



# KNOW YOUR SENSE OF HUMOR

LEVEL 3 PROJECT



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# INTRODUCTION



Humor is one of the great bridges connecting a speaker to an audience. It is a highly effective method of breaking communication barriers in many settings, even the most difficult. It is also one of the most challenging skills to learn for those who don't come by it naturally.

The first step in bringing humor into your public speaking is to understand your sense of humor. Your personal stories, the ones that make you laugh, are the best place to add humor to your speeches.

# YOUR ASSIGNMENT

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to begin developing a collection of humorous stories and to present a speech that includes humor.

**Overview:** Give a 5- to 7-minute speech on a topic of your choosing. Your speech should include at least one anecdote or story intended to entertain or bring humor into your presentation.

**For all assignment details and requirements, review the Project Checklist on page 12.**

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Throughout this project you will see icons in the margins next to the text. These icons indicate additional resources available online.



**Video:** Sign in to Base Camp to watch a video that supports this project.



**Interactive Activity:** Sign in to Base Camp to complete an interactive activity.



**Resource:** Sign in to Base Camp to view this resource online.

# ASSESS YOUR SKILLS

Evaluate your current skill level by rating each statement.

Select the appropriate number based on your skills today:

**5**  
EXEMPLARY

**4**  
EXCEL

**3**  
ACCOMPLISHED

**2**  
EMERGING

**1**  
DEVELOPING

Pre-Project					Statement	Post-Project				
5	4	3	2	1	I can engage an audience with a story.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I easily identify the best story to make the broader point of a speech.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I recognize the elements of a story that make it engaging and/or bring humor to an audience.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I am comfortable setting the pace for a speech that includes anecdotes or stories.	5	4	3	2	1
5	4	3	2	1	I recognize how this project applies to my life outside of Toastmasters.	5	4	3	2	1

# COMPETENCIES



**The following is a list of competencies that you will learn and practice in this project.**

- Understand your sense of humor.
- Recognize the elements of a humorous story.
- Identify the story you want to tell.
- Recognize the elements of a well-organized story.
- Determine the best story for your speech topic.

# THE VALUE OF TELLING A STORY

Storytelling has been a part of the human experience since before the written word. Stories have been passed down through generations by an oral tradition that reaches back across thousands of years. Where spoken stories have been lost, there is art on cave walls that communicate the stories of life long ago. The oral tradition of storytelling is at the heart of public speaking.

Humor is a form of storytelling. Even the shortest joke is a story at its heart. Think about the funniest jokes you have heard. Take a few minutes to write one or two down and identify the beginning, middle, and end. You will find that even two-line or single-line jokes have a story. A lot may be unsaid, but the full story is evoked in the mind of each listener.

As you move through the humor projects, you will be encouraged to create a collection of stories, jokes, and transitions that you can draw from when creating your speeches.

## START YOUR COLLECTION

Once you have a few different stories in mind, it is time to determine how those stories can build a bridge to connect to your audience.

## MAKE IT UNIVERSAL

An effective story must have a universal theme.

For example, a story that requires a specific geographic understanding will not work for an audience that does not share that understanding. If your story requires that your audience be familiar with a particular burrowing beetle's habitat in the central jungles of Peru, it is unlikely to resonate with anyone who hasn't been there.

However, if your story is about a day you got locked out of your house in the pouring rain and you compare your experience to a beetle in the jungles of Peru, most people will be able to relate to the experience and the comparison, making your story both humorous and universal.

## KEEP IT SUCCINCT

Your story must be succinct. Stories that have a long lead in and a powerful payoff at the end can work, but are challenging because an audience can lose interest in the story leading up to the funny close and miss the humor. Keeping your stories short, succinct, and to the point will help you stay connected with your audience through the humorous ending or twist.

## PAY ATTENTION TO TIMING

Timing is everything in storytelling, in humor, and in public speaking. Think about the story you want to tell. Consider the amount of time it will take to make your point and connect with the audience and their collective sense of humor. Well-constructed, succinct stories will make that connection easier to achieve.

## TELL A STORY OR A JOKE

When presenting a humorous speech, it is tempting to open with a joke or one-line observation intended to make the audience laugh. This can be effective in some environments and for speakers who are accomplished at delivering a joke. The danger in opening this way is that if the joke doesn't resonate, you will be left trying to connect with an audience you inadvertently distanced. A brief story, one that is about you or closely related to you and a universal experience, is most likely to have an emotional impact on your audience.







### **Telling a Joke Takes Skill**

Some speakers are particularly adept at telling jokes, while others have to work a little harder to make sure a joke elicits the response they want. When you create any speech, you are always at your discretion to add a joke. It is important to remember what many know from experience: a joke that fails to produce the expected laughter or light-hearted moment can ruin an otherwise excellent speech.

