

Laugh Lovers Toastmasters Humor Skills Presentation

Making Shaggy Dog Stories Work for you

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Let's set the "way-back" machine for a time in the Past. Do you remember the Rocky and Bullwinkle show? How about Mr. Peabody and Sherman in "Peabody's Improbable History" it was about a time-traveling dog and his pet boy, Sherman. The stories were always set in the past, highly improbable twists on history, and always ended with Mr. Peabody saying, "Afterall, Sherman,....." followed by an outrageous pun.

This was a true "Shaggy Dog Story told by a DOG!

Many people "think" they know what makes a Shaggy Dog Story work.

Many think they are long stories, so they tell long stories.

Many think that they must be long stories and stupid at the end.

Many think that the longer the story, the funnier the story.

Not so. Shaggy Dog stories must be crafted and practiced like any humor.

A Shaggy Dog Story is a story which ends with a pun: A set-up and twist

General rules:

It must be a good story.

Shaggy dog stories are generally for adults. Mostly, they have the background necessary to fully appreciate the irony and humor. However, older children will often "get" the pun is they are exposed to this type of humor.

Consider the audience and what will they accept.

All jokes depend on a solid "set-up and twist." The Shaggy Dog story starts with a plausible premise (A man walks into the bar) or an outrageous conundrum (a frog walks into the bar). Both can work because the audience knows that this is just a story and expects anything.

But, if the set-up is so obvious that it gives away the twist. The joke is ruined. You know this. You have seen people say, half way into the joke, "I can see what is coming." That is worse than, "Oh, I have heard this one before."

Also, the "set-up" can be too complicated and the audience will get lost. Often the excessive details as in the frog story will kill the story. Keep the verbiage tight and clean.

Repetition: Often Overworked

A shaggy Dog story often depends upon repetition of an event. Too few or too many repetitions and the story will not work. You must gauge the tolerance of the audience. If they give up, the joke is lost.

A shaggy Dog story can be topical and recent. But, you run a risk if the audience is not “tuned in” to the recent events.

Also, watch out for “made up words.” They can be the hook for the pun but they must be put into a familiar setting and accepted before the pun. Otherwise, they might backfire and wreck the pun.

Warning: Ethnicity

If the pun requires an ethnicity element, will your audience approve of it? It is easy to put in a joke about how one people cannot use the “ell” sound. But if the audience feels you are making fun of them, you might die on stage.

A Foreign culture Minefield

Shaggy dog stories will not translate into Japanese, Chinese, Malay, or Spanish. It is not that these people are stupid or that the language cannot convey jokes. It is simply that the story will not be funny. .

A word upon the Pun:

“The pun has been said to be the lowest form of humor... It compresses into the shortest possible length the basic elements of comedy.”¹

A pun (in Greek, paronomasia, “equal word”) has been defined as a play upon words and a bad pun as two-thirds of a pun—p.u.)² Usually, there is some sort of conflict between meaning and word choice. In a pun, the words are twisted to make the joke. Here are examples:

What did Samsen die of? Fallen Arches.

Have you heard about the cannibal who had a wife and ate children

The panda ate shoots and leaves.

Drunk Drivers are people who put the quart before the hearse.³

Puns are not contemptible. There are no feeble, good, or bad puns. There are only those with wit who “get it” and those who do not. Puns will change with the times. Often,

¹ John S. Crosbie, “Crosbie’s Dictionary of Puns”, Harmony books, New York, 1977, Page 1

² Richard Lederer, “Get Thee to a Punnery,” Laurel Book from Dell Publishing, 1988, page 25

³ IBID, Richard Lederer

they are reflective of certain common events or situations. Like any humor, they can fall flat if the connections are so old or obscure that the audience fails to make the connections.

Puns are a “play on words.” The “play” comes from the fact that the actual words used in the pun often make no sense standing alone. However in the common context of the situation, their entirely different and new application takes a juxtaposition altogether different from the original word meaning.

Some would call a pun a petty conceit arising from the use of two words that agree in sound but not in sense.

“This work is for the birds. It’s aardvark, but it pays well.”

One termite to another in a saloon: “You’ve been here before. Where is the bar tender?”

Trick the audience but do not make them feel stupid

Finally, the audience must know the original lines from which the pun. if the pun is a “take-off” from an old saying, it must have a good origin. For example, “People who live in glass houses should not throw stones.” This “old saw” is well known in the US.

