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**This Class is a Joke! Humor as a Pedagogical Tool in the Teaching of Psychology**

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### **This Class is a Joke! Humor as a Pedagogical Tool in the Teaching of Psychology**

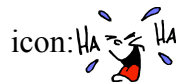
In recent years, educators have been encouraged to make use of humor in their teaching, and research suggests that instructors often do so (Martin, 2007). Many authors have advocated the use of humor and have detailed humor's potential benefits as an instructional tool (Berk, 1996; Powers, 2008). Humor can be incorporated into instruction in a variety of ways including in the classroom, on exams, and on syllabi to name a few (Berk, 2002, 2003; Martin, 2007). Although the sparse research literature on humor in education (Berk, 1996) has produced mixed results (Teslow, 1995), humor can increase students' enjoyment of a course and possibly enhance their retention of material (Garner, 2006). However, there are also limitations to the use of humor in education (Deiter, 2000; Martin, 2007; Wanzer, Frymier, Wojtaszczyk, & Smith, 2006),

Wilson and Taylor (2001) found that psychology instructors' use of humor was positively associated with students' perceptions that the instructor had "a positive attitude toward" them, "wanted them to succeed," and displayed "a genuine concern for them" (pp. 136-137). Powers (2008) suggested ways that humor might be used in the teaching of psychology, and other authors have described and studied the use of humor in specific psychology content areas, including statistics (e.g., Lesser & Pearl, 2008; Neumann, Hood, & Neumann, 2009), the history of psychology (e.g., Thorne, 1999), and online psychology courses (e.g., LoSchiavo & Shatz, 2005).

Excellent review articles and chapters that focus on the use of humor in teaching exist. Although such resources provide an overview of extant research, the bibliography we have compiled is annotated – allowing us to provide summaries and relatively detailed descriptions of individual articles and studies. The purpose of this bibliography, then, is to provide psychology

instructors with a user-friendly, “one-stop” shop replete with representative descriptions of scholarly and nonscholarly information focused on the use of humor in teaching. Although this resource does not include every article, book, or book chapter ever written about the use of humor in teaching, we have attempted to provide a representative and relatively comprehensive list. Because instructors are frequently pressed for time, we have also indicated those resources that we feel provide a good overview of the use of humor in teaching, touch a specific and important topic (e.g., using humor with international students), or describe studies that seem particularly well-designed.\* We hope that this bibliography will provide instructors either with a solid starting point as they consider the use of humor in teaching or with new ideas for the seasoned comedian in the classroom.

\* We thank anonymous reviewers for this suggestion and have designated these resources with an



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## Humor as a Teaching Tool in Higher Education

### Articles

**Aylor, B., & Oppliger, P. (2003). Out-of-class communication and student perceptions of instructor humor orientation and socio-communicative style. *Communication Education*, 52, 122-134. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03634520302469>**

Aylor and Oppliger pointed out that the majority of research examining instructor humor has focused on the classroom environment. They hypothesized that instructor humor would be positively associated with both the frequency and quality of instructor-student interactions outside of class. Using a sample of 188 undergraduates in a public-speaking course, the authors found support for these hypotheses. Instructors' use of humor was related to the frequency of both formal and informal outside-the-class interactions as well as students' satisfaction with those interactions. Furthermore, the authors pointed out that instructors' use of humor in the classroom was positively associated with the percentage of interactions focused on students' personal problems.

**Banas, J. A., Dunbar, N., Rodriguez, D., & Liu, S. J. (2011). A review of humor in educational settings: Four decades of research. *Communication Education*, 60, 115-144. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03634523.2010.496867>**

In this comprehensive and detailed article, Banas et al. provided a thorough discussion of research findings related to humor and teaching. In addition, the authors provided some coverage of the theoretical and empirical literature related to humor in general. In terms of the role of humor in education, Banas et al. summarized research for a range of crucial areas including the effect of instructor humor on student learning, testing, classroom environment, and student perceptions of the instructor. The article also included reviews of research that examine relationships between humor and instructor variables such as gender, culture, and level of experience. Banas et al. closed this meticulous article with a concise summary of the humor and teaching research, suggestions for future research, and guidelines—grounded in the research they review—for the use of humor in teaching.