### **A Story at the Heart**

It may be a tale that is told in a single sentence. There are jokes that are funny because of what is omitted or because of a well-placed silence. The difference between a joke and a personal story is often the originator. Many times, jokes are created by others and then repeated by a speaker. This can present a problem. A misplaced, poorly timed, or inappropriate joke cannot be untold. It will remain in the minds of your audience long after you step away from the lectern.

### **Sharing the Experience**

If a joke does not resonate with audience members, the speaker is left working to bring the audience back. When a humorous story that originates with the speaker falls short of accomplishing the goal, the speaker has all the information they need to add context or pivot in another direction to forge a better connection with the audience.

Personal storytelling, especially a story that can bring a sense of shared experience and humor, is often a better option for a successful speech than a prepared joke.

# KNOWING YOUR AUDIENCE

Demographics include age, gender, cultural background, political or religious affiliation, ethnicity, ability, economic status, and employment status. If audience demographics are unfamiliar to you, take some time to do your own research. There are many sources available.

## AUDIENCE DEMOGRAPHICS

### Humor is Individual

Demographics along with other factors can impact a person's sense of humor. Personal values and beliefs can also influence what an individual deems humorous or offensive.

### Know Your Audience

It is important to know, to the best of your ability, who will be in your audience. Adjust your speech based on that information.

### Recognize Differences

Certain groups and individuals may not find humor in the same things you do or may even be offended by content that you deem inoffensive.

### Create a Meaningful Speech

It is up to the speaker to have a sense of the audience and create a speech that resonates.

### Make a List

When developing stories to add to your speech, it might be helpful to create a quick list of topics you consider acceptable for a particular audience and focus your humorous storytelling around those.

### Tailor Your Story

Once you have an idea of your audience demographics, you can choose stories from the list that best fit a particular audience. Be mindful to keep the themes universal.

## SET UP YOUR STORY

To set up your story means to establish the point of view for the humor you are including. Stand-up comics use setups to convey an attitude, or point of view, for a story or joke. These attitudes usually fall into four categories of story: strange, scary, difficult, or foolish. An example of a setup is something like this:

*"Yesterday, I heard a sound outside that scared me..."*

It is important to note that setups are not intended to be funny; they are the experience in a story that everyone can relate to, regardless of their demographic. Fear is universal. The humorous part of the story follows the universal experience that is communicated and the humor can be anything. Often, it is an unexpected twist or surprise that makes an audience laugh.

When you first start considering how you will set up your stories, think about the categories and use the words. "A strange thing happened..." "The most difficult thing I've ever done..." or "I did the most foolish thing..." Starting with the word will keep your mind on the idea or attitude of your story or joke. Once you have the story in mind, you can drop the word and say it in a different way. For example, "A strange thing happened..." can change to "What is happening with the weather?" Though the word strange is not stated, it is implied by using, "What is happening with...?"



Your setups do not need to be complex. They only need to establish a universal experience that prepares the audience for what is coming. They will be looking for the punchline, or the twist that makes your story funny or entertaining.

## PRESENTATION BASICS

Once you are happy with the speech you have written, you are ready to think about how you will present. Core public speaking skills like vocal variety, pacing, and body language can have an even larger impact on a humorous speech than a speech that is not intended to elicit humor. Practice your speech. Record it and, if possible, get feedback from a friend or mentor.

Because this is your first humor project, your audience is not expected to laugh during your speech. If they do, good for you! Take note of the stories or delivery that brought you the laugh and write it down after your speech. If your speech doesn't garner any laugh-out-loud moments, that is fine. Take note of the times your stories engaged and/or entertained your audience. Also take note of times when your audience seemed disinterested or bored.

Learn from your audiences by listening to their responses. Humor is a shared experience and only works when speaker and audience are interacting well. You can apply what you learn from each audience to your future speeches.

As you create your speech, consider the things that make you smile or bring humor into your day. They can be simple, everyday things that are common, shared experiences. Often, the familiar landscape of everyday experience is the most fertile ground for building a strong connection with any audience and supporting you to write and deliver an excellent speech.

## REVIEW AND APPLY

- How do demographics impact your speech?
- What influence can empathy for the audience have on a humorous speech?
- How does your sense of humor affect your humorous speech?
- How can audience response help you succeed?

## COMPLETE YOUR ASSIGNMENT

Now that you have read through the project, plan and prepare your speech or report.

**Review:** Return to page 3 to review your assignment.

**Organize:** Use the Project Checklist on page 12 to review the steps and add your own. This will help you organize and prepare your assignment.