Let's hear how Michael Heggen looks at puns. From his Website created 11/07/96, [Michael Heggen](#)⁴

“There is nothing I appreciate quite so much as a really good (or bad, depending on your point of view, I suppose) shaggy dog story. I've always enjoyed (?) shaggy dogs, but my interest was nurtured by two sources: a little green rag of a publication called *The Isolated M* that always carried a *whole page* of shaggies every month, and my high school algebra teacher, Mr. John Reisner (a very gifted teacher with an absolutely appalling "gift" for puns -- good chess player, too).

The art of creating a well-crafted pun is lost on many people unfortunately, so enjoying a shaggy dog story is sort of like enjoying a cigar -- the person smoking has a great time, but bystanders usually gag. If you're not familiar with shaggy dog stories, here's a definition (you poor sap, you):

*A seemingly plausible (usually) story of varying length (the longer the better, I say). As the story progresses, the listener/reader should become more and more intrigued, even if they **know** it's a shaggy dog story. The last line is always an absolutely hideous pun.*

Today a great shaggy dog story showed up in my e-mail. It got me thinking of all the shaggy dog stories I have heard. Why not preserve this priceless works of, uh, art? So here is my contribution....”

The Chess Players⁵

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)

All the top chess players show up at a hotel for an important international tournament. They spend the first hour hanging around the lobby telling each other of their recent victories. Their crows get progressively louder and louder as each one tries to outdo the others.

The hotel manager gets tired of this, so he throws them out of the lobby and tells them to go to their rooms. "If there's one thing I can't stand," he says, "it's chess nuts boasting by an open foyer."

⁴ Michael Heggen, "The Heggen Pages," 1996, (www.heggen.net/entertainment/shaggy_dogs/)

⁵ IBID, Michael Heggen

The Czechoslovakian Friend⁶

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)

A certain lawyer was quite wealthy and had a summer house in the country. Each summer the lawyer would invite a different friend to spend a week or two.

On one occasion, he invited a Czechoslovakian friend to stay with him. The friend, eager to get a freebie off a lawyer, agreed.

Early one morning, the lawyer and his Czechoslovakian companion went out to pick berries for their breakfast. As they went around the berry patch gathering blueberries and raspberries, along came two huge bears, a male and a female.

The lawyer, seeing the two bears, immediately dashed for cover. His friend, though, wasn't so lucky. The male bear reached him and swallowed him whole.

The lawyer ran back to his Mercedes, tore into town, and got the local sheriff. The sheriff grabbed his shotgun and dashed back to the berry patch with the lawyer.

Sure enough, the two bears were still there. "He's in *that* one," cried the lawyer, pointing to the male, while visions of lawsuits from his friend's family danced in his head.

He just had to save his friend. The sheriff looked at the bears, and without batting an eye, leveled his gun, took careful aim, and shot the female.

"What did you do that for?" exclaimed the lawyer. "I said he was in the *other* one!"

"Exactly," replied the sheriff. "Would you believe a lawyer who told you the Czech was in the male?"

This story plays on the incongruous use of the words. But, the words make sense. This is a classic use of puns for a plausible story.

⁶ IBID, Michael Heggen

Desert Storm Twins⁷

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)

During Desert Storm, an American Air Force officer met a Saudi Air Force officer. They began to make small talk, and after the discussion had been carrying on for a little while, the Saudi officer decided to pull out his wallet and show pictures of his family to the American.

When the American saw the picture of the Saudi's family, he was shocked. "Hey, that looks like my son," he said, referring to one of the Saudi officer's children. "That looks just like my Juan!"

The Saudi officer explained. "About 15 years ago, I went to Mexico to drill for oil. While I was there, my wife and I decided to adopt a young boy. We named him Amal and he's grown up with us."

The American said, "Well, about 15 years ago, my wife and I were stationed at the Mexican embassy. We adopted Juan and now he's in high school. I wonder if your boy and mine are twins!"

Sure enough, the boys had the same birthday and they agreed that the two boys must have been twins. After the war ended, they agreed to meet in Los Angeles and have a big reunion. Of course, the news media received word of this and were eagerly anticipating the arrival of the young boy from the Middle East.

However, to the disappointment of the crowd that had assembled, it was announced that the plane would be over four hours late. Juan's mother said to the media, "You might as well go home. There's no point in waiting here."

