

3. Share funny anecdotes: Share humorous anecdotes or personal stories related to your own experiences with business information research. Stories that involve unexpected or amusing outcomes can help students relate to the subject matter and make it more memorable.
But what is funny?

- Humor takes many forms
- Know your bubble
- Know your audience
Who is Gen Z?
Defining Generations

- Silent Generation: b. 1925 - 1945
- Boomers: b. 1946 - 1964
- Generation X: b. 1965 - 1979
- Generation Z: b. 1995 - 2012

Twenge, 2023
Defining Gen Z
Touchstones

- True “digital natives” who never knew a world without the internet

- Born into a world of climate change, economic uncertainty, and global unrest

- The last generation to remember a pre-COVID world
Theme: Chronically online

• Instant access to media on demand

• Ability to avoid exposure to challenging ideas

• Negative impact on mental health
Scrappy, pragmatic, entrepreneurial

- Born into a world of economic uncertainty
- Value being in control
- Access to information empowers them to “DIY”
Individualistic and authentic

- Aversion to “cheugyness”
- Would rather expose their own flaws than be criticized
- A response to the “edgelord” culture of the 2010s
- Quarantine allowed them to explore their identities without experiencing face-to-face mockery

Seemiller and Grace, 2019
Lorenz, 2023
Humor and Gen Z
Nostalgic

- Reviving trends of the 90s and 00s to return to simpler times as a form of escapism
- Reminiscing on childhood for comfort
how I used to sleep the night before a field trip

Not to sound depressing but I miss being this excited about life lol
Absurd and Surreal

• In a time of information overload, you can stand out by being bizarre

• When you can’t make sense of current events, you can cope with surrealism

• “Fighting lunacy with lunacy”
Sick of the Media? Welcome to the new media.
THE TRUTH REPORT
birdsarentreal.com
Post-Ironic

- Functions as coded language to insulate from intergenerational criticism and cyberbullying
- When irony is expected as the norm, it’s no longer funny
- Response to “post-truth” era
- An effort to embrace nuance and layers of meaning in a complex world

Monroe, 2014
Wilson, 2022
Be patient.
Things will get better.

Type YES if you agree.
GIVE UP

At Some Point, Hanging In There Just Makes You Look Like an Even Bigger Loser.
I will not let my ex’s opinion of me define my self-worth.
Gallows humor and political commentary

- 😂 -> 💀 🕵️

- Embracing dark humor to cope with challenging circumstances

- Openness to having difficult conversations fueled by hope for better in the future

Beausoleil, 2021
Your FBI agent watching you laugh at memes about WWIII while preparing your draft.
Referential humor and remixing

- Templates require a shared understanding and help enforce an “in-group” dynamic.
- “Deep frying” images distinguishes them from polished advertisements and skirts automated censorship.

Sanders, 2020
DUDES BE LIKE
“SUBWAY SUCKS”
MY BROTHER IN CHRIST
YOU MADE THE SANDWICH

https://knowyourmeme.com/memes/dudes-be-like-subway-sucks
MEME MAKERS BE LIKE

"I'M GOING TO REMOVE 90% OF THE ORIGINAL WORDS FROM THE MEME"

MY BROTHER IN CHRIST YOU HAVE LEFT ME WONDERING WHAT THE HELL A SUBWAY SANDWICH IS DOING IN THIS IMAGE

https://www.memedroid.com/memes/detail/3942331/Is-this-meta-Somebody-let-me-know
BEHOLD
SHIP OF THESEUS"

Instagram: @spicydeepfriedmemesv3
https://www.instagram.com/p/CrODpDirnKx/
Identifying themes and tropes
Gen Z Humor recap

• Nostalgic
• Absurd and Surreal
• Post-ironic
• Gallows humor and political commentary
• Referential humor and remixing
BOOMER HUMOR:  I HATE MY WIFE

MILLENNIAL HUMOR:  I HATE MY LIFE

GEN-Z HUMOR:

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listen son in this world it's either yeet or be yeeted
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hank: you're scaring the baby
My grandfather, full of lead

My father, full of asbestos

Me, full of microplastics
Successfully incorporating humor in the Gen Z classroom
Where do we go from here?

• Are we now "funny" to our students?

• It depends on you

• How did I respond to that evaluation comment?
The case for incorporating humor in the classroom

- Humor has been shown to increase attention & retention of information
- Humor relaxes
- *But use it wisely*
Humor, Equity, and Inclusion
When students have developed a disdain for school because they believe that to be successful, they must repress their authentic selves, making them see that the content being delivered respects and values their culture... becomes a way to reconcile the broken relationship [they] have to schools and schooling.

Dr. Christopher Emdin

*For White Folks Who Teach in the Hood ... and the Rest of Y’all Too*
Humor and Belonging

• Humor can act as a bridge between those from different backgrounds as they laugh together

• Punching up vs. punching down

• How can you remain authentic to your personality and humor while acknowledging and recognizing the values and humor of the students you teach?
Humor and information literacy

• Satire and irony are opportunities to apply information literacy principles – bias, credibility, authorship

• Use culturally-relevant examples to make concepts accessible (and add “sugar on top”)
References


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