

Originally Processed With FOIA(s):

FOIA Number:

S

FOIA MARKER

This is not a textual record. This is used as an administrative marker by the George Bush Presidential Library Staff.

Record Group/Collection: George H.W. Bush Presidential Records
Collection/Office of Origin: Speechwriting, White House Office of
Series: Snow, Tony, Files
Subseries: Subject File, 1988-1993

OA/ID Number: 13894
Folder ID Number: 13894-026

Folder Title:
["Humor Writing for White House Speech Writers," 6/13/91]

Stack:	Row:	Section:	Shelf:	Position:
G	18	29	2	2

**HUMOR WRITING
FOR
WHITE HOUSE
SPEECHWRITERS**

June 13, 1991

Presented by

Frederick Talbott

Know Your Humor Audience

Remember: Your goal is to relate. Ask:

Q - Who are they? Professions? Interests?

Q - Why are they attending the speech?

Q - What things are they thinking about?

Q - What do they care about?

Q - What do they disdain (rivals, etc.)?

Q - What are they talking about?

(current events)

Q - What do they have in common?

Q - What experiences do they share?

Q - What are their gripes?

Q - What are they proud of?

Q - What do they joke about?

Q - Who do they joke about?

And, most important:

**What SPEECH MESSAGE, POINT
or PASSAGE are you
trying to reinforce
with HUMOR?**

Humor Tips

Localize

Think locations. And use specifics to localize. You can even "borrow" old jokes and plug 'em in locally. For instance, let's say the President is speaking at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville:

"Coming in from the airport tonight we found ourselves a little lost, heading the wrong way down I-40. So we pull off the ramp, pull over to the curb, and I yell to an old timer standing there:

'Hey buddy, how do I get to the Grand Ole Opry?'

And he just looked me straight in the eye and said,

"Practice, sonny, practice."

Think specifics. Not just any road, I-40. If you're in New York, not just any big store, Macy's.

Some Location Humor Sources

local history	famous spots, locations
natural settings	weather
transportation	local traditions
famous folks	famous (or infamous) activities
good/bad places	local/state news
nearby towns, schools	area rivalries

The President is speaking one muggy day in Richmond, VA:

"Just a few miles from here Patrick Henry made his remarkable speech, 'Give me liberty or give me death!' ... I don't know about you ... but I wish he'd thrown in a line or two about the humidity!"

Local Groundlayers Sampling:

"Flying in today..."

"Driving in today..."

"Entering the hotel tonight...." "I was just talking with..."

Pull 'Em In!

This works great for local or national/international news jokes:

"Say, did you hear about the lady in Topeka..."

(notice how the question and the "you" pulls 'em in?)

News, News!

News provides a great "take off" for all sorts of jokes.

Speech Humor Tips

Pace effectively :

1. At the beginning of the speech...
 - a. be light and easy (goal: win 'em over)
 - b. sum up the situation
 - c. apply as directly to audience as possible

2. Inside the speech...
 - a. look for natural breaks
 - b. use humor to highlight main points
Gene Perrett says: (1) make the point
(2) highlight with humor
(3) repeat the point
 - c. give the audience a rest between points

3. At the end of the speech...
 - a. reward the audience
 - b. drive the overall message home

Humorous responses to questions:

Anticipate questions and be ready with:

1. zingers and one-liners
2. reverses
3. triples
4. analogies/comparisons
5. vignettes/stories

Goofs, flubs, calamities and catcalls:

1. be patient and enjoy them
2. use them for ad lib setups

HAVE FUN -- THINK FUNNY

The President's 'Shtick'

President Bush's image, speaking presence and manner are very important to the humor writer. They create his 'shtick.' Visualize and 'hear' his shtick -- and think funny -- when you design humor for him.

Some of his shtick strengths include:

- * **Friendly, really likes people**
- * **One of the guys**
- * **Speaks openly, forthright**
- * **Happy, robust**
- * **Honest (great use of hands, body language)**
- * **Can take a joke**
- * **Enjoys humor, quick wit**
- * **Vast knowledge/experience**
- * **Comfortable, positive**
- * **Clear, concise speaker**
- * **Caring, compassionate**
- * **Dynamic leader**

Writing Funny

Here are a few humor approaches. When you want to write funny, first jump start your own funnybone: Think silly, be silly.