**Schedule:** Work with the vice president education to schedule your speech.

**Prepare:** Prepare for your evaluation. Review the evaluation resources on pages 13–15 and share all resources with your evaluator before your speech. You may choose to share your evaluation resources online.



# PROJECT CHECKLIST

## Know Your Sense of Humor

**Purpose:** The purpose of this project is to begin developing a collection of humorous stories and to present a speech that includes humor.

**Overview:** Give a 5- to 7-minute speech on a topic of your choosing. Your speech should include at least one anecdote or story intended to entertain or bring humor into your presentation.

### This project includes:

- A 5- to 7-minute speech

Below are tasks you will need to complete for this project. Please remember, your project is unique to you. You may alter the following list to incorporate any other tasks necessary for your project.

Select a topic for your speech and develop at least one story you can use in your speech to add humor.

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Schedule your speech with the vice president education.

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Write your speech.

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Rehearse your speech.

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After you have completed all components of the assignment, including your speech, return to page 4 to rate your skills in the post-project section.

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# EVALUATION FORM

Know Your Sense of Humor

Member Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Evaluator \_\_\_\_\_ Speech Length: 5 – 7 minutes

**Speech Title**

## Purpose Statement

The purpose of this project is to begin developing a collection of humorous stories and to present a speech that includes humor.

## Notes for the Evaluator

The member completing this project is working to add humor to a speech through anecdotes and stories. The speech should not be a report on the content of the “Know Your Sense of Humor” project.

## General Comments

You excelled at:

You may want to work on:

To challenge yourself:

## EVALUATION FORM – Know Your Sense of Humor

For the evaluator: In addition to your verbal evaluation, please complete this form.

5 EXEMPLARY	4 EXCELS	3 ACCOMPLISHED	2 EMERGING	1 DEVELOPING	
<b>Clarity:</b> Spoken language is clear and is easily understood					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Vocal Variety:</b> Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Eye Contact:</b> Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Gestures:</b> Uses physical gestures effectively					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Audience Awareness:</b> Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Comfort Level:</b> Appears comfortable with the audience					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Interest:</b> Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	
<b>Humor:</b> Humor is present and purposeful					Comment:
5	4	3	2	1	

# EVALUATION CRITERIA

## Know Your Sense of Humor

This criteria lists the specific goals and expectations for the speech. Please review each level to help you complete the evaluation.

### Clarity

- 5 – Is an exemplary public speaker who is always understood
- 4 – Excels at communicating using the spoken word
- 3 – Spoken language is clear and is easily understood
- 2 – Spoken language is somewhat unclear or challenging to understand
- 1 – Spoken language is unclear or not easily understood

### Vocal Variety

- 5 – Uses the tools of tone, speed, and volume to perfection
- 4 – Excels at using tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 3 – Uses tone, speed, and volume as tools
- 2 – Use of tone, speed, and volume requires further practice
- 1 – Ineffective use of tone, speed, and volume

### Eye Contact

- 5 – Uses eye contact to convey emotion and elicit response
- 4 – Uses eye contact to gauge audience reaction and response
- 3 – Effectively uses eye contact to engage audience
- 2 – Eye contact with audience needs improvement
- 1 – Makes little or no eye contact with audience

### Gestures

- 5 – Fully integrates physical gestures with content to deliver an exemplary speech
- 4 – Uses physical gestures as a tool to enhance speech
- 3 – Uses physical gestures effectively
- 2 – Uses somewhat distracting or limited gestures
- 1 – Uses very distracting gestures or no gestures

### Audience Awareness

- 5 – Engages audience completely and anticipates audience needs
- 4 – Is fully aware of audience engagement/needs and responds effectively
- 3 – Demonstrates awareness of audience engagement and needs
- 2 – Audience engagement or awareness of audience requires further practice
- 1 – Makes little or no attempt to engage audience or meet audience needs

### Comfort Level

- 5 – Appears completely self-assured with the audience
- 4 – Appears fully at ease with the audience
- 3 – Appears comfortable with the audience
- 2 – Appears uncomfortable with the audience
- 1 – Appears highly uncomfortable with the audience

### Interest

- 5 – Fully engages audience with exemplary, well-constructed content
- 4 – Engages audience with highly compelling, well-constructed content
- 3 – Engages audience with interesting, well-constructed content
- 2 – Content is interesting but not well-constructed or is well-constructed but not interesting
- 1 – Content is neither interesting nor well-constructed

### Humor

- 5 – Humor is obvious and well received by the audience
- 4 – Humor is present and much of the audience responded well
- 3 – Humor is present and purposeful
- 2 – Attempted to add humor to the speech though audience members did not respond
- 1 – Made little or no attempt to add humor to the speech





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