

Connect Using Humor and Story

How I Got 18 Laughs 3 Applauses in a 7-Minute
Persuasive Speech

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Dedication

To Priyanka, my better half – *After marrying you, I learned more about humor than ever before*

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Introduction

Humor, story, and persuasion are the most widely discussed elements of a speech on the public speaking circuit. There are loads and loads of information about each of these respective topics but less information on how to successfully combine these three elements into one persuasive speech. It was precisely for this reason that I wrote this book. It was the one that I had been looking for to help me when I went looking for information on how these three elements could be integrated into one speech. Like my earlier books, this book adheres to my motto: simple to understand, easy to implement. Practical information along with proven principles is distilled into a simple to understand and easy to implement approach. *One more thing*—as you read along the chapters, look for something cool. I'm offering one of my audiobooks for free so that it will act as a perfect complement for you.

Maybe you are curious to know how I was able to get eighteen laughs in a seven-minute persuasive speech and that's the reason you opened this book. But you will learn much more than that. You'll learn how to understand humor at the elemental level, how to find ways to tap into humor, how to convert real-world experiences into humorous stories, how to tie story and speech elements, along with my secret formula to craft, edit, and execute a successful persuasive speech. Not just that, we will be using a real presentation as a case study to learn these concepts. This case study helped me become one of the top three winners in a speech contest in New England. I also used a revised version of the same presentation to emerge as a top three winner at the India level. So, rest assured that this presentation has successfully undergone testing with a global audience. If you have read my other books, you may recall my childhood story about how I went blank on stage and reacted by swearing at myself. Worse, it got amplified over the loudspeaker. It was one of the most embarrassing moments of my life and I never forgot it. Always having this memory motivated me to become a confident and articulate speaker. That's when I came across Toastmasters, the world's leading organization for improving communication and leadership skills. Initially, I had to overcome a lot, but the more I spoke on stage, the better I got. In fact, I got more excited as I learned new skills after becoming more comfortable on stage. That's when I started following the pros of public speaking such as Tony Robbins, Sir Ken Robinson, and Barack Obama. The pro speakers had this impeccable quality of being able to connect with any audience. It was during this intense learning period that I came to know about TED talks. I stumbled upon Sir Ken Robinson delivering a speech called "Schools Kill Creativity." I watched that

speech like twenty times in a span of two days. This is the most watched talk on www.TED.com, and I watched it more than anybody else. Just kidding! But on a serious note, I did watch this talk, maybe a hundred times, but every time I watched it, I learned something new. However, two things stood out, which acted as evidence for its popularity and success. Those two things were story and humor. Knowing this and being able to implement them is the secret. Once I started doing this, people loved the results. It was just amazing to see the connection it created with my audience.

Initially, though I got smiles and giggles, it was hard to generate good laughs. I really wanted to learn the skill of creating humor through storytelling because it seemed like a cool skill to master. This drove me to participate in a humorous speech contest in 2010. Though it was my first time, I was determined to be good at it. I spent hours watching stand-up comedy shows, reading books, and begging people for help. Well, asking people for help. In that contest, I emerged as one of the top six speakers among the Toastmasters community in all of India and Sri Lanka. That experience made me a confident speaker.

Life moved on. I went to Connecticut in the United States to work as a consultant. After a gap of six months, I started competing. The speaking industry in the United States seemed more mature. Even though I had the raw energy, I badly needed a mentor who could control and channel it. I came to know about Jerry Aiyathurai, who happened to be the speaking champion in Connecticut, a TED speaker and a finalist of the World Championship of Public Speaking conducted by Toastmasters. I don't know if it was God's grace or sheer luck, but I connected with him in my first interaction. I have never met a kinder person. Today, I am really proud to say that he is my mentor. The thrill I got when he agreed to mentor me cannot be expressed in words. When he started mentoring me, I realized how much I did not know. He not only taught me skills but also made sure I was on track when I faced failure. In May 2012, I practiced hard for a contest and I won two levels, but lost at the third level. Jerry made sure that I got back on track. Because of that push, I again competed in the next season. Again I won two levels but lost the third level. This was a humorous speech contest, but I was pretty depressed and serious when I lost. You might be asking, "Really?" Well, humor is serious business! I thought I would never compete again. I wrote a note to the governor of the Toastmasters community in Connecticut that I was not happy with the results and how upset I was with the way the judging was done. To my surprise, instead of defending the community, she wrote me a warm email so that I did not lose heart. In fact, she went out of her way to recommend