**Bryant, J., Brown, D., & Parks, S. L. (1981). Ridicule as an educational corrective. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 73, 722-727. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-0663.73.5.722>**

This study included 180 undergraduate students (half were male and half were female) enrolled in a communication course. The researchers examined different types of written prompts to encourage students to study harder. In all conditions students received the prompt the class period before a small test. In some of the conditions the prompt was provided in a ridiculing way (which was intended to be humorous), and in other conditions the prompt was not ridiculing. The primary findings indicated that students performed best on the test when they received a cartoon ridiculing their previous performance when compared to a nonridiculing

cartoon and other types of written prompts. The authors acknowledged that, despite their findings, there may be problems with using ridicule as a form of motivation in a college classroom. Specifically they caution that the performance benefits of ridicule might come at the expense of students' self-esteem as well as the relationship with the instructor.

**Bryant, J., Comisky, P., & Zillmann, D. (1979). Teachers' humor in the college classroom. *Communication Education, 28*, 110-118.**  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03634527909378339>

In this study, the authors examined, via student observation and transcription, the frequency and type of humor used by instructors across 70 classes. Results indicated that instructors in the sample averaged 3.34 attempts at humor per 50-min class and that the majority of the humor used related to course content. Although female instructors used humor less frequently than male instructors, the authors caution that female instructors comprised only about 30% of the sample. The most commonly used forms of humor were humorous stories, humorous comments, and jokes, respectively. The majority of the humor used by instructors was judged to be spontaneous, with female, compared to male, instructors using a greater proportion of spontaneous humor.

**Davis, B. M. (2005). Bored and ignored or gained and maintained: Role of attention in beginning class. *Teaching Professor, 19*(6), 2.**

Stressing the importance of catching attention at the start of class, Davis made a number of recommendations for focusing students on the class topic. For example, she suggested the use of humorous cartoons relevant to the material to be covered.

**Deiter, R. (2000, June). The use of humor as a teaching tool in the college classroom. *NACTA Journal, 20*-28.**

Deiter asserted that although humor should not be used as a substitute for course content, it can bolster student learning and attendance by creating a positive and fun learning environment. The article included a number of examples of how humor can be used in the classroom including cartoons (possibly with modified captions), top 10 (or 5) lists, humorous multiple choice items, and using humor when the professor makes a mistake. Although Dieter acknowledged the benefit of spontaneous humor, he suggested that as a teaching tool humor is most effective when it is thought-out and planned in advance.




**Downs, V. C., Javidi, M., & Nussbaum, J. F. (1988). An analysis of teachers' verbal communication within the college classroom: Use of humor, self-disclosure, and narratives. *Communication Education*, 37, 127-141.**  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03634528809378710>


Across two studies, the authors sought to determine the frequency of instructors' use of humor, self-disclosure, and narrative in college teaching as well as the frequency with which "award-winning" instructors use these techniques. They reviewed lectures by 57 instructors teaching introductory courses across a variety of disciplines. Results indicated an average of 13 humor attempts in a 50-min class. Furthermore, 70% of the humor was related to course material. Although award-winning teachers used humor in the same way as other instructors (e.g., content-related), award-winning instructors used humor less frequently than other instructors (seven vs. 13 attempts in a 50-min class session). The authors suggested that overuse of humor may not be appropriate and that students may prefer moderate use of humor. Data also revealed that award-winning instructors' use of humor vacillated across the semester, with more humor during the 2<sup>nd</sup> week of the semester, less in the 6<sup>th</sup> week of the semester, and still less in the 10<sup>th</sup> week. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> week of the semester the instructors' humor was more likely to be related to course content than in the 10<sup>th</sup> week.

**Garner, R. L. (2005). Humor, analogy, and metaphor: H.A.M. it up in teaching. *Radical Pedagogy*, 6(2), 1.**

In this article, Garner provided a brief overview of the benefits of employing humor, as well as creative analogies and metaphors, in teaching. He also suggested that in incorporating these techniques, instructors remain cognizant of variables such as culture, age, and gender and how these variables might impact the ways humor (or metaphors and analogies) are perceived. Garner concluded that an instructor's use of humor, analogies, and metaphors has a number of merits including increasing enjoyment of a class for both students and instructors.

