

## A sense of humour

Upper-intermediate

### 1 Collocations

All these verbs, except one in each list, collocate with *a joke*. You can say *tell a joke* but can you say *take a joke*? Which is the odd verb out in each list?

- |         |      |      |       |      |
|---------|------|------|-------|------|
| 1. tell | go   | make | crack | have |
| 2. get  | take | play | share | put  |

Now complete the sentences below with a verb (or verbs) from the lists above. More than one answer is possible in some.

- The comedian \_\_\_\_\_ a really funny joke.
- Why are you laughing? Come on, you two, \_\_\_\_\_ the joke.
- The boys are always \_\_\_\_\_ practical jokes on their sister. They're really horrible.
- I'm afraid I didn't \_\_\_\_\_ the joke. Can you tell it to me again?
- Paul can't \_\_\_\_\_ a joke. If you laugh at him he gets very angry.
- Working in my office is great. We get on really well. We \_\_\_\_\_ a laugh and a joke all the time.

### 2 Match the sentences

Match the sentences in A with the sentences in B. the sentences in B should follow on from the sentences in A. The sentences in B all contain idioms with *joke*.

A

- Stop being silly now. Let's do some work.
- She looks really funny in that dress in her new video.
- Sally has put salt in my tea again! I'm really angry.
- At work, nobody takes Tim seriously. They laugh at him all the time.
- Ha! Ha! You laughed when I said I could run the marathon and bet me £200 that I couldn't do it. But I won!
- I just told my boss that he could keep his stupid job!

B

- You must be joking!
- The joke's on you now.
- It's got beyond a joke.
- He's a bit of a joke really.
- Joking aside, though, she is an excellent singer.
- I suppose that's her idea of a joke.

### 3 Prepositions

The phrases below all mean *to make jokes about someone or something in a friendly or unkind way*. First, fill the gaps with the correct prepositions or no preposition. Then decide which of these phrases can be friendly, and which are most unkind?

to make fun \_\_\_\_\_ someone

to poke fun \_\_\_\_\_ someone

to pull \_\_\_\_\_ someone's leg

to tease \_\_\_\_\_ someone

to take the mickey \_\_\_\_\_ someone

to laugh \_\_\_\_\_ someone

Which is the best phrase to use in the situations below?

1. The guys at work are really funny. Because I'm really tall, they say things like 'What's the weather like up there?' I make jokes about them too. We have a good laugh.
2. My brother is really mean. He saw me holding hands with Martin Pratt, so now, whenever he sees me, he makes kissing noises.
3. On my first day at school some older children called me horrible names and made me cry. All the other kids at school just laughed.

### 4 Match the words

Match the 'funny' people below to the lists of words and phrases connected to them.

clown

stand-up comedian

cartoonist

satirist

1. a practical joke

slapstick

a red nose

a circus

2. a punchline

tell a gag

timing

audience

3. sarcasm

biting

criticism

political

4. humorous drawing

caption

strip

speech bubble

### 5 Reading

— 'A shaggy dog story' is a joke that is long, repetitive, and ends with a punchline which is often not funny! It's funny, when told by somebody good at telling jokes, because it takes so long, and everybody wants to know what the punchline is!

Read the shaggy dog story below. Do you get the joke?

## What a Dog!

There's this dog, and it walks into a butcher's shop, walks up to the counter, and drops a note from its mouth. The butcher picks up the note, and it reads, 'Can I have 12 sausages, please. The dog has money in his mouth.' The butcher looks inside and finds a ten pound note between the dog's teeth. So he takes the money, and puts the sausages in a bag, placing it in the dog's mouth. The butcher is really impressed, and since it's close to closing time, he decides to shut up shop and follow the dog. So off he goes. The dog walks down the street, comes to a bus stop, and starts looking at the timetable. The butcher can't believe it. Anyway, a bus comes, and the dog climbs on. The butcher, by now open-mouthed, follows him onto the bus. The bus travels through the town and out into the suburbs. Eventually the dog stands on 2 back paws and pushes the button to stop the bus. Then it gets off, walks up to a house, and drops the groceries on the step. Then it walks back down the path, takes a big run, and throws itself - Wham! - against the door. There's no answer at the house, so the dog goes to the window, and beats its head against it several times, walks back, and waits at the door. The butcher watches as a big guy opens the door, and starts hitting the dog. Swearing at it. The butcher runs up, and stops the guy. 'What are you doing? The dog is so clever. He could be on TV.' 'He's not clever at all,' says the big guy. 'This is the second time this week that he's forgotten his key.'

## 6 Writing

**Look at this list of features that are typical of a shaggy dog story. Which one is not true?**

1. The use of the narrative present to make the story immediate.
2. Short sentences.
3. The use of narrative phrases like *'There's this guy and he...'*
4. The use of conditional forms.
5. Simple linking words like *so, then, anyway*.
6. The use of direct speech.

**Now prepare to tell the shaggy dog story below. Rewrite it, using the features listed above, and adding any extra details you think might improve the story.**

### The three-legged chicken

A man/driving along a road in the country/saw a three legged chicken/followed it/chicken running at 30 mph/drove faster/chicken accelerated/60 mph!!!/Man followed chicken to farmhouse/saw farmer/'How did you get all these three legged chickens?'/The farmer said he bred them/He said he loved chicken legs/Driver amazed/'How do they taste?'/Don't know, I can't catch them...'