me as a speaker at a conference in upstate New York. My speech got rave reviews. It was a great feeling. In the next season, I emerged as one of the top three speakers in New England.

When I moved back to India, I continued to participate in contests. That season, I crossed five different levels and in the final level, I again emerged as one of the top three speakers in India. The next season, I participated in a contest that judged speakers on their skill in persuading an audience. Here, the message has to be strong; one could not just say funny things. The speaker has to uncover the humor from the stories and deliver it in a way that the audience would enjoy. That was a challenge that I met. In that season, I took my speech to the level of getting eighteen laughs and three rounds of applause in just seven minutes. The humor was more than situational comedy; it was carefully crafted and delivered. *I truly believe that if your speech is strong with the principles of story and humor, even a potentially boring speech will be transformed into an entertaining one.* My promise in this book is to explain how to use humor and story in a persuasive speech.

I hope you are ready for the ride. Ready, set, go.

Keep Rocking
Ramakrishna Reddy

Case Study Speech Script: Magic

In which you'll see the speech script with the laugh lines and applauses marked for reference.

I stood on the edge of a long swimming pool. It was the eighteenth day my dad coached me to swim. My dad is kind and patient with everyone except me (*laugh*). He said, "Jump." I said, "I can't." He said, "Jump" (*laugh*). I said, "I can't." He goes, "Do you want to learn swimming or not?" I said, "That's what I'm thinking" (*laugh*). You see, the idea of swimming fascinated me but my hands were falling apart, my legs were falling apart, and the water was unbeatable.

Ladies and gentlemen, do you remember anything unbeatable? I remember. In my ninth grade, my classmate Vivek was unbeatable. I could never beat his rank in exams. Vivek had a big face, a thick voice, and a lot of cholesterol (*laugh*). That day—we got our results for our midterm exams. Vivek got fifth rank and I got fifteenth. Not surprising but depressing. Why? My classmates will think I am dumb (*laugh*) which I am (*laugh*), not (*laugh/applause*). We guys started discussing our ranks and Vivek said, "I wonder how these guys end up in top three." I said, "Vivek, even you can be in top three if you study harder." And he goes, "You know, it's not your thing. You can't even beat my rank. Just shut your mouth and leave" (*laugh*). But in front of everyone, I got humiliated. I was furious.

I went to my best buddy Rakesh and said, "I want to beat his rank. What do I do?"

He said, "Forget it" (*laugh*).

I said, "No."

He said, "Okay. I have an idea. Why don't you study every day? You will become better. You can even beat his rank."

I said, "Shall we start today?"

He said, "No. No. You study, I have to play" (*laugh*).

Do you have such friends? ... God bless you (*laugh*).

That evening—my friends called me to play cricket, I said "No."

My sister called me to watch TV, I said "No."

My mom called me to eat Maggi, I said, "Yes" (*laugh*).

After eating, I picked up my book to study. I studied and studied and studied till I fell asleep after five minutes (*laugh*). I started to sleep but could not continue to sleep. The humiliation became my nightmare. I woke up and cried, again and again. I studied so that I could stop crying. And I studied every single day. After a few months, exams came. Then the results came and guess what? Vivek got the sixth rank and I got the second rank in my class. My teacher was shocked. Vivek was shocked. I was shocked (*laugh*). It was like magic (*applause*).

Fast-forward fourteen years; if you were sitting with me in that coffee shop, you would have seen my best buddy Rakesh and me, sipping freshly brewed cappuccino and recalling that school incident.

