

STAND UP & LEARN: COMEDY TOOLBOX HANDOUT



Wordplay (a.k.a. Language Magic)

This is where we get clever with words—puns, double meanings, and sounds that trip people up in a fun way. Comics like Bo Burnham are masters of this.

Example: "I'm reading a book on anti-gravity... it's impossible to put down."

The Surprise (Incongruity Theory/ Misdirection):

You set people up to expect one thing—and then twist it in a totally unexpected direction. It's quick, clever, and always gets a reaction.

Example: "My grandfather died peacefully in his sleep... but the kids on his bus were screaming."

The Triple (The Rule of Three) exaggerated or unrealistic.

It's a classic. You say two normal things, and then the third one surprises us. That twist makes it funny.

Example: "I like video games, I like comic books, and"

The List

Sometimes a long, weird list is the joke. You keep going... and it gets funnier the more unexpected it becomes. Great for those who love to go all-in with details.

Example: "For my camping trip, I packed a flashlight, a sleeping bag, bug spray, six snacks, three emergency snacks, two backup emergency snacks, and a life-size cardboard cutout of my dog."

The Cringe (Superiority & Self-Deprecation)

You can get laughs by poking fun at yourself—or at the weird things people do. Comics like Kevin Hart do this all the time. It's real, it's awkward, and it's super relatable.

Example: "I'm a grown little man." (Kevin Hart literally named his comedy special this.)

Repetition

This is when you use the same word or phrase over again to make what people say sound funnier.

Example: "My mom said clean your room. Clean your room. CLEAN YOUR ROOM. I think she may have wanted me to clean my room."

Juxtaposition

This is when you combine two things that usually don't go together, and the unexpected nature of the pairing makes it funny.

Example: "My little brother talks like he's a CEO, but he still cries when his sandwich is cut wrong."

Sarcasm

This is when you say something that isn't true, and everyone listening knows you don't believe it.

Example: "Oh great, another math worksheet. This is exactly how I wanted to spend my afternoon."



STAND UP & LEARN: VOCABULARY DEFINITIONS



SpooF

This is when you create your own funny version of a TV show, film, or situation that already exists.

Example: "Harry Potter and the Homework of Doom."

Slapstick

This is when you use physical humor, such as falling over, dropping something, or bumping into someone, rather than relying on dialogue to get a laugh. Sometimes you can tell a joke that has a slapstick feel to it.

Example: "I walked into a glass door so hard the door looked embarrassed for me."

Inversion

This is where you take a normal situation and make it the opposite of what it usually is.

Example: "What if teachers got report cards from students?"

Absurdity

This is when you get a laugh by doing or saying something completely unexpected, in fact, something completely random.

Example: "My goldfish quit swimming and started training for a marathon."

Put Downs

Being sassy can sometimes be funny, as long as we don't make the jokes too personal. Put-downs are often used in dialogue when one person believes they are more important than the other.

Example: "You're moving so slowly, a snail just passed you and asked for directions."

Exaggeration

It overstates, dramatizes, or falsifies an idea by taking a characteristic and pushing it to its most extreme form.

Example: "I was so hungry after school, I could have eaten an entire pizza, the box, and maybe the delivery car."



Bonus: The SAP Formula –
A theory developed by author William Lang.

If you remember nothing else, remember this:

S = Setup (you build the world)

A = Anticipation (the audience leans in)

P = Punchline (you deliver the twist)