**Tell your partner the shaggy dog story.**

## 7 Speaking

Think of a good joke or shaggy dog story, which you know in your first language. Prepare to tell it in English. Tell the class the joke. Is it still funny in English?

## 8 Dictionary quiz

### Humour Dictionary Quiz

1. What is a *humorist*?
2. Which of these adjectives collocate with *humour*: black, dry, sardonic, green, wry?
3. How do you spell *humour* in American English?
4. Find two adjectives you can form from *humour*.
5. If you are *in a bad humour*, how do you feel?
6. Where is your *funny bone*?
7. What is *funny business*?
8. What's the difference between *funny ha-ha* and *funny peculiar*?
9. What do you mean if you say *It's a funny old world*.
10. If you say, *It's funny how she always passes her exams*, do you mean that it is amusing?
11. Is a Ferrari a *funny little* car?

*This activity was compiled using the Macmillan English Advanced Learner's Dictionary and CD Rom. To find out more about using dictionaries go to <http://www.macmillandictionary.com>.*

## Teacher's notes – A sense of humour

1) Put the students in pairs to decide which verb does not collocate with a *joke* in each list.

Answers:

1. go
2. put

Then ask the students to complete the sentences with a verb (or verbs) from the lists.

Answers:

1. The comedian **told/made/cracked** a really funny joke.
2. Why are you laughing? Come on, you two, **share** the joke.
3. The boys are always **playing** practical jokes on their sister. They're really horrible.
4. I'm afraid I don't **get** the joke. Can you tell it to me again?
5. Paul can't **take** a joke. If you laugh at him he gets very angry.
6. Working in my office is great. We get on really well. We **have** a laugh and a joke all the time.

2) Put the students in pairs to match the sentences in A with the sentences in B that probably come next. The sentences in B all contain idioms with *joke*.

Answers:

A	B
Stop being silly now. Let's do some work.	It's got beyond a joke.
She looks really funny in that dress in her new video.	Joking aside, though, she is an excellent singer.
Sally has put salt in my tea again! I'm really angry.	I suppose that's her idea of a joke.
At work, nobody takes Tim seriously. They laugh at him all the time.	He's a bit of a joke really.
Ha! Ha! You laughed when I said I could run the marathon and bet me £200 that I couldn't do it. But I won!	The joke's on you now.
I just told my boss that he could keep his stupid job!	You must be joking!

**3) Put the students in pairs to fill the gaps with the correct prepositions or no preposition, then ask them to decide which of the phrases can be friendly, and which are most unkind.**

**Answers:**

to make fun of someone	to poke fun at someone
to pull someone's leg	to tease someone
to take the mickey out of someone	to laugh at someone

to make fun of someone, to poke fun at someone, and to laugh at someone are most unkind.

**Ask the students to decide which is the best phrase to use in the situations described.**

**Answers:**

1. pull someone's leg/take the mickey out of someone
2. make fun of/poke fun at/tease
3. make fun of/poke fun at/laugh at

**4) Put the students in pairs to match the 'funny' people to the lists of words and phrases connected to them.**

**Answers:**

1. clown
2. stand-up comedian
3. satirist
4. cartoonist

**5) Read the introduction as a class, and make sure the students know what a 'shaggy dog story' is.**

**Ask the students to read the shaggy dog story. Do they get the joke?**

**6) As a class, discuss the list of features that are typical of a shaggy dog story. Which one is not true?**

**Answer:**

4. is not true.

**Put the students in pairs to prepare to tell the shaggy dog story. Ask them to rewrite it, using the features listed, and adding any extra details they think might improve the story. Monitor and give lots of help.**

**Suggested answer:**

**The Three-Legged Chicken**

There's this man and he's driving along a road in the country when he sees a three legged chicken. He can't believe it! Anyway, he follows it, and realises the chicken is running at 30 mph, so he drives faster, and the chicken accelerates to 60 mph!!! The man follows the chicken to a farmhouse, and sees a farmer. 'How did you get all these three legged chickens?' asks the driver. 'I breed them,' says the farmer. 'I love chicken legs.' The driver is amazed. 'How do they taste?' he asks, open-mouthed. 'Don't know,' says the farmer, 'I can't catch them...'

**When they are ready, change pairs, and ask the students to tell each other their shaggy dog story.**

**7) Ask the students to prepare to tell a joke in English. Give them time and lots of help. When they are ready, ask brave students to tell their joke to the class. Are they funny? Be kind.**

### **8) Dictionary Quiz**

If your students have access to the Macmillan English Advanced Learner's Dictionary and CD ROM, set them the following quiz. They can find all the answers by finding the key words *humour* and *funny*, and following the various links.

#### **Humour Dictionary Quiz**

1. What is a *humorist*?
2. Which of these adjectives collocate with *humour*: black, dry, sardonic, green, wry?
3. How do you spell *humour* in American English?
4. Find two adjectives you can form from *humour*.
5. If you are *in a bad humour*, how do you feel?
6. Where is your *funny bone*?
7. What is *funny business*?
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