Rakesh said, "Rama, do you know how you created that magic at school?"

I said, "Hard work."

He goes, "No, it's because of your habit of studying every single day. Habits create magic."

That's when it hit me—I was missing the magic of good habits in my life. I needed it badly to beat those things that seemed unbeatable. You know what was the first thing that came to my mind? Swimming. Why? Since childhood, swimming fascinated me but the water daunted me. My dad being a swimmer, I asked, "Dad, will you coach me to swim?" He said, "No, lazy bone." To make him say "Yes," I promised him that I would practice swimming for one hour every single day. Sounds simple; but was really painful. I was bruised and battered for seventeen continuous days. And on the eighteenth day, I stood on the edge of a long swimming pool. My hands were falling apart, my legs were falling apart, and the water was unbeatable. But my habits gave me that push to plunge into the pool. I gasped for breath, fluttered my hands and legs as fast as possible, and I started to sink (*laugh*). Even under water, I tried again and again and again. And all of a sudden, I started floating. I beat the water, sprang to the surface, and started beating on and on and on till I reached the far end of the long swimming pool. It was like magic.

What seems unbeatable in your life?

Maybe staying in shape seems unbeatable—a habit of working out 30 minutes every day can create the magic.

Maybe growing as a speaker seems unbeatable—a habit of competing in every speech contest can create the magic.

Maybe being an ideal husband seems unbeatable—a habit of saying "I love you" (*laugh*) 50 times (*laugh*) every day (*laugh*) cannot create the magic (*applause*). Listening to her 50 times can create the magic (*applause*).

Friends, in the swimming pool of your life, you might fall apart; you might struggle; you might even sink in the water that seems unbeatable. But you can beat the unbeatable using habits because "habits create magic."

Chapter 1.

Story, Humor, and Persuasion Simplified

In which I explain Aristotle's view on persuasion, perspectives about humor, and persuasive storytelling with humor

What makes a great story? A great story is when an ordinary character overcomes seemingly impossible circumstances to achieve a goal. That's it. If you can understand this sentence and digest each and every word and reflect it in your story creation process, you are already halfway into creating exciting content. Now, what is humor? In simple terms, humor brings amusement and laughter to a speech so that the audience is entertained.

Then what is persuasion? In the context of a speech, persuasion is the speaker's skill at influencing how the audience thinks, feels, or acts as a result of hearing the speech.

Persuasion from Aristotle

Aristotle in his masterpiece *Rhetoric* wrote that persuasion is the result of ethos, logos, and pathos. To be concise, ethos is credibility, pathos is the emotional connect, and logos is the logic in your speech. The best way to use these three elements when speaking is through a *personal* story. Why a personal story, and not just any story? When you speak, you need credibility (ethos) and that's what comes through in a personal story. If it is the story of your own life, you have the right to speak about it with authority. Logic (logos) can be taken care of by carefully crafting your speech content with the proper flow of ideas in a good order. The emotional connect (pathos) is the main reason for using a story. Story is a powerhouse for pathos because stories have the unique ability to transmit emotion. Emotion creates a great connection with the audience. And on top of it, if you add humor, you will hit a home run.

I can tell that humor and story are the greatest tools for any speaker. Story has the power to transmit emotion and humor helps to deliver positive emotions. Hence, humorous stories make for one of the best mediums to connect with an audience. A great story has a life of its own. With a great story, your words walk into the hearts of your listeners. When you add humor, your words will fly into the hearts of your listeners.

Perspectives of Humor

Dr. Charles Jarvis, a dentist, humorist, and Hall of Fame speaker, defined humor as "the mental faculty of discovering, expressing or appreciating the ludicrous or absurdly incongruous." Jarvis shared two additional definitions of humor with us.