Topic, slant, connection...

Many great humor writers enjoy building laughs from just about any topic. They do this by using what Gene Perret calls the "topic, slant, comedy connection" approach:

Step 1: Pick any topic

Example: an automobile (this is our "target")

Make a long list of auto types, parts --
anything you can visualize about cars.

We list speedometer, gasoline, headlights,
steering wheel, brakes, tires, etc.

Step 2: The slant

Let's say we want to joke about the car being old
(Think Carson: "It was so old...")

Now make a long list of things associated with
old, being old, antiquity.

We list Roman numerals, canes, horse and buggy,
chariots, Geritol, lanterns, etc.

Step 3: The comedy connection

You guessed it: With our topic, the car, stated as
our target, we simply bring the ideas from the
two lists together:

Ex: "That car was so old ... its speedometer was in
Roman numerals ... it runs on Geritol..."

Humor Rules and Reasoning

Pauses: Pauses "set up" the punch line.

We use pauses to let 'em know it's coming!

IMPORTANT:

1. Use ellipses (...) in your text to signify a pause.
2. Mark the text to remind the speaker that a joke is coming (he can 'shift gears').

Targets: It's safest to "joke up," which is difficult for the President to do. Always avoid joking "down" at the little guy.

Ribbing: Targetting an individual or group doesn't have to mean a "put down." Good natured "ribbing" is often a form of flattery.

Poke Thyself: The safest and best target is the speaker himself. Self-effacing humor is a great team builder: Audiences love someone who can laugh at themselves.

Volunteers: Political opponents, questionable programs and the like are safe, inviting targets.

The Rule of Three: Remember, never use more than three successive jokes about the same subject. Three jokes create a "roll" of laughter. Four -- for some strange comedic reason -- wears it thin.

Punch At The End of The Line: And Punch Hard

Exaggerate. Distort. Twist. Amplify.

Really squeeze the humor out.

And edit, polish and make it flow and punch.

Humor Tips From The Greats

MEL BROOKS -- Think vocal (how it sounds differs from how it reads).

ART BUCHWALD -- "It makes people happy, and makes you well received."

SELMA DIAMOND -- You learn by doing it.

Choose something topical, what they read about in the paper that morning, the weather. Something topical.

Relate humor to the masses.

Be alert for jokes and stories ... and apply them.

Take a straight line, and follow it with something funny.

SID CEASAR -- "The truer it is the funnier it is."

JACK DOUGLAS -- Be observant. Listen.

Play on what the audience knows about the speaker.

HAL KANTER -- Listen to the speaker's speech pattern and rhythm.

For material, pay attention to "the little things everybody knows."

Be topical. Build lines to your speaker's public character.

"Look at as much comedy, investigate and listen to as much comedy as possible and find new areas to approach.

Be as fresh (current) as possible.

CARL REINER -- Also work from your own experiences.

MEL HELITZER -- Think funny.

Practice, practice, practice.

GENE PERRETT -- Collect jokes, stories, sayings, one liners.

Constantly be on the lookout for material.

Use your memory, news, history, observations, regionalisms, sports, celebrities, entertainment for material.

"You need to find out what a group (audience) is thinking, and try to phrase it in a unique way."

"When in doubt, leave it out."

Humor readings:

Melvin Helitzer, *Comedy Writing Secrets*,
Writer's Digest Books, 1987.

James C. Humes, *Podium Humor*,
Harper & Row, 1975.

Michael Iapocce, *A Funny Thing Happened
On The Way To The Boardroom*,
John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1988.

George Jessel, *The Toastmaster General's
Favorite Jokes*, Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973.

Gene Perret, *How To Hold Your Audience With
Humor*, Writer's Digest Books, 1984.

Larry Wilde, *How the Great Comedy Writers
Create Laughter*, Nelson-Hall, 1976.