 **Garner, R. L. (2006). Humor in pedagogy: How ha-ha can lead to aha! *College Teaching*, 54(1), 177-180.** <http://dx.doi.org/10.3200/CTCH.54.1.177-180>

In this study, undergraduates reviewed three lectures on research methods and statistics. In one condition the lectures included topic-relevant humorous stories. Compared to students in the nonhumor condition, students in the humor condition retained more of the information from the lecture and rated both the lecture and the instructor more positively. Interviews with some of the participants supported the assertion that humor facilitated comprehension of the lesson and created a more pleasant learning experience.

 **Goodboy, A. K., Booth-Butterfield, M., Bolkan, San, & Griffin, D. J. (2015). The role of instructor humor and students' educational orientations in student learning, extra effort, participation, and out-of-class communication. *Communication Quarterly*, 63, 44-61. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01463373.2014.965840>**

The authors hypothesized that student learning, class participation, extra effort, and communication with instructors outside of class would be positively predicted by students' perceptions of their instructors' use of humor. Hierarchical regressions analyses, controlling for two types of educational orientations – learning orientation and grade orientation – supported these hypotheses. The authors stressed that, consistent with Instructional Humor Processing Theory, their findings suggested that instructor humor has the potential to motivate both learning-oriented and grade-oriented college students.

**Gorham, J. (1988). The relationship between verbal teacher immediacy behaviors and student learning. *Communication Education*, 37, 40-53. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03634528809378702>**

Using a sample of 387 undergraduates enrolled in communication courses, Gorham examined students' perceptions of verbal and nonverbal immediacy behaviors and their relationship to learning, learning loss, and a variety of attitudinal and affective variables. Instructor use of humor consistently emerged in small, medium, and large classes as a particularly salient variable relating positively to student self-reported learning and attitude.

**Gorham, J., & Christophel, D. M. (1990). The relationship of teachers' use of humor in the classroom to immediacy and student learning. *Communication Education*, 39, 46-62. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03634529009378786>**

The authors examined the effect of humor—both amount and type—on self-reported student learning. Students observed instructors during class and documented the use of humor. Results indicated that increased humor was positively related to increased instructor immediacy behaviors (both verbal and nonverbal). The study also demonstrated some gender differences. For example, male students showed a stronger relationship than did female students between instructor humor and self-reported learning outcomes. Additionally, the use of humor by male instructors appeared to have a stronger effect on students than did the use of humor by female instructors.

**Granitz, N. A., Koernig, S. K., & Harich, K. R. (2009). Now it's personal: Antecedents and outcomes of rapport between business faculty and their students. *Journal of Marketing Education*, 31, 52-65. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0273475308326408>**

In a qualitative study the authors solicited the opinions of business faculty about factors associated with good rapport with students as well as the potential outcomes of that rapport. Faculty noted that, among other attributes, a sense of humor was a positive personality

characteristic—one that many felt could facilitate good rapport with students. The authors recommend incorporating humor as one of several ways to nurture a positive learning environment.

**Hellman, S. (2007). Humor in the classroom: Stu’s seven simple steps to success. *College Teaching*, 55, 37-39. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3200/CTCH.55.1.37-39>**

In this brief article, Hellman asserted that humor in the classroom can help maintain students’ interest and creates a relaxed learning environment. He also suggested using what he called “guerilla humor”—humor that is quick and unexpected—and beginning each class with humor as an “icebreaker.” Hellman described guidelines for incorporating humor into the classroom. These guidelines included using humor selectively and in moderation, understanding who the audience is (e.g., age) so that the humor is relatable, and recognizing students’ use of humor. Suggestions also included avoiding humor that could be offensive or at the expense of a student.

**Inman, D. (1991). Humor in the classroom as a teaching strategy. *Adult Learning*, 2(2), 29.**

Inman advocated the use of humor in teaching as a way to attract students’ attention, facilitate learning, and increase the enjoyment of a class.