The first is “a painful thing told playfully.” The second is “tragedy separated by time and space.” Note that both definitions treat humor as a serious thought viewed in a light manner. Ever heard someone say, “I laughed so hard I nearly cried”? This shows how close humor is to pathos: an emotion of sympathetic pity. The other theory, which is really cool, is the benign violation theory coined by Dr. Peter McGraw and Joel Warner. I heard this theory from McGraw’s TED talk “What Makes Things Funny.” Although he is not a stand-up comedian, he has done a lot of research on humor. According to the duo, humor gets created when there is a benign (harmless or safe) violation from what is acceptable. They illustrate this theory by using the old gag of someone slipping on a banana peel. Such an accident usually elicits a laugh. However, if the person was hurt badly in the fall, it won’t elicit a laugh because it has become harmful and the playful element has been lost.

Sophie Scott in her TED talk “Why We Laugh” said, “When you are alone, you do not laugh often. It means the humor creation is beyond just the quality of the joke. You laugh because you say that you understand the speaker and you agree with the speaker.” Humor creates a strong bond and is a vital element for connection. When an audience laughs, it means more than just being entertained; their laughter says they understand you, they like you.

Persuasive Story with Humor

Now that we understand perspectives of humor, let’s understand perspectives about story. There are many types of stories and as I mentioned earlier, it would be a cool idea to focus on using a personal story for persuasion. You can persuade even without humor if you tell a moving story of someone dying in your arms, or how you climbed Mt. Everest, or fought with a tiger, etc., but if you, like me, don’t have such an emotional story, humor is your *mantra*.

In order to inject humor into your speech in an organic way, you need to learn the skills needed to craft a persuasive story. Did you notice that I used the word *skills*? That is because knowing how to craft a persuasive story requires skills. That’s the reason I am about to carefully lead you through a tested persuasive and humorous speech. Along the way, we will uncover its secrets and strategies and you will learn the nuts and bolts of how it was created so that you can create your own humorous and persuasive stories. You will also learn the secrets to editing and delivering your speech in ways which will keep your audience engaged and entertained.

Chapter 2.

Knowing the Equation for Creating Laugh Lines

In which I explain premise, pause, punch line, pause and how they work together to create a laugh line

Some people are so talented that humor just pours out of them. And then there are those like me! Many people think creating humor is hard, but actually it is not. Being humorous on stage is a skill you can master if you are willing to work at it. To begin, here is something that you can use. There are many variations to the following humor equation and they can all work because people laugh at different things for different reasons. The following, however, is a good one to follow for crafting laugh lines within a speech.

Premise + Pause + Punch Line + Pause = Laughter

Let us understand the elements with a laugh line.

People exaggerate that parents in India pressure their children to only become a doctor or an engineer. That's not true. They don't just pressure. They blackmail.

I have rewritten the above laugh line to indicate the different elements of humor.

People exaggerate that parents in India pressure their children to only become a doctor or an engineer. That's not true. They don't just pressure.
<Pause 1> They blackmail <Pause 2>.

Premise: The premise is the information needed for an audience to understand or appreciate the punch line. In our example, words highlighted in italics form the premise. The premise must:

- Be believable, even if not completely true. In our example, the premise is believable because the audience also could agree it is a cultural thing that Indian parents are pretty hard on their child's ambition.
- Lead the audience in one direction (in order to surprise them later). Note that I said, "That's not true. They don't just pressure." This leads the audience to think that I am going to say something positive about Indian parents.
- Not be funny.
- Be easily understood.
- Create anticipation in the minds of the audience.
- Be relevant for the audience.
- Be about a situation with which the audience can identify and empathize.

Pause 1: Is needed to build tension. Pause 1 must:

- Heighten the curiosity.

- Not be so long that the audience members lose interest.
- Be long enough to create tension. This is what is known as *timing*.

Punch Line: It is a word or phrase that follows the pause that triggers laughter. Punch line should create surprise by *saying something contrary to the audience's expectation*. Here, the punch line is, "They blackmail." The laughter is the result of the release of the tension built up during the pause.