"Why would we want to do that?" asked a reporter.

"Well," she replied, "they're identical twins. If you've seen Juan, you've seen Amal."

Again, the story hinges on the incongruity of the words at the end.

⁷ IBID, Michael Heggen

The Flower-Growing Friars⁸

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)

Submitted by John Cavanaugh

Some friars wanted to do more for their flock but their vow of poverty, simple lifestyle and lack of gainful employment meant that their supply of available funds was, to say the least, meager. Nevertheless, they put their collective heads together and came up with the idea of opening a small florist shop. They reasoned that they could grow most of the flowers on the church grounds, and what they couldn't grow, they could likely pick from the surrounding countryside.

As you can probably guess, everyone liked to buy flowers from the men of God and their little business flourished. So much so that the rival florist across town thought the competition was unfair. He asked the good fathers to close their little shop, but their flower business was providing them with much-needed funds for their good works and they refused. He went back time and again, finally begging the friars to close. By this time, they had tired of the florist's constant whining and they ignored him. The florist even asked his mother to go and ask the friars to get out of the flower business, but they ignored her, too.

By this time, the florist was nearly bankrupt and in desperation hired Hugh MacTaggart, the roughest and most vicious thug in town, to "persuade" the good friars to close. Being a man of few morals and even fewer religious convictions, Hugh had no ethical problems with his assigned task and promptly gave the friars a thorough beating and trashed their store. He departed with a stern warning that he'd be back if they didn't close the shop. Terrified, the friars did so immediately, thereby proving that only Hugh can prevent florist friars.

Ghandi's Health Problems⁹

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)

Submitted by Bill McJunkin

Ghandi walked barefoot everywhere, to the point that his feet became quite thick and hard. Even when he wasn't on a hunger strike, he did not eat much and became quite thin and frail. He also was quite a spiritual person. Furthermore, due to his diet, he ended up with very bad breath. He became known as a super-calloused fragile mystic plagued with halitosis.

⁸ Ibid, Michael Heggen

⁹ IBID, Michael Heggen

The Giant Panda

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)

A giant panda escaped from the zoo in New York. Eventually, he found his way downtown and walked into a restaurant, where he found a seat at an empty table. The maitre d', being a native New Yorker figures he's seen stranger things than this so he sends over a waiter to take the panda's order. In due course the panda's meal arrives and he eats.

After he finishes his dinner he stands up, calmly pulls out a gun from God-knows-where he had it hidden, and blows away several customers and a couple of the waiters. Then he turns around and walks toward the door.

Naturally, the maitre d' is horrified. He stops the panda and demands an explanation, at the very least.

The panda says to him, "What do I look like to you"?

The maitre d' answers, "Well, a giant panda, of course."

"That's right," says the panda, "Look it up," and he walks out.

The maitre d' calls the police. When they arrive the maitre d' relates the whole story to them, including the panda's comment about looking it up. So the chief detective sends a rookie out to get an encyclopedia.

He eventually returns with the Encyclopedia Britannica, Volume P. The detective looks up "panda", and there's the answer: "Giant panda, lives in China, eats shoots and leaves."

Man Arrested in Roofing Accident¹⁰

Pun coined by Kimberly Heggen
Shaggy dog crafted (?) by Michael Heggen

A man who despised his city's Building Department decided to re-roof his house. He knew he was supposed to get a building permit to do this, but didn't out of spite. He had completed most of his illegal repairs and was preparing to eliminate the sag in the eaves at the end of the house.

As the man struggled to eliminate the sag in the eaves, some rotted wood gave way underneath him. He fell right through the hole in the roof, but managed to grab the edge of the eaves as he fell, catching himself.

Unfortunately, the sudden weight of the falling man caused the edge of the roof to completely tear loose from the rest of the house, resulting in the man falling twenty feet to the ground and getting pummeled with debris from the collapsed eaves.

A neighbor happened to witness this and hurried over to check on the man. He was alive, but badly hurt. The paramedics were called and he was taken to the hospital in agony.

The man's injuries were serious enough that he spent six weeks in the hospital recovering. On his last day in the hospital, the police arrived and announced that he was under arrest for his activities six weeks earlier.

"What!?" exclaimed the man. "You're going to arrest me for falling off my own roof?"