Remember, humor positively:

- * Eases audience tension and anxiety
- * Equalizes (unites speaker and audience)
- * Makes a point
- * Shares common experiences
- * Gives the audience a break (refreshes)
- * Sets up a message
- * Helps the audience remember main points
- * Energizes

Frederick Talbott

Humorist, journalist, attorney and educator, Fred Talbott hails from his native Virginia, where he swears humor is still against the law .

"If they convict you of being funny," he says, "they make you read every Civil War road marker in the state. Twice."

Talbott is a veteran journalist (*Orlando Sentinel*, *The Virginian-Pilot*) whose coverage ranged from the ku klux klan to gunrunning, cults and government mismanagement to international trade. He was one of the first to recognize and report on the significance of religion in politics, and intercepted John Anthony Walker Jr. two years before the FBI arrested Walker for espionage.

A lifelong fan of comedy, Talbott first learned the survival value of jest on the tough streets of Petersburg, VA. "If a gang said, 'Hey, you're funny,' " he kids, "that meant you got to live another day."

While Talbott long valued humor for teaching, public speaking and raising colleague morale, he began teaching Humor Writing three years ago after he began supplying news jokes to Saturday Night Live's Dennis Miller. He now teaches humor writing -- as well as journalism, mass media law and ethics, management communications and other courses -- at Old Dominion University. He is also an active humor, speech and media relations consultant, a public speaker, and an investigative reporting mentor for news professionals.

Talbott received his BA in journalism from Florida Southern College and his MA (journalism) and Juris Doctor degrees from the University of South Carolina. He is a member of the South Carolina Bar, and serves as regional Freedom of Information director for the Society of Professional Journalists. He resides in Virginia Beach with his wife, Patsy, their daughter, April, and their cat, Queen Kong.

office

visualize
joke

small

chairs
desk
carpet
lamps
computer
books
moulding

stamp
~~stamp~~
Air freshener

HUMOR QUIZ NUMERO UNO

Answer all questions without panic. If you need help, scream.

1. I enjoy laughing at myself because:
 - (a) I'm funny
 - (b) I'm funny looking
 - (c) Mike Dukakis actually ran for president
2. Busch Garden's new thrill ride is called:
 - (a) Aloha Airlines
 - (b) Aloha Airlines
 - (c) Aloha Airlines
3. Which politician currently has the strongest pulse:
 - (a) Chuck Robb
 - (b) Michael Dukakis
 - (c) Abe Lincoln
4. My most enjoyable job has been:
 - (a) serving as a counselor for Nosepickers Anonymous
 - (b) taunting cars in the middle of the New Jersey Turnpike
 - (c) smelling feet at Kinney's
5. A huge, sticky mass washed up on the beach last night. It was:
 - (a) ocean plankton
 - (b) whale boo-boo
 - (c) Tammy Faye Bakker's right eyelash
6. Former First Lady Nancy Reagan insists she is not angry at former Chief of Staff Donald Regan. To prove this, Nancy:
 - (a) writes to Regan daily
 - (b) sings Regan songs
 - (c) recently sent Regan a selection of chocolates prepared by Rex, the White House pooch
7. The silliest thing I've ever done was:
 - (a) kiss a moving automobile
 - (b) name all my children Winky
 - (c) take this stupid test
8. If Nancy Reagan reads the stars today, she'll predict:
 - (a) Donald Regan will one day marry a cat
 - (b) Kitty Kelly is really a shaved orangutan
 - (c) The late Elvis Presley will convene the 107th Congress
9. The Defense Department has announced that the new Stealth Bomber is now completely invisible. As a result:
 - (a) it will evade all known radar
 - (b) it will fly higher, faster and farther
 - (c) nobody can find the darn plane!
10. Pizza Hut has opened a restaurant in Moscow. As a result:
 - (a) Russians are showing a preference for anchovies
 - (b) Russians must stand in line twice for double cheese
 - (c) If the Personal Pan Pizza isn't delivered in 5 minutes, the waitress is sent to Siberia

Who's the most effective leader

1, 2, 3

Target
hostility
exaggeration
Threats
emotion
surprise

reversals-

set up - factual

Target ☆
hostility
realism
exaggeration ☆
emotion
surprise ☆

Avoid dull snide jokes

Puns only work on paper