

Laugh and Learn

Humour can be defined as, “any communication that leads to laughing, smiling or a feeling of amusement”.

Current research suggests that humour in the classroom:

- Facilitates retention of novel information;
- Increases learning speed;
- Improves problem solving;
- Relieves stress;
- Reduces test anxiety;
- Increases perceptions of teacher credibility.



The prudent use of “content-related, non-hostile humour” has added benefits:

- More supportive learning environment;
- Enhanced students’ attention and pleasure in learning;
- Improved thinking skills and test scores;
- Improved attitudes towards the subject matter.

Surveys rank humour as one of the top five traits of an effective teacher. Humour emanates from communication. This gives the instructor control over the kind and extent of humour in the classroom. It opens up the humorous possibilities for all instructors.

Strategies and Techniques to Enhance Classroom Learning Using Humour

1. Smile / be light hearted. Smiling makes students feel comfortable.
2. Be spontaneous / natural. Part of being spontaneous and natural involves relaxing a little and breaking the routine occasionally. Spontaneity also involves instructors being able to laugh at themselves when they make a mistake or when their attempt at humour goes awry.
3. Relax control a little. Remember that students can still learn even if there is a smile on the instructor’s face.
4. Foster an informal climate / be conversational. Instructors, who work to establish points 1 – 3 above, will find that they have developed a supportive, interesting and responsive in-class climate in which students will enjoy learning.
5. Begin class with a thought, saying, key idea, statement, poem, observation or joke. This is an easy technique to use to bring the class to think as one and to grab attention. It is also a way for an instructor who is trying to incorporate humour to concentrate on ideas designed to be funny.

6. Use stories and personal experiences that emerge from the subject matter. When an instructor deviates from his or her regularly planned material for a story or personal experience, often a class will become very still – all eyes riveted on the instructor. Personal anecdotes and experiences break up the class and give students needed refreshment.
7. Relate things to the everyday life of students. Read the student newspaper. Listen to “their” music; see “their” movies. It is these involvements that make instructors seem to care about their students and make them more human.
8. Plan lectures or presentations in short segments with humour injected. Plan a commercial break. As a guide, instructors should use 10 – 15 minutes for content with 1 - 2 minute commercial breaks that focus either on the current topic or something unrelated. These breaks can be complete nonsense or semi-serious.
9. Encourage a give-and-take climate between yourself and your students. Play off of their comments. Learn their names. Students can work in small groups, for the purpose of discussing open-ended problems introduced during the lecture. Take a few minutes out of every class to talk to the class on a personal level. Material can also be presented through role playing.



Alyssa Taylor, former Psychology teaching assistant

What do you get when you cross a teacher with an elephant?

~A teacher you can never forget.