"Oh no," replied the policeman. "We're arresting you for tearing off the edge of your roof without a permit. That's a clear case of illegal eavesdropping."

The Man Who Loved Hollandaise¹¹

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)

A man went to his dentist because he felt something wrong in his mouth. The dentist examined him and said "That new upper plate I put in for you six months ago is eroding. What have you been eating?"

The man replied, "All I can think of is that about four months ago, my wife made some asparagus and put some stuff on it that was delicious... hollandaise sauce! I love it so much now that I put it on everything -- meat, toast, fish, vegetables, everything!"

¹⁰ IBID, Michael Heggen

¹¹ IBID, Michael Heggen

The dentist said, "Well, that's probably the problem. Hollandaise sauce is made with lots of lemon juice, which is highly corrosive. It's eaten away your upper plate. I'll make you a new one, and this time, I'll use chrome."

"Why chrome?" asked the patient.

"It's simple," said the dentist. "Everyone knows that there's no plate like chrome for the hollandaise."

Mercy Hospital

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)

Mercy Hospital in Chicago is run by a group of nuns who came from Australia. Through the years the years they have gone out of their way to maintain ties with their native land. They put up a large map of the country in the reception area and served Australian tea from tins decorated with koala bears.

One night a patient calls a nun into his room and tells her how much he likes the hospital and the care. But, he has one small complaint: he found some leaves in his tea.

"Oh, no worries," the nun says, "the koala tea of Mercy is not strained."

Nate the Snake

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)

Submitted by Linda Wright

There was a snake called Nate. His purpose in life was to stay in the desert and guard the lever. This lever was no ordinary lever. It was the lever that if moved would destroy the world. Nate took his job very seriously. He let nothing get close to the lever.

One day off in the distance he saw a cloud of dust. He kept his eye on it because he was guarding the lever. The dust cloud continued to move closer to the lever. Nate saw that it was a huge boulder and it was heading straight for the lever!

Nate thought about what he could do to save the world. He decided if he could get in front of the boulder he could deflect it and it would miss the lever. Nate slithered quickly to intersect the boulder. The boulder ran over Nate, but it was, in fact, deflected, leaving history to conclude that it is was better Nate than lever.

Know your audience. If they are very young, never watched television, or simply only ate eggs for breakfast, they might not "get" the joke.

The Rabbi and the Trids¹²

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)
Submitted by Linda Wright

There was a Rabbi who was shipwrecked on an island. He knew that there was no way he could get off so he decided to make the best of it.

One day in his exploration of the island he came across an interesting tribe of people. They devised some kind of communication and he found out they called themselves Trids. He asked if he could join the tribe. The Trids said yes. So the Rabbi did everything that the Trids did.

One day about a month after the Rabbi joined the Trids, there was a loud trumpet sounding. The Trids all lined up and started walking up the hill. The Rabbi joined them thinking it was some religious ceremony. The Trids stopped on top of a cliff by the sea. They were in a straight line. The Rabbi followed. Then a giant came out of the woods and began to kick each Trid off the cliff. The giant passed the Rabbi and continued to kicked the Trids off the cliff. When the Giant was finished, the Rabbi went to the Giant and asked why he didn't get kicked off. The Giant replied, "Silly Rabbi, kicks are for Trids!"

Watch out! An easy slip of the tongue and the joke is ruined. In this case the correct word of "helper" is critical.

Robinson Crusoe's Coma¹³

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)

Robinson Crusoe fell desperately ill. Just before dropping into a coma, he called for his man Friday to help him. "Friday, get help! Get help!"

"Yes!" Friday replied, "Get help now!" Not knowing what else to do, he went outside of Crusoe's tent and danced and prayed for the gods to come and help his master.

Shortly afterwards, he went back into Crusoe's tent and found his master awake and staring at a beautiful glowing shape at the foot of his bed.

"Who is *that*?" Robinson Crusoe asked.

His helper answered, "Thank Friday! It's God!"

¹² IBID, Michael Heggen

¹³ IBID, Michael Heggen

Shaggy Dog stories do not always work. Here is one even I do not understand

Roy's Footwear¹⁴

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)

Submitted by Linda Wright

Roy was entertaining a friend in his living room. They were talking about all sorts of things. Roy mentioned he had a very good cat but this cat had been acting strange lately. He was biting and chewing all of Roy's shoes.

