

Love of Laughter Comedy Club



Toastmasters International



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Physical Humor

It is not easy to describe physical humor in a paper. But as a general rule skip physical humor unless you are a pro. Having said that, the following best describes physical humor.

When you learn physical humor basics you add a new dimension to your presentation or speech. You are *beginning* to learn about the ancient art of using your body to make people laugh or smile. Physical humor has an immediacy that bypasses language completely and goes straight to the funny centre.

Some people use physical humor basics naturally. They can't help themselves. These are the folk who mimic either themselves or others as they tell their stories. Their arms will stretch as wide as possible to show you how big the fish was they caught. They will hop on one foot and grimace with exaggerated pain as they regale you with the story of how they stubbed their toe on the step while carrying the groceries inside.

I have a friend was one of these types for whom physical humor basics was deeply ingrained. Nearly everything that happened to him was retold with full-body accompaniment and an optional sound track thrown in. He never simply went fishing. He went FISHING and when the fish bit they SAVAGED the bait.

Here's a story to illustrate:

As a child my friend went with a couple of friends to catch eels in the creek. They got one: a *small one* and carried it home in a bucket.

Later that evening he entertained at the dinner table. He demonstrated hauling it out of the creek. Now it took three boys all huffing and puffing with the strain, as the eel was determined to get away. Guess who landed it flapping on the bank? By now it was Herculean in size and *one bucket* wasn't enough. He proudly told us it took *fifteen buckets* to bring it home. I remember laughing so hard I almost choked as he demonstrated trying to juggle the buckets full of jiggling eel.

So to Learn Physical Humor Basics, what do you have to know and practice?

The first prerequisite is to watch people closely.

Good people watchers observe body language and learn how to read it. They know when a body says closed, go away or when the signal is angry, sad or happy.

The second fundamental is to practice reproducing what you see in others. A person adept at using physical humor basics does more than read body language, they've learnt to reproduce it. They copy shamelessly and exaggerate as well.

What was a minor but recognisable characteristic now becomes the dominating feature.

For example, as a child I used to stand on one foot, twiddle a lock of my hair and dream. A family friend perfected it. If he wanted to be 'me', he had it accurately in an instant without the need for words.

The third hallmark of physical humor is that it *doesn't rely on language*. You can get the joke *without it*.

And *now* onto those-

5 (& 3/4) Fantastic Reasons to Learn Physical Humor Basics

Understand a presentation or speech *is* a performance. You are *the performer*, whether you like it or not.

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You stand in front of a group of people to speak and maybe show as well. They watch and listen to you.

Now consider:

Would *you* rather watch and listen to a static/wooden performance or one including laughter and some movement?

To help you decide whether it is worth the risk to learn physical humor basics also consider:

- **People learn better with laughter.**
Good humor relaxes. It opens people...makes them more receptive and able to grasp new things or ideas. They will also remember longer if they learnt with laughter as the teacher.
- **People perceive the person who is able to use physical humor basics well as confident and able.**
This is definitely a plus in gaining an authoritative edge. The person who can laugh at themselves publically is admired.
- **Physical humor basics cuts through language and cross-cultural barriers faster than any speech can.**
The ability to mime is a great tool to have in your kit.
- **Physical humor appeals to all age groups.**
Each of us has a child within. We all remember the joy of seeing a clown at work.
- **Physical humor basics paint a picture and a picture says a thousand words.**
The capacity to mime or reproduce stereotypical states of mind or people cuts out having to explain everything. Showing or demonstrating does it for you.

And last but not least, the 3/4 reason:

- **It makes YOU feel good and if you feel good, so will your audience.**

And the reason it's *only* a 3/4 or 75% reason?

Because *mostly* when we perform a speech, we have the audience uppermost in our mind, *not* ourselves. It's about what 'they need', not about us. We are simply the vehicle carrying the message.

Still unsure how to begin?

Use these **Physical Humor Basics** suggestions to get yourself started:

Take a cue from children:

- How do they respond to pain?
- How do they respond to joy?
- What faces do they pull if something tastes odd?
- What do they do if they're told-off?
- What does a full-blown sulk look like?

Walk in Another's Shoes:

Work with a friend. Have them walk in front of you and keep walking until they've lost self consciousness. When you've observed them carefully, begin to follow. Copy as closely as you can the way their feet meet the ground, how they hold themselves, what their arms are doing... When you think you've got it ask them to step aside and watch you as you 'walk' them. Swap over and repeat. This a wonderful exercise to raise awareness of what being in another's body might feel like.

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You can practice variations anywhere, anytime. Try asking yourself what would I walk like if I was 'in love', if I had a sore toe, if my shoes pinched, if I was walking barefoot on hot sand, if I had a sore lower back ...

Practice slipping and out of 'states' as fast as you can.

Watch yourself in the mirror as you go from neutral to envious, joyful, shy, flirtatious, despairing etc. The bigger and bolder the gestures the better. Remember to involve your whole body rather than just your face.

Watch some of the classic comedians at work.

You'll find some suggestions below. Mimicry can be cruel. Make sure you're creating safe/healthy laughter. That is you are not setting someone up to be laughed at. Use yourself as the butt of your humor if in doubt.

Although people's eccentricities may mark themselves out as prime targets for copying, not everyone enjoys seeing themselves. And *especially not*, if it's done without knowledge or compassion.

Theatrical Forms of Physical Humor

The 3 genres of physical humor below are often entwined.

Slapstick: a boisterous comedy with chases and collisions and practical jokes. Slapstick is an ancient form of humor involving as well as chases and collisions, highly exaggerated violence. Because the violence goes far beyond what is easily recognized as common sense, it becomes non-threatening and funny. Modern examples of comedians who use it are Rowan Atkinson, Mel Brooks and Jackie Gleason. Amongst professionals it is considered one of the more difficult forms to use as it relies on split second timing and finely honed characterizations to get the laughs.

Farce: a break neck paced form of comedy relying on improbable situations, highly exaggerated characters and physical buffoonery. It incorporates much of slapstick with the addition of verbal wit usually in the form of puns and sexual innuendo. Farce is the basis of many popular sitcoms.

Clowning/Mime: both these forms have a long and distinguished history in the evolution of theatre. Clowning and mime skills depend on accurate as well as exaggerated characterizations of people. They are physically based rather than verbal and performers are often expected to be acrobatic as well. Traditionally a clown can juggle, do the splits, walk a tight rope, back flip and act. Their expertise is celebrated in circuses, theatre and on film and television. Many successful comedians use elements of clowning or mime in their performances. Examples: John Belushi, Pinky Lee, Peter Sellers, Rowan Atkinson, Andy Kaufman. Examples from the early silent days of film are the Charlie Chaplin and Laurel and Hardy movies.

And ONE more Interesting Tidbit on Physical Humor Basics:

Did you know boys/men are more likely to find physical humor funny?

They tend to fall around hysterical over exaggerated violence, mock battles and bodily function humor.

Girls/women tend to go for more verbally based humor.

Homework Assignment

Pick a person that you know and tell a joke (you select the joke) mimicking that person. Re: Walk in another person's shoes.