

How To Write Funny

by Lance Manion

I've never really been impressed with authors that write long teary-eyed novels about people dying of terrible diseases or uplifting stories about the armless boy who made the wrestling team. That may be exactly what the reading public is looking for I don't think it will be too long before computers can crank that crap out without the need of a frumpy middle-aged woman tapping away.

Same goes with the glut of teen wizards and werewolves that seem to be choking every shelf in the few remaining book stores.

It's all 50 shades of the same stuff.

If you want to impress me ... make me laugh.

Now I realize that the thought of impressing me is far down on your to-do list and with good reason. You've probably never heard of me and just the implication that I feel that you should be trying to impress me to begin with probably has you raising the trembling fist and strongly considering abandoning this post altogether. I understand completely.

That being said, you're probably in need of some advice on how to make people laugh so stop your bellyaching and listen up.

Let me start with a joke you've probably heard before.

* * *Celine Dion walks into a bar. The bartender says "Why the long face?"* * *

Funny. No denying that.

But why?

It's not just because Celine Dion has a long face. It's because the joke doesn't describe the bar. It just says bar and lets the listener picture any bar they want in their head. The perfect bar for Celine Dion to be walking into. The same goes with the bartender. When I heard that joke I, no doubt like yourself, had a very vivid image of what the bartended looked like and I'm guessing our two bartenders looked nothing alike.

It doesn't matter. We both pictured just the right bartender to deliver the line "Why the long face?"

Available online at <http://fictionaut.com/stories/lance-manion/how-to-write-funny>

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Rule #1: Don't over-write.

Let the reader fill in as much detail as they can. They will image a much better scene in their head than you can possibly write. Get over yourself. Unless it's critical to the story, just give the basics.

This next one is the most important rule and I'm regretting not making it #1 but to change it now would involve a lot of copying and pasting and frankly I'm just not up to it. Suffice to say, make a little mental note that this rule should be #1 but I'll go ahead and call it #2.

Rule #2: Write to the right audience.

There are people out there that you're never going to amuse. You need to keep your writing out of their miserable hands. What you want to look for is people who have an imagination similar to your own. Ideally you want people that have at one point in their lives looked down on an odd little plant they'd never seen before and felt the need to bend over and uproot it, took a closer look to confirm that it was in fact from another planet and was sent here to sprout and consume everything in its path, destroyed it and then said to themselves "You're welcome Earth" as they walked away.

These are outstanding readers and exactly what you're looking for. I cannot stress this enough. If you can't find any of these than people who know that the time difference between the United States and Australia doesn't mean that things happen at different relative times but still think to themselves they should find a friend in Australia to let them know how all the football games turned out before they were played so they can bet on them will do.

People with a healthy appreciation of a good run-on sentence don't hurt either.

Got it? You have to accept that you're not really that funny and you are completely dependent on the reader to find something redeeming about anything you come up with.

Rule #3 isn't as important as Rule #2, which should be Rule #1, but it's more important than Rule #1 so it really should be Rule #2.

And that rule is?

Rule #3: You have to connect. You have to put yourself out there. Don't be afraid to be honest and never shy away from the stuff that makes you who you are. Funny writers have to make the reader feel like they are simpatico. For example, if you really like John Hughes movies don't be afraid to burn *16 Candles* at both ends.

See what I did there? The line itself isn't funny but the connection to a beloved movie makes you find it redeeming (Rule #2).

Or, you hated the line and hate me and now wish you'd have abandoned this post back before Rule #1 (again, Rule #2 in action ... you miserable bastard).

Rule #4 is truly the least important of the four so I'm happy to address it last.

Rule #4: If you're going to use the word cornucopia in a sentence, the sentence better have to do with corn.

People are really touchy about that.

Just sayin'.

Well, I hope these four simple rules will help you in your attempts at writing funny stuff and that you return to review them often. Please let me know if you write something funny and go on to publish your own humorous short story collection. Obviously I'm far too busy to ever read it but it will give me the warm fuzzy feeling that I've helped a fellow writer blossom.