He had just gone out and bought some new ones to replace the shoes the cat had destroyed. This morning Roy found that the cat got to his brand new shoes. Just then, the cat walked through the living room. His friend interrupted, saying, "Pardon me Roy, is that the cat who chewed your new shoes?"

Beware! You better know beforehand if your audience will tolerate something "off color." If not, the story will likely flop.

The Story of the Fabulous Foo Bird

Author unknown (presumably for good reason)

Three explorers had arrived in Africa to explore territory that had never been seen by Europeans before. Immediately upon arrival, they enlisted the services of a native to translate for them and another native to act as a guide. After a few days, they had organized their supplies and secured the services of porters. They were ready at last!

Off they went into the jungle! They had a few days of travel before they got to the area they wished to explore. The travel went smoothly and uneventfully.

The day dawned when they began to travel into the unknown jungle. After a few hours travel, their guide got very excited upon seeing something on the ground. The three explorers and their translator hurried over to see what was the matter. The translator explained, "He says that this is the mark of the Fabulous Foo Bird! They are very rarely seen! They are very lucky!"

The explorers chuckled to themselves at the natives' superstitions and the safari moved on. After awhile, they heard a horrible squawking from the air above them. As they looked up to see what it was, the sun was briefly hidden as an enormous bird flew overhead. As they were staring, there was a loud squelching sound, followed by cries of disgust from the senior explorer. The other turned to see that he was covered with bird poop. The guide got even more excited when he saw this and began gesturing frantically at the explorer. The translator said, "That was the Fabulous Foo Bird! He says you must

¹⁴ IBID, Michael Heggen

not wipe this off! If you leave it on and do not wash it off, you will receive untold wealth and fortune. But he says if you wipe it off, you will die horribly!"

"Nonsense!" said the explorer. He disgustedly cleaned himself up, all the while grumbling about superstitions. The natives began murmuring. They were very nervous. A short time later, the senior explorer was clean and still very much alive. "There! You see? Nothing to worry about!" he said. Three steps later he fell over dead, his body rotting away.

After the shock died down, the guide looked somewhat smug.

The next day, the same squawking was heard, followed by the appearance of the bird. This time, the second explorer was coated in gunk. Once again, the guide issued his hysterical warning. "Poppycock!" said the second explorer. "That was a coincidence. I am not going to trek through Africa coated in bird droppings because of some silly superstition!" He proceeded to clean himself off, but wasn't even finished before he collapsed dead into a pile of dust.

After the shock died down, the guide again looked somewhat smug.

The next day, the same squawking was heard, followed by the appearance of the bird. This time, the youngest (and only remaining) explorer was coated in gunk. Once again, the guide issued his hysterical warning. The nervous young explorer decided to play it safe and continue the exploration in his filthy state. This met with great approval by the natives.

The expedition continued and proved to be a smashing success, with great discoveries. The young explorer received incredible accolades and lived a very long and wealthy life.

From then on, enterprising explorers were always given this sage advice: if the foo shits, wear it.

From "the MacScouter Resources

If your audience did NOT grow up in the "Hayday of the TV Western," use another story. Here is the reason why.

*Dogs in the Wild West*¹⁵

One hot and dry day in the Wild West, this dog walks into a saloon and says, "Gimme a beer". Evidently this type of thing wasn't too rare 'round those parts because the bartender said, "I'm sorry, but we don't serve dogs here." The dog then took out a silver dollar, dropped it on the bar, and said, "Look, I got money, and I want a beer." This scene had the potential to get ugly. The bartender, getting a little irate, said one more time, "We do not serve dogs here. Please leave." The dog growled, so the bartender pulled out a gun and shot the dog in the foot! The dog yelped, and ran out the door.

The next day, the swinging bar doors were tossed open and in walks the dog that had been in the saloon the day before. He was dressed all in black. A black cowboy hat, a black vest, three black cowboy boots and one black bandage. The dog looks around, waits for the talking to quiet down, and says, "I'm lookin' fer the man who shot my paw."

-- Thanks to Steve Poggio

The Very Special Bus

There once was this man who was looking for a job. He applied for a bus driver's job at the county board of education. The head of the school board granted him an interview. During the interview the man was told there was only one bus driver job left, the one that drove the special education bus. The man said he would take the job but the school official asked that he look at the bus first. They went outside down a row of yellow school buses and at the end was a small van with Sesame Street characters painted all over it. The man was a little reluctant at first but the official told him all the kids would be at the bus stops and all he had to do was pick them up in the morning and take them home in the evening. The man needed the job badly so he took it.

