

Increasing Your Laughs by 400%

Writing 15 Jokes From Scratch at Breakfast (A Step-by-step Approach)



I got an email recently from a student who asked me for a step-by-step approach to writing jokes. He asked for something dry and linear, without fluff. A process, from start-to-finish. Or in this case, start to jokes.

I thought back to when I first started writing 28 years ago. I had to fix my computer and I got this computer repair book. It was totally written without a bunch of fluff. It got right to the point and the step-by-step process helped me repair my computer. I actually wound up rebuilding my computer using this book.

It was a relief too, because I was a broke comedian and I couldn't afford a new computer. But this process got me into really understanding the fundamentals of comedy structure and sent me on a journey to discover the science behind laughter and the structure behind comedy.

This process changed my life and transformed my career.

Since I was a kid, I always wanted to know what made things work. I took apart my toys to figure them out. I built bikes when I was 12. I rebuilt my car engine when I was 16, saving me--well, saving my Dad-- over a thousand dollars in car repair. Understanding what made things work helped me fix them easily when they broke.

If only they had a tool kit for relationships!

There's something about knowing what makes something work that is empowering. As a result of rebuilding the entire car engine, car problems never intimidated me again. I remember one day I was on my way to an audition. I broke down on the freeway. The car was hesitating, I mean, really jerking when I accelerated. I was afraid I wouldn't make it to the audition.

I pulled over, lifted the hood. And knowing how an engine was built helped me know what could cause that type of instant hesitation. I thought, *it's probably electrical*. As the freeway traffic blew by me, I felt a draft. I looked down into the engine compartment at the coil and I noticed that there was a loosened wire blowing in that wind each time a car raced by.

I noticed that the connection from the wire to the coil was loose. I didn't have any tools with me so I removed the wire from the coil, bent my head into the engine compartment and bit down on the connector until I could feel the metal squeeze a little. I took that wire put it back on the pin from the coil. It fit nice and snug. Tight.

I started the car. Pulled out onto the freeway and the car rode smooth and fast. I was super proud that I solved the problem with my teeth. Everyone loved when I told them that story; except my dentist.

When I got into comedy, it fascinated me! I loved it when people laughed at what I said. Problem was that I couldn't make them laugh consistently. It was always hit or miss.

It wasn't until I studied comedy and got under the hood that I really understood it from the inside out. It made me understand that there's a process for everything. There's a reason something works or it doesn't.

It's the same for comedy. There's some stimuli present every time an audience laughs. Something makes them laugh. In my studies I've identified 9 Laughter Triggers and 13 comedy structures.

It's what makes an audience laugh. Once you understand that you can really build comedy for just about anything, any time you want.

So here's the step-by-step process for how to write jokes, but I just couldn't leave out the fluff.

I just tried this process yesterday morning to retest it to make sure it works. And it does. I made my coffee made a bowl of Raisin Bran, sat down, flipped open the laptop and I wrote 15 jokes. When you have this many jokes on one subject you can build that one

line from the news, conversation or life, into a bit that contains multiple laughs. So instead of a joke getting one laugh, a joke can get multiple laughs, especially if you finesse each of the punchlines to be a tag or topper.

This can increase your laughs by 400% or more, with just a little bit of Raisin Bran.

Here we go:

1. UsaToday look for some news. (You can choose any of the news sources)
2. Look for News headlines that have recognition. (In this case I just grabbed the first news story I saw.)
3. Take the headline and put it on Google Docs.
4. Make a table and identify the Dissimilar Ideas that are converging.
5. Start looking for associations including similar words from one column that could be used in other columns either as a metaphor or hyperbole to create surprise, incongruity and coincidence. (3 of the 9 laughter triggers.)

Headline:

“Police arrested a Chicago woman for assaulting a waitress who told her she couldn't share her \$4 all you can eat pancakes with her entire table.”

Locate all the dissimilar ideas in the headline statement.

Write down everything associated with each of the dissimilar ideas in the story.

Sub Categories for Listing:

Remember you're looking for...

People, Places, Things, Words, Phrases, Cliches, Events (Opposites) Also don't forget to ask yourself “What images am I seeing? What are the smells? What are the textures, colors.

IMPORTANT: Are you seeing the images? If you are seeing the images, the audience is seeing the images with you and they are more compelled to be

in your story with you. Also seeing the images when you write opens up new possibilities for ideas.

Police	Denny's	Assault	Waitress
Cops	24 hours	punch	tip 20%
guns	moons over my hammy	kick	tip
handcuffs	waffles	attack	server
squad car	\$4 all-you-can-eat pancakes	violence	take your order
coffee	Stale Rolls	throw something	let me top off your coffee
arrested	Pictures on the menu	hit her with a dinner roll	would you like water
booked	Item numbers	scratch	no substitutions
book 'em Danno	Dessert list		would you like to look at the dessert menu?
Freeze	Specials		graveyard shift
shots fired	Coffee Shop		
lights and sirens	pay the check		
donuts	drop the check		
speeding ticket	table settings		
pistol	water glasses		
service revolver	bus boy		

badge	bus station		
sergeant	bus your table		
dispatch	fast service		
what did the dispatch sound like? "One Adam 14, we have a 217 on a #17 at Denny's..." COPS: 217 on a #17? That's the \$4 All-You-Can-Eat Pancakes!	slow service		
	she was eating the pancakes faster than they could cook them		
	waffles		
	Belgian Waffle		
	Ice Cream Sundae		
	Grand Slam		
	Sausages		
	Pancake syrup		
	Whipped Cream		
	Eggs over easy		
	Scrambled eggs		
	Eggs Benedict		