**Javidi, M. N., & Long, L. W. (1989). Teachers’ use of humor, self-disclosure, and narrative activity as a function of experience. *Communication and Research Reports*, 6, 47-52. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08824098909359831>**

The researchers in this study observed 20 experienced university teachers (i.e., with at least 5 years of experience and doctoral degrees) and 20 less-experienced teachers (i.e., doctoral candidates with less than 3 years of experience). The experienced teachers used significantly more humor during the observations ( $M = 6.5$  humorous *attempts* per 50-min class) than the less experienced teachers ( $M = 1.6$  *attempts*). Experienced teachers also used significantly more self-disclosure and story-telling. Javidi and Long also noted that the humor used by the experienced teachers was more likely to actually be related to the course content.

**Kaplan, R. M., & Pascoe, G. C. (1977). Humorous lectures and humorous examples: Some effects upon comprehension and retention. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 69, 61-65. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037//0022-0663.69.1.61>**



In this study, 508 undergraduates watched one of four versions of a 20-min videotaped lecture about Freud’s personality theory. The four versions of the lecture were serious, related humor, unrelated humor, and a combination of related and unrelated humor. The use of humor in lectures did not lead to improved overall performance on follow-up comprehension and retention tests. However, those students in the humor-lecture conditions performed better than those in the serious condition on items that pertained to lecture material that had included a humorous

example. In short, the use of humor in a lecture had a positive effect only on recall of material that was related with humor. Overall performance was not affected by humor.

**Kehr, N. M., Molstad, S., & Donahue, R. (1999). Using humor in the college classroom to enhance teaching effectiveness in 'dread courses.'** *College Student Journal*, 33, 400-406.

Kehr and colleagues asserted that an instructor's use of humor can be an effective tool particularly in classes that students avoid because they perceive the material to be too difficult in those courses or do not feel confident in their ability to succeed in those courses. They suggested that humor can be used in instruction in a variety of ways including as a means for relaxing students and addressing classroom management issues. The authors provided examples of a number of ways to infuse humor into these courses, including specific examples described in appendices. The authors also included recommendations regarding the appropriate uses of humor in the classroom.

**Klein, D. M., Bryant, J., & Zillmann, D. (1982). Relationship between humor in introductory textbooks and students' evaluations of the texts' appeal and effectiveness.** *Psychological Reports*, 50, 235-241.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1982.50.1.235>

In this study, 180 undergraduates evaluated introductory communication textbooks. Students were assigned one chapter to read and asked to evaluate it in terms of six variables including enjoyment of the reading, level of interest, and credibility. In the second phase of the study the same students determined the number of attempts at humor the author made in the chapter. Results indicated that although humor was positively associated with the enjoyment of the reading, it had a negative relationship with the authors' credibility.

**Korobkin, D. (1988). Humor in the classroom: Considerations and strategies.** *College Teaching*, 36, 154-158. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/87567555.1988.10532139>

Because humor was historically considered to be inappropriate for scholastic settings, Korobkin indicated that the use and exploration of humor in teaching is relatively recent (i.e., 20<sup>th</sup> century). Korobkin addressed some merits related to humor's role in teaching. Additionally, she discussed some suggestions, guidelines, and caveats associated with instructors' use of humor.

**Layng, A. (1991). Sexism and classroom humor.** *College Teaching*, 39(2), 43.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/87567555.1991.9925483>



In this commentary, Layng pointed out that although humor has a place in teaching, humor that targets women has the potential to reinforce stereotypes and promote sexism. A student who objects to such humor risks having his or her concerns discounted. Layng also pointed out that

simply because students may not explicitly object to jokes about women, instructors should not assume that students are comfortable with those jokes.

**Lei, S. A., Cohen, J. L., & Russler, K. M. (2010). Humor on learning in the college classroom: Evaluating benefits and drawbacks from instructors' perspectives.** *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 37, 326-331.

In this article, the authors pointed out that college students consider a sense of humor to be an important characteristic of quality instructors. They reviewed some of the literature on the advantages and limitations to using humor in college teaching, concluding that humor can be an effective tool if used judiciously.

**Özdoğan, A. A., & McMorris, R. F. (2013). Humorous cartoons in college textbooks: Student perceptions and learning.** *Humor: International Journal Of Humor Research*, 26, 135-154.