The first day on the job he comes to the bus stop and there is a little girl standing there who is very fat. She gets on the bus and the driver says, "Hi! What's your name?" The girl replies, "My name is Patty" and takes a seat. He comes to the next stop and there is another little girl there who is fatter than the first. She gets on the bus and the driver asks, "What your name?" She says "My name is Patty" then takes a seat by the first girl.

¹⁵ The MacScouter Scouting Resources Online. Stories for Scouts and Scouters. (www.macscouter.com/Stoies/BadPuns-1.html)

At the next stop there is a little boy standing there. When he gets on the bus he says, "Hi, I'm Ross and I'm special." At the next stop there is another little boy standing there and when asked his name he says, "Hi, I'm Lester Cheatum." Lester takes the seat behind the driver and pulls off his shoes. He starts picking the loose skin on his bunions. This being the last stop, the driver takes the group of special kids to school.

This same scene happens every day for a week. On Friday the driver goes into the superintendent's office and say, "I quit! I can't take it anymore!"

When asked why the driver says, "Every day it's the same thing! Two obese Patty's, special Ross, Lester Cheatum picking bunions on a Sesame Street bus."

(Two all beef patties, special sauce, lettuce, cheese and onions on a sesame seed bun.)

■ Thanks to John Sugg

Sometimes, an overhaul is necessary to make it work. If you notice, this story crowds several puns together along the way. While they can be individually funny, the story loses its plausibility as you realize the author is trying to be too witty. It loses its impact at the end.

*Dances with Cucumbers*¹⁶

May 5, 1863 -- Here on the frontier, I sometimes wonder if the ancients were right. With no other friendly face within 150 miles, it seems as if I _have_ fallen off the edge of the Earth.

I spend my time now reading what books I have and cultivating my patch of cucumbers (which I brought back from the Holy Land, cf. _Prince_of_Thieves_). The "purpose" of this fort, to hold back the Indians, has fallen away with my civilized veneer.

May 7, 1863 -- This morning I had an interesting and silent encounter. One of the tribe of Indians nearby watched me perform my morning tasks and then left without a word. I am excited by the prospect of contact with the natives of the area.

May 20, 1863 -- I have finally convinced the Indians to parlay with me. I taught them the word for "fort", feeling that it would be simple enough for them to learn. They in turn taught me the Indian word "titonka", apparently a small but tough,

¹⁶ IBID, MacScouter

powerfully merchandised horseless carriage of metal construction. I envy these people their simplicity.

June 7, 1863 -- Today I visited the Indians' village. It is on one of the many flat-topped plateaus in the area. As the decline of the buffalo proceeds, so too does this Indian tribe face decline. I will try to teach them agriculture. They have also told me their name for themselves. It is "Anasazi"... which apparently means "people called Anasazi" in their language. I am called by them "Stinchapecsal" which means "he who should bathe more regularly".

July 8, 1863 -- A rude awakening. The Indians are fully aware of agriculture and in fact have nothing to do with the buffalo (what kind of nomadic tribe would build a village on a _mesa_?); unfortunately, they are suffering a drought.

Knowing a remedy, I have told them to dig a ditch from the nearby stream up the mountainside to their mesa-top fields. In the meantime, I am pickling my cucumbers.

July 20, 1863 -- The drought is desperate, but the ditch is finished and my pickles are ready. I am lining the ditch with pickles. The Anasazi are doubtful, but I have promised them results in the morning.

July 21, 1863 -- Success! The stream has been diverted and now flows up the mountainside to the Anasazi fields. Amazed by this seeming magic, I told them that it was simply a well-known fact in my world. After all, everyone knows that "dill waters run steep".

Thanks to Steven Andrew Wolfman

Some stories should be left to the original and not re-told. And, what is s funny about Australian nuns?