	Cream in your coffee		
	Sweetener		
	pancake batter		
	denny's bathrooms		

Resulting 1st Draft Jokes

1. Police arrested a Chicago woman for assaulting a Denny's waitress who told her she couldn't share her \$4 all you can eat pancakes with her entire table. When the cops got the dispatch, they showed up in record time. "One Adam 14, we have a 217 on a #17 at Denny's..." Cops were like, "217 on a number 17? That's the \$4 All-You-Can-Eat Pancakes!"
2. It was a pretty big deal; It actually took 28 cop cars and 9 helicopter crews... to eat all those pancakes.

(Once you do this joke, do you see the images? The scene? Could this lead to a sketch? or a scene in a comedy movie?)

3. Cops showed up and it was almost a hostage situation... yeah, they held the waitress hostage until she gave them the all-you-can-eat pancakes.

Police arrested a Chicago woman for assaulting a Denny's waitress who told her she couldn't share her \$4 all you can eat pancakes with her entire table.

4. It wasn't a real assault the woman just hit the waitress with some Moons over My Hammy.
5. It was pretty bad. She hit the waitress with a Dinner Roll... gave her a concussion.
6. Or... the cops were just gonna let it go, until the angry woman broke one of the police car windshields with a dinner roll. Or until she threw a dinner roll at a cop car... broke a windshield.

7. It all went down during the graveyard shift. Let's face it if you're eating at Denny's it's all a graveyard shift.
8. Waitress was just ignoring it until she started sharing it with her service dog under-the-table.
9. The real problem was the woman was also drinking the bottomless coffee. They were thinking, "this bitch could be a while."
10. What if we changed the word 'table' to 'family?' It doesn't totally change the setup and could give us more possible ideas.
11. It was a dire situation, it was a Mormon family and Denny's almost ran out of its entire stock of batter.
12. Maybe it's just me, but I'm thinkin' after an assault, you could pretty much forget about the 20% tip.
13. Assault? I miss the good ole days when you pissed off a proprietor, he would just reach under the register and take out the shotgun.
14. The good news is Denny's has all you can eat pancakes. The bad news is Denny's has all you can eat pancakes.
15. In the morning it's all you can eat. In the afternoon it's all you can throw up.
16. 4 bucks for all you can eat pancakes. The punch is just a bonus.
17. I can't believe that type of thing would happen in Chicago... Chicago's had so much violence lately, Mayor Rahm Emanuel is proposing changing the name of the city to Fallujah.
18. I guess what I'm trying to say is if you're in a Denny's in Chicago, the eggs are then only things getting beaten.
19. They charged the woman with assault and batter.
20. Even when the cops threatened the woman with jail, she refused to confess. You know when she admitted to everything? When they threatened to put her one of the Denny's bathrooms. She was like: (ACT-OUT) "I did it! I did it!" (Possible tag): Trump was right: Torture works!

One of the mistakes new writers make... and one to be aware of is the constant desire to make funny for the sake of funny. But beware, a joke has to have structure in order for it to get a laugh. If you try too hard to "funny it up," the audience is not sure what you're trying to do and what they are supposed to process.

Most jokes of this type are about simple associations or linear stories that force the audience to think one way then the comedian switches the perception of what he was trying to communicate at the last second. Simple association means one idea to

another. Not multiple combinations built into one simple joke. It will often result in groans or come across 'punny.'

For example: If we did a joke like the one above about the woman confessing but instead of confess we used 'waffled' it would come out 'punny.' The woman refused to confess, but then she waffled when the cops threatened to put her in one of the Denny's bathrooms.

In this joke, the reader or listener is not sure what the joke is: 'waffle' or 'bathroom?' It's what is sometimes referred to as "joking" the joke.

where the laugh is supposed to come; on "waffled" or bathroom

So you can see by the work in the listing technique that it didn't take a long time until ideas started flowing and I was able to write several jokes and a possible sketch in a pretty short period of time. So instead trolling the news stories until something funny pops up, I just took a story that had some recognition and a benign retaliation possibility and launched the listing technique then put the dissimilar ideas together to create associative humor.

Here's your advantage: Most comedians and writers do NOT do this work. They just trust their instinct. They let the possible material just squirrel around in their heads. And if you've done that before you know that it can wind up leaving you frustrated with no jokes.

But once you do the lists, really sit down and do them, you can start to strike gold and lots of it!

At first you might struggle with this concept. If you still can't find associative ideas, increase the size of the list. Think of more items in each category in the table. Ask yourself *did I go through the sub-categories?*

- what are the cliches or phrases spoken within these concepts?
- who are the people involved?
- who else could be involved?
- what other events relate to this event?

Start thinking and talking out loud. What if? What else relates to Denny's or Assault or Waitress or Police.

This is one of those techniques that can help you create constantly. The underlying idea of the entire concept is to always ask yourself *What else? What else? What else?* and *What if? What? if? What if?*

So go ahead. Take the headline (or one of your own) and set the table with a little coffee and Raisin Bran and get to work!