

# The Reverse

The reverse can involve several things: adding an opposite or incongruous punch line; flipping words or a situation; turning around and playing with the listener's believe.

The term *reverse* has many definitions in humor writing, but one of the best is "a device that adds a contradictory tag line to the opening line of a standard expression of cliché.

"I couldn't wait for success, so I went ahead without it" Jonathan Winters

"I will not age an issue in this campaign. I will not exploit my opponent's relative youth and inexperience". Ronald Reagan

"I just broke up with my girlfriend, she wanted to get married. I didn't want her to."

The idea in a reverse is you want to switch the audience's point of view.

The standard reverse is a simple statement setting up a point of view that is effectively cancelled out by the last few words. Pro writers sometimes spend hours polishing that important last line. In the example below, the setup statements have been underlined.

"I sold my house last week, I got a good price for it - But it made my landlord mad as hell." - Garry Shandling

Do not overplay the setup

You need to use a reverse on a relatively high IQ audience. If the listener doesn't get the first part of the joke, they will never get the punch line.

## YOUR HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

Think of a stereotype, something like "Doctors are males", "White guys can't jump", "and Accountants are accurate". Turn it into a joke.

Tell a joke about yourself and a person or situation that "fools" your listeners.

A reverse should not be easy for the audience to spot in advance. Write a reverse for each of the following set-ups.

My wife turns the lights off when we make love. That doesn't bother me. It's the.....

After twelve years of therapy, my psychiatrist said something that brought tears to my eyes. He said.....

The "news" reports on shows such as Saturday Night Live and The Daily Show commonly include reverses in the form of one-sentence news headlines followed by contradictory tag lines. Write a reverse for each of the following setups.

"A Harvard Medical School study has determined that rectal thermometers are still the best way to tell a baby's temperature"

"The University of Wisconsin says that elderly people who drink beer or wine at least four times a week have the highest bone density"

Thomas McFarlin, Founder and President, Love of Laughter Comedy Club  
Office: 262-717-9776 Home: 262-784-7464