*The Bush Pilot*¹⁷

A British bush pilot is flying on a job through the Australian outback when he encounters engine problems and is forced to make a crash landing. He survives, but is found unconscious and is taken to a local mission hospital which is run by the Sisters of Mercy. Upon awakening, he is greeted by the mother superior who advises him where he is and asks if there is anything he wants. He replies, "I am a bit thirsty...could I have a cup of tea?" to which the mother superior says, "I'm terribly sorry, but our supply truck is late and we are out of regular tea. However, we do have a sort of native drink that is brewed from koala hides." the pilot thinks awhile and replies, "Well, I just have to have my cuppa...you can bring me that, thanks."

The nun leaves and returns in a few minutes with a steaming cup. The pilot takes the cup gratefully, but upon taking a sip, instantly gags and spits it out. "This tea is filled with hair!", he exclaims disgustedly.

"Oh, I'm dreadfully sorry!" The nun replies, "I forgot to tell you: The koala tea of mercy is not strained!"

■ Thanks to Bill Snedden

Let's try one that has problems and see if we can fix it.

The story is obvious at the opening and only gets worse. Even the second edition (following) needs work. Perhaps you can make it better.

Buford at the Bank

Buford, a fairly handsome Southern Bullfrog, hops into a bank lobby one day, brief case neatly tucked under his right foreleg. Buford hops up to the first open teller window and sits down in front of a teller, Miss Mary Greene. He announces, "I need a loan."

Miss Greene, not wanting to look too uncool with this frog talking to her, pauses only briefly to reflect on this situation, then says, "Well, the Everglades Savings and Loan doesn't usually give loans to amphibians." Quickly opening the brief

¹⁷ IBID, MacScouter

case, Buford produces construction permits and blueprints. Showing them to Miss Greene, he says, "But I need a loan. You see I have this construction project in mind. Down in the swamp, we need affordable housing for all my in-laws and out-laws. I have the permits. Freddy, an architect newt friend of mine has drawn up the plans. Everything is approved and in order. So you see, all I need is the financing."

For Miss Greene, this is getting stranger by the moment. It isn't enough that there is this talking frog only inches in front of her, but now he is talking about plans, permits and a newt architect. Just before she loses it completely, Miss Greene blurts out, "I can't help you. You must see our loan officer, Miss Black. Wait here for a moment and I'll get her."

Miss Greene is gone for a while. After several minutes of animated conversation at the other side of the bank she returns with the loan officer. "Hello, I'm Miss Patricia Black, the Loan Officer here. How can I help you?" Well, Buford goes through his speech once again, tells her about the plans and permits, about the housing and his friend Freddy the newt architect. Thinking she could put an end to this foolishness quickly, Miss Black asks, "What do you have to put up for collateral for a loan? You must have something of value to mortgage against a loan like this."

Buford digs into his brief case once more. "I have this!" he exclaims as he draws forth a crystal trinket on a silver chain. "I can't give you a loan based on this THING," Miss Black says, pointing at Buford's treasure. Buford begs. He pleads. Finally, Buford demands to see the bank manager. Miss Greene, the teller, leaves for a moment to get the bank manager. Another animated conversation ensues at the other side of the bank. The manager comes over and asks "What's the problem, Miss Black?" "Well, Mr. Brown..." and the Loan Manager explains that the frog wants to take out a loan, to construct housing in the swamp for his in-laws and out-laws and he has plans and permits, but all he has is this trinket as collateral. The manager bemused by this whole situation, takes the trinket in hand, examines it carefully, then hands it back to Buford saying, "It's a knick knack, Patty Black. Give the frog a loan."

-- Thanks to Kevin Doyle , and elaborated by Gary Hendra

Ok, it goes too long, is repetitions unnecessarily so, and is not funny when you get to the end.

Let's try that one again...

A frog walks/hops into a bank, and asks to see someone about applying for a loan.

"Oh, Mr. Paddywack will be glad to help you," says the teller, looking down at the frog rather dubiously. "Just have a seat at that desk over there, and he'll be right with you."

So the frog sits down, and presently, the loan officer comes over. "Good day, sir, how may I help you?" he says, raising an eyebrow.

"I need a loan," says the frog, "I want to do some renovations on my lillypond."

"Well..." says the loan officer, "we are not in the practice of approving loans for amphibians..." he said condescendingly, looking over the rims of his hornrimmed glasses.

"But why not?" exclaims the frog, "I've got an excellent credit record! I've never been late on my visa payment!"