Pause 2: This pause gives the audience time to laugh. Again, it's the timing that is important in comedy and many speakers make the mistake of not pausing after they trigger the laugh. If you do not pause, you will be cutting the laughter short. Don't do this—enjoy it and let the audience enjoy it, too.

Also, during this pause for laughter, you can get the most out of it by using gestures or even a deadpan expression to maximize the effect. Try different gestures to see which one works best.

Chapter 3.

Real-World Experience into a Humorous Story

In which I explain how to relate real-life experiences so they come across as funny

The method we'll cover for converting any real experience, observation, or scenario into a humorous story or anecdote has worked very well for me and those whom I have coached. There is no reason it shouldn't work for you as well. It helps to at least understand the process of stand-up comedy and an easy way to do this is to read *The Comedy Bible* by Judy Carter. This book certainly helped me. Even though I had no intention of becoming a stand-up comic, the rules helped me. When I applied Carter's stand-up strategy to my storytelling, I struck the humor gold mine. Right, now we both are aligned to the point: Humor is gold! In the previous chapter we learned the equation for humor—premise, pause, punch line, pause. The following process will show you how to create punch lines to deliver laughs from personal *experiences*. This process can be used not only for sharing your *experiences* but also used for sharing your *perspectives* about your life. Here's the high-level process.

Step 1: Write down the raw story or your thoughts.

Step 2: From the raw piece of content,

- a) Find topic and create topic introduction.
- b) Find attitude and create attitude statement.
- c) Find point of view and create point of view statement.
- d) Find humor trigger and create relevant experience.

Don't worry if you don't understand any of the terms mentioned above. I'll come back to it soon.

Step 3: Sequence the topic introduction, attitude statement, point of view statement, and relevant experience.

Let me walk you through the whole process with an example so that it is easier to understand.

First Example

Step 1: Write

First, write down the story as you remember it—this is the raw story. Here's my example:

A few months ago, after finishing my assignment, I was traveling back from New York, USA, to Chennai, India. I went to the ticketing counter and gave my passport to get my boarding pass. The officer looked at my passport and said, "Ramakrishna Reddy Veerappa Narayana Reddy. Sir, it seems you have

used all alphabets in English language.” I smiled but felt embarrassed because of his comment on my name.

Step 2: Find and Create

a) Find topic and create the topic introduction

Find topic: You can find the topic from the raw story by focusing on the main theme of the story. While zeroing in on the topic, you need to determine whether the topic is leading to the rest of the story. Also, the topic should be relatable to your audience. The above points are applicable even if the raw content is not about an experience but about your perspective about something that seems funny. In this particular story, topic is my “long name.”

Create the topic Introduction: For our example, we had identified the topic as “long name.” Let us talk about creating a topic introduction. For the humor to work, first you need to warm up the audience with the topic. For that, you need to clearly introduce the topic so that they have necessary information to appreciate the humor. Hence, for our example, the audience needs to be aware that I already have a long name. After some thought, I felt I could use my passport as a transition tool to tell the audience that my name is pretty long in it. Here’s how I created the topic introduction.

Ramakrishna Reddy is not my complete name. My name in passport says, “Ramakrishna Reddy Veerappa Narayana Reddy.”

b) Find attitude and create attitude statement

Find attitude: In *The Comedy Bible*, Judy Carter says that trying to create comedy without attitude is like driving a car without gas. This explains why certain punch lines result in huge laughs and others do not. This is an example of how a concept so simple isn’t always evident until it is pointed out. I find it awesome when this happens. I followed Carter’s suggestion of attitude words: *hard*, *weird*, *stupid*, and *scary*. By using any of these words, you are deliberately giving attitude to your story. Pros don’t use attitude words, but they show attitude with body language, facial expressions, and gestures. I recommend you use the textbook approach. Begin by using these attitude words and work up to conveying attitude through non-verbal methods as you become more experienced.

