

Introduction

Download the LearnEnglish Themes podcast. You'll find more information on this page:
<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- the article that you can listen to in the podcast
- an optional activity based on the theme of the article
- links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (jokes).

Read the article

Jokes

by John Russell

“It is better to be silent and be thought a fool, than to speak and remove all doubt.” Mark Twain (famous humorist)

Jokes come in all shapes and sizes. This article looks at just a few of these shapes and sizes and gives a few tips to those of you who like telling jokes.

According to the dictionary, a joke is “something that makes you laugh”. This is a very short definition for something that can make you laugh, cry, feel angry, or sad, scream or shout. They can be about anything in the universe, from jobs to relationships, from nationalities to animals. They can also make you think very hard or laugh immediately.

From the one liner...

The difference between stupidity and genius is that genius has its limits. (Einstein)

... to jokes about computers...

I use my cat's name as my computer password. Unfortunately I have to change the password every month so now my cat's called czc-x9ig-pol9!

... humour is something that connects all countries and nationalities.

A very common type of joke in English is a pun or a play on words. This can be based around different meanings for the same spelling (homographic);

He's the senior teacher. He's over 70!
 (How many different meanings of 'senior' are there?)

It can also be based around different meanings for the same sound (homophonic).

Why didn't the perfume arrive? Because it wasn't scent.



A pun can also be used in a shaggy dog story. This is a very long joke that usually finishes with a punch line (the climax of a joke) that uses a play on words. Some people argue that a shaggy dog story is just a long joke.

A man and a woman were involved in a terrible car crash, but amazingly neither of them was injured. After climbing out of their separate cars and looking at each other the woman finally said. “The fact that neither of us was hurt must be a sign that we were meant to meet each other, and were meant to be friends.” The man, still shocked, nodded his head in agreement. Just at that moment an unopened bottle of whiskey rolled out of the woman's car and she said “again this must be a sign that we were meant to ‘toast’ our friendship with a drink.” The man (by this point needing a drink) took hold of the bottle and drank a few mouthfuls. He gave it back to the woman and asked “aren't you going

to have any?" The woman (wiping her fingerprints off the bottle) shook her head and replied. "You know...I think I'll just wait for the police to arrive before I drink anything"

Many jokes also have a darker side. People laugh about other peoples' misfortunes and problems, and about difficult relationships:

Husband: Pack your bags. I've won the lottery.

Wife: Wonderful! Shall we go to Las Vegas or Monte Carlo?

Husband: I don't care where you go... just pack your bags and get out of my house!

A lot of jokes also involve using another person as a victim – as the focus of the joke – often a stupid person. This can be another nationality, sex, religion, or just a person who has blonde hair.

*How did the Blonde hurt herself drinking milk?
The cow fell on her.*

Death and other depressing topics are also very common subjects for jokes; this kind of humour is called black humour.

When asked in class how they would like to die, one student said to the teacher "I'd like to die peacefully in my sleep - like my Uncle.....not screaming in terror - like the passengers on his bus."

How to tell a good joke?

There are a few things to remember when you tell a joke:

Firstly, remember who you're telling the joke to. Choose a subject that your audience can appreciate – young people won't find jokes about economics funny. However, economics students may.

Be careful not to offend people by mistake, a joke about Doctors or sick people may be funny, but not to a Doctor or a sick person.

*Doctor: I'm afraid I've got some **bad** news and some **very** bad news for you.*

*Patient: What's the **bad** news?*

Doctor: You have 24 hours to live.

*Patient: And the **very** bad news?*

Doctor: I should have told you yesterday.

Never announce a joke "I know a very funny joke..." or tell anyone you know a story that will make them laugh. It will never be as funny as you want it to be. Tell the joke without introductions.

To be happy with a husband you have to understand him a little and love him a lot. To be happy with a wife you have to love her a lot and not try to understand her at all!

The timing of a joke is also very important. Don't rush towards the punch line, the joke should build up a little tension..... and a little more..... and then a pause.....and then a strong punch line. Your punch line could also be something that surprises, something your audience doesn't expect.

In the same way, if your audience have to think a little before they understand the joke, they may appreciate it more. Try this one (how many different meanings of change can you think of?):

Change is inevitable..... except from a drinks machine.

Finally, topical jokes (jokes about events now) are funnier than jokes about events in the past. How many people would laugh now at a Margaret Thatcher joke, or a joke about the Berlin Wall coming down? But there are thousands of Gordon Brown jokes or funny Internet sites about current events.

In the end, it's up to you what you find funny. And even if you can't tell jokes very well you can still enjoy them.

After reading
Exercise 1

Below on the left are the first parts of 10 jokes. On the right there are the second parts.

Can you match the first and second parts?

1	Why don't blind people go parachuting?
2	You should always go to other peoples funerals...
3	What do you call the Cuban symphony orchestra after a tour of the USA?
4	How do you make milk powder?
5	What did the apple say to the worm?
6	Why was the little Egyptian boy sad?
7	What is the definition of a washing machine?
8	Why do stupid people have TGIF written on their shoes?
9	What do you get if you mix a kangaroo with an elephant?
10	Why worry about tomorrow ...

a	... or they won't go to yours.
b	... there are enough problems with today.
c	A machine designed specially to eat your socks.
d	A string quartet.
e	Because it scares their guide dogs.
f	Because Toes Go In First.
g	Great big holes all across Australia.
h	His daddy was a Mummy.
i	Push a cow out of a plane.
j	You bore me.

More activities on this topic

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of jokes at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-jokes.htm>

- **Magazine article: The funniest jokes in the world.** *"Recently, a group of scientists and psychologists decided to try and find out what the funniest joke in the world was. This was obviously going to be a difficult task, as no two people ever really agree about what is funny and what is not – especially when they are from different countries."*
- **Word game: Famous riddles:** Why did the chicken cross the road? Why do birds fly south in the winter? Find out here!
- **Story: Three Jokes.** Have you heard the one about the chicken and the frog? How about the one about the firing squad? And the one about the parrot who didn't want to talk? In this activity you have to 'tell' the jokes yourself.
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about jokes.
- There is also a joke-related cartoon, a poll, and some carefully selected external links.

Answers to activity: 1. e); 2. a); 3. d); 4. i); 5. j); 6. h); 7. c); 8. f); 9. g); 10. b)