The loan officer sighs. "Sir, I'm afraid we would need some type of collateral, and I'm-

"But I've got it!" exclaims the frog. "I've got an extensive collection of hummels I can use as collateral-"

"I'm sorry," cuts in the loan officer, "but I don't think we'll be able to help you," he begins, but just then his supervisor comes up behind the desk.

"What seems to be the problem?" he says to the loan officer.

"Uh, um, Sir, this fro- um, gentleman, wanted to obtain a loan," says the loan officer, "but I've been trying to tell him that we can't-"

"I've got a hummel as collateral!" the frog breaks in.

"What in the world is a hummel???" says the loan officer condescendingly.

The supervisor looks exasperated. "It's a knick-knack, Paddywack! Give the frog a loan!"

- Thanks to the Giant Panda, Tony Quon

Another Improvement:

A joke that has a historical setting or “Age” needs to be set-up properly. In this case the opening needs a change. How about, “Back during the Cold War, the Soviets....” Also, since the story hinges on ironical use of words, the word “mill” should be introduced early and surreptitiously. Here is the original followed by an “improvement.”

Soviet Ingenuity¹⁸

So the Soviets got sick of buying wheat from the Americans and began to spend millions on research into grains. Finally U.S. intelligence found out that the Soviet scientists had developed a new grain that yielded twice the harvest of conventional wheat and grew in half the time. Several agents died before it was discovered that the new grain was called "Krilk". The CIA was panicked! Without the Soviet dependency on American grains the security of the West could be forever compromised.

Congress quickly convened and appropriated several hundred million dollars for the CIA to send up spy satellites over Russia to learn the secrets of Krilk. Finally, after several years, the satellites began to send back images of the factory deep in the Soviet Union that was processing the Krilk. The CIA sent in over a hundred agents. None returned. The process remained a secret. The satellites were next to useless because they could only see the outside of the building, not the actual milling of the harvests. Finally the Soviet Ambassador in Washington sent a message to the President of the U.S. to let him know that all further attempts to learn the secrets would be futile.

The message read...."You are wasting your money. Everyone knows that it's no use spying over milled Krilk!"

- Thanks to Steve Poggio

Let's try this again with a few changes....

Soviet Grain Plots

Back during the Cold War with Russia, the Soviets were dependent upon American grain to feed their people. Eventually, they rebelled at this outrageous circumstance and began spending millions on research to find a new grain they could grow.

¹⁸ IBID, MacScouter

The Soviets were very secretive about this project. The U.S. intelligence agency, the CIA, soon learned that the Soviet scientists had developed a new super grain called Krilk. Krilk yielded twice the harvest of conventional wheat. It grew in half the time. And, when the husk was milled away, the remaining grain was a fine and white as rice.

For the U.S., the situation was critical. Without the Soviet dependency on American grain the security of the West could be forever compromised.

A worried Congress ordered the CIA to learn the secret of Krilk. Up went CIA spy satellites. And, they satellites located the special Krilk grain mill deep in the Soviet Union. The CIA sent in agents. None returned. More spy satellites were sent up. But, they learned nothing. The CIA was embarrassed. All the spying they had done and the millions of dollars spent resulted in nothing. Eventually, the U.S. gave up trying to learn the secret of Krilk. The Soviets had won. To this day, the secret of Krilk is still a mystery.

But recently, the old question rose again and a new spy satellite over Russia was sent up. The Russian Ambassador heard about this. He sent the President of the U.S. a message to let him know that further attempts to learn the secrets of Krilk would be futile.

The message read...."You are wasting your money. Everyone knows that it's no use spying over milled Krilk!"

Again, a connection or detail to "insider" knowledge or experience (aka, Francis the Talking Mule movies of the 1950's) must be important. If it does not move the story, leave it out or change it.

As the story progresses, the choice of "normal" words and tense (time) can be critical. See how the overuse of "sets" causes the story to stumble unnecessarily. Originally, this was written with an obviously unintended verb tense error (...he decide...). But, whether the pheasant "decided" or "decides" can impact the tone of the rest of the story. AT the end, ask yourself, "Does this story really work?" The story is recounted here as found and without editorial correction

In Summary:

Keep the story tight and complete

Make the pun relevant to the audience.

Practice and Practice. L

Let's create a Shagy Dog Story/

Start with a line:

"This work is for the birds. It's aardvark, but it pays well."

One termite to another in a saloon: "You've been here before. Where is the bar tender?"