Create attitude statement: *Creating an attitude statement is to convey how you feel about your topic.* It means selecting the right attitude word and applying it in a way to elicit a humorous response. Since my goal is to convert a real story to a humorous one, I use the type of situation to help me find the best word to create the attitude. To do this, let’s use the four attitude words suggested by Carter to ask the following questions about the topic:

What is *hard* about a long name?

What is *weird* about a long name?

What is *stupid* about a long name?

What is *scary* about a long name?

Considering my situation at the airport, the words *hard* and *weird* seem to work best. Now we need to narrow it down to one word and *hard* is the word that rings the truest. As we saw earlier, attitude statement needs to convey how you feel about your topic. Topic is “long name.” Attitude is “hard.” Combine both of them and you have the attitude statement as “Long names are hard.”

c) Find point of view and create a point of view statement

Find point of view: Point of view is your analysis of what happened. You’ll be able to come up with point of view by thinking about the reason why you are complaining. It should answer why *you* are conveying the attitude you have chosen. My point of view was that the “Officer was making fun of me.”

Create a point of view statement: I have realized that this statement can play two roles. In the first role, which is in this case, it can help you set a clear premise before you say the relevant experience. The relevant experience part will have the *punch line*. In the second role, which is the second example following this, point of view statement will have the *punch line* because the humor trigger is part of point of view.

For this example, point of view statement is setting a clear premise. Hence, make sure the statement is generic. The key is—understand this carefully—your story has to become your audience’s story. You can do this when you *generalize the situation and put the audience in the setup*. *There is a simple way to achieve this*. Just replace the pronouns “I” or “me” with “you.”

Hence the point of view “Officer was making fun of me” becomes “People make fun of you” or “People mock you.” You need to use words that an audience relates to in daily life. In this instance, the better choice is “People make fun of you.”

d) Find humor trigger and create relevant experience

Find humor trigger: Trigger is what creates the funniness. It is what cracks you up. You can find the trigger by highlighting the exact word or phrase that you think is having the funny quotient. In the above example, “Sir, it seems you have used all alphabets in English language” is what I felt was funny.

Create relevant experience: There is a reason why we extracted the humor trigger. This is because we need to include only relevant things about our experience, which will naturally lead to the humor trigger. Creating relevant

experience is a critical process to tighten up your speech. Let us see how this applies to our story.

Let me write down points that can be excluded from the raw story:

- Why I am traveling.
- Action of going to the counter and giving boarding pass.

Let me write down points that can be included from the raw story:

- We need to tell that the place is an airport.
- We also need to tell that the airport is in New York. Only then can the audience assume that it is an American officer who could not pronounce my name properly.

Based on the above ideas, I created relevant experience as shown below:

For instance, an officer at New York airport looked at my passport and goes, “Ramakrishna Reddy Veerappa Narayana Reddy. Sir, it seems you have used all alphabets in English language.”

Step 3: Sequence

As discussed earlier, we will be sequencing topic introduction, attitude statement, point of view statement, and relevant experience to form the humorous anecdote. Excited to see the formation of a humorous anecdote? Here we go!

Ramakrishna Reddy is not my complete name. My name in passport says, “Ramakrishna Reddy Veerappa Narayana Reddy.” Long names are hard. People make fun of you. For instance, an officer at New York airport looked at my passport and goes, “Ramakrishna Reddy Veerappa Narayana Reddy. Sir, it seems you have used all alphabets in English language.”

The above formula might not always hand over a perfect humorous story. You need to be ready to tweak your sentences to tighten the flow of the story. For example, in the above story, adding the question “Why?” between “Long names are hard” and “People make fun of you” tightens the flow. Again, the effectiveness also depends on delivery, which is what we are going to see next.

Delivery

Constructing a humorous story is one thing, delivering it effectively is another. Construction and delivery have to be in sync. We constructed the humorous story by putting together the topic introduction, attitude statement, point of view statement, and relevant experience. Now, to deliver it effectively, view the whole entity from the premise, pause, punch line, pause perspective. To do this, start by identifying all the words that contribute to the premise and to the punch line.

The premise:

Ramakrishna Reddy is not my complete name. My name in passport says, "Ramakrishna Reddy Veerappa Narayana Reddy." Long names are hard. Why? People make fun of you. For instance, an officer at New York airport looked at my passport and goes "Ramakrishna Reddy Veerappa Narayana Reddy..."

The long length of this premise is okay since the objective is to learn to use humor in stories, not to become a stand-up comic. When delivering the premise, the objective is to be sincere and honest, not funny. Say it as you would talk to a friend. Use optimum movement and gestures to convey your premise clearly. I started moving and gesturing only when I started speaking about the officer. I mimed as the officer looking at the passport, I faked an American accent and said "Ramakrishna Reddy Veerappa Narayana Reddy," and gave a few weird looks and then... <paused>

Pausing After Premise:

As we discussed earlier, pausing after the premise creates curiousness, anticipation and tension. Even if the quality of the premise and the punch line is top-notch, your audience won't laugh without this pause. In this case, I paused for two to three seconds.

The Punch Line:

"Sir, it seems you have used all alphabets in the English language."

Since you are expecting the audience to laugh at the end of the punch line, you need to be creative during your delivery. While delivering the punch line, I used an American accent and wore a silly smile. This is where you pull out all the stops and use intonation, exaggeration, modulation, body movement, and facial expressions to your advantage. Try different things and choose the one that elicits the best results. Practice makes perfect. Being funny is all about testing and tweaking your material.

Pausing After Punch Line:

A good rule of thumb is to pause for a second or two and see if you get any response. If you do get a response, *continue to pause* and let them laugh till the entire audience finishes laughing. If not, move on at the same pace as you would if you were just continuing with the speech. This time will vary. One second, two seconds or three seconds? Well, it depends. You'll pick up the skill of pausing as you deliver more laugh lines during actual presentations. You'll also get good at it if you deliberately pause when practicing for your presentation.

A Second Example

Let's follow our three-step process to construct a humorous anecdote. As I said earlier, this is a case where the point of view is strong enough to serve as your punch line. Let's see how it goes.

Step 1 – Write the raw story or perspective as it is. Here you go:

A few years after starting my career as a software engineer, my dad was asking me to get married. In India, parents find the bride or groom and marriages are arranged. (Hold on, that is not the joke.) I was very anxious about an arranged marriage because you never know how your life will turn out. And then, one day during work hours I was testing a piece of code when the thought “How nice it would be if we had an option to do testing before getting married” struck me. *I felt that thought was funny.*

Step 2 – From the raw story or perspective, find and create.

a) Find topic and create topic introduction

Find topic: We need to find topic in such a way that it is relatable and leads to the trigger. From that reasoning perspective, *marriage* seems to be our topic.

Creating topic introduction: Marriage is such a common thing that you can get creative in introducing the topic. One idea is to use relevant experience for creating the topic introduction. For instance, for our example, I picked a specific instance where my dad is asking me to get married. Let's see how I introduced the topic:

Few weeks ago, my dad said, “Rama, get married.” I said, “No.”

b) Find attitude and create attitude statement

Find attitude: Remember, comedy queen Judy Carter advised on four attitude words: *hard*, *weird*, *scary*, and *stupid*. To find which attitude applies to a situation, do a quick check of how the character is feeling towards the topic. Is the character feeling that something is hard, weird, scary, or stupid? As the writer, you have to take that call. I felt *scary* seemed to be the best choice. Read the raw perspective from Step 1 again. Imagine the character's situation. It makes more sense when the attitude word is *scary*.

Create attitude statement: Creating the attitude statement is easy. Just use the attitude word to describe your topic. Attitude is *scary* and topic is *marriage*. So, we have attitude statement as “Marriages are scary.” Since I am planning to deliver point of view specific to my case (not generic as seen in earlier example), I changed the attitude statement to suit the same. Again, this depends on your preference and what makes more sense. Another thing that I want to mention is that if you feel that the audience needs to get more information to appreciate the *punch line*, be more specific and emphasize the attitude again. I felt that I could

take my audience deeper. Hence I added, “I have fears.” So the attitude statement is:

I have fears. I am scared of marriage.

c) Find point of view and create point of view statement

Find point of view: As seen earlier, *point of view is your analysis of the situation*. To find the exact words, you need to answer why you are saying the attitude statement. Let’s try to answer using our example. I said that attitude statement “I have fears. I am scared of marriage” because even though I am a software engineer I would be marrying someone without doing testing of our life with each other. Hence the point of view is “Though I am a software engineer, I would be marrying someone without doing testing.”

Creating point of view statement: Point of view is “Though I am a software engineer, I would be marrying someone without doing testing.” This is going to help us create point of view statement, which will include the punch line.

In the earlier example, the punch line was present in the relevant experience part. The dialogue “Sir, it seems you have used all alphabets in English language” by the airport officer created humor. Our dialogue as it is functioned as our punch line. In this case (where humor trigger is part of point of view), we should create punch line by slightly modifying the point of view. A simple rule for creating punch line is to keep minimum words that encapsulate the humor trigger. Our point of view is “Though I am a software engineer, I would be marrying someone without doing testing.” The core idea that is triggering humor is “getting married without testing.” This line can be modified from first person’s perspective to: “I can’t go live without testing.” “I am a software guy” is necessary but can be split as a separate sentence.

So, our entire point of view statement is “I am a software engineer. I can’t go live without testing.”

Step 3 – Sequence

In the first example, we sequenced topic introduction, attitude statement, point of view statement, and relevant experience. In this case, we created our punch line in point of view statement itself.

Topic introduction – Few weeks ago, my dad said, “Rama, get married.” I said, “No.”

Attitude statement – I have fears. I am scared of marriage.

Point of view statement – I am a software guy. I can’t go live without testing.

After sequencing, here we go with the humorous anecdote:

Few weeks ago, my dad said “Rama, get married.” I said, “No.” I have fears.

I am scared of marriage. I am a software guy. I can’t go live without testing. I can use the above piece in any speech where the topic is about marriage. This always works for me.

You see, even though punch lines on the surface seem to be simple and straightforward, they aren’t. It will take some time to get tuned to this concept, but be patient. Apply yourself when you write and practice your anecdotes. Practice your timing so that you pause for maximum effect. Everything won’t be perfect at the first go, but I can tell you for sure that you’ll get better, as you practice and tweak your punch lines to get a laugh.

Delivery

We constructed the humorous anecdote by putting together the topic introduction, attitude statement, and point of view statement. Now, to deliver the same, it is time to view the whole entity from the premise, pause, punch line, pause perspective. Start identifying all the words that contribute to the premise and to the punch line. Before reading further, try finding premise and punch line.

The premise is:

Few weeks ago, my dad said, “Get married.” I said, “No.” I have fears. I am scared of marriage. I am a software guy.

When delivering the premise, the objective is to be sincere and honest, not funny. I used optimum movement and gestures to convey the premise and then <paused>.

Pausing after premise:

As we discussed earlier, pausing after the premise creates curiousness, anticipation, and tension. Even if the quality of the premise and punch line is top-notch, your audience won’t laugh without this pause. In this case, I paused for two to three seconds. The punch line is:

I can’t go live without testing.

While delivering the punch line, I had an attitude of intense anxiousness. Since you are expecting the audience to laugh at the end of the punch line, you need to be creative during your delivery. This is where you pull out all the stops and use intonation, exaggeration, modulation, body movement, and facial expressions to your advantage. Try different things and choose the one that elicits the best results. Practice makes perfect. Being funny is all about testing and tweaking your material.

Pausing after punch line:

I usually have a deadpan expression during this pause. This punch line gets me maximum laughs. Hence I pause till the audience is completely done with laughter.