Using a sample of 156, primarily graduate, students, Özdoğan and McMorris examined the effect of humorous cartoons on test performance. Although the students reported that they found the cartoons humorous and that cartoons facilitated learning, the cartoons had no effect on exam performance. Students' self-reported sense of humor positively related to their opinions about the cartoons.

**Powell, J. P., & Andresen, L. W. (1985). Humour and teaching in higher education.** *Studies in Higher Education*, 10, 79-90. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075078512331378726>

The authors reviewed research on the use of humor in teaching. They posited that humor can increase students' attention, facilitate student involvement, promote a positive classroom atmosphere, and even be used to address unwanted student behaviors. Powell and Anderson discussed research findings focused on the effect of humor on test anxiety, recall of information, and understanding of material. They concluded the article by framing humor as a skill that instructors can cultivate and provided suggestions to that end.

**Punyanunt, N. M. (2000). The effects of humor on perceptions of compliance-gaining in the college classroom.** *Communication Research Reports*, 17, 30-38. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08824090009388748>

Punyanunt asserted that although research exists examining the use of humor in the classroom and examining compliance-gaining techniques, little research explores the relationship between these two variables. Using a sample of 428 university students, primarily undergraduates, Punyanunt's investigation found positive relationships between students' perceptions of instructors' use of humor and behavior alteration techniques. Furthermore, humor had a stronger relationship with some techniques than others.

**Roth, G. L. (2008). Confessions from a guy who teaches humor. *New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development*, 22(2), 55-60.**

<http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/nha3.10307>

Roth briefly discussed the significance of humor and his interest in it. He described a graduate course he developed, as a result of his interests, focused on humor and learning. He touched on some of the topics and readings the course entails. The course Roth described includes examination of the relevance of humor to a variety of contexts such as health, education, and work settings. Roth pointed out that his course covers ways in which humor might be used in teaching but he also acknowledged the necessity of research to support the purported effect of humor on learning.

**Sadowski, C. J., Gulgoz, S., & LoBello, S. G. (1994). An evaluation of the use of content-relevant cartoons as a teaching device. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 21, 368-370.**

The authors incorporated the use of cartoons in a social psychology course and asked students to evaluate the usefulness of those cartoons. The cartoons were given to students at the beginning of class and were discussed when applicable during the class lecture. Ratings indicated that students enjoyed the cartoons and found them instructive. Compared to a class that did not have the cartoons, the class with the cartoons had a higher rate of passing the corresponding exam (55% vs. 33%) although the difference was not statistically significant. The authors suggested that small sample size may have been a factor hampering statistical significance. They concluded that the data support the idea that content-related humor can be valuable.

**Sev'er, A., & Ungar, S. (1997). No laughing matter: Boundaries of gender-based humour in the classroom. *Journal of Higher Education*, 68, 87-105.**

<http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2959937>

Sev'er and Ungar investigated university students' and instructors' perceptions regarding the appropriateness of gender-based humor and the degree to which gender and setting (e.g., classroom, family gathering) affected these perceptions. Results indicated that men were more accepting of gender-based jokes than were women. Additionally, male students were the most accepting of gender-based jokes, whereas female instructors were the least accepting. Female students as well as female and male instructors considered gender-oriented jokes targeting women to be less acceptable than jokes targeting men.

**Shatz, M. A., & Coil, S. R. (2008). Regional campus teaching ain't a joke but humor can make it more effective. *AURCO Journal*, 14, 105-117.**

Shatz and Coil presented a number of guidelines for using humor in teaching and reviewed some of the associated research. For example, they suggested that instructor humor should primarily

be used to achieve learning objectives, fit the instructor's personality, and be tailored to the student audience. They advocated the use of visual humor in particular and provided a number of suggestions for sources of instructional humor (e.g., the Internet, extra credit assignments requiring students to locate humorous material relevant to the course content). Shatz and Coil also offered recommendations for how humor can be incorporated into lectures, exams, and online content. They concluded by emphasizing that the thoughtful use of humor can facilitate students' connections with the course material, each other, and the instructor.

**Teslow, J. (1995). Humor me: A call for research. *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 43(3), 6-28.**

Teslow discussed theories of humor and reviewed the literature on humor as an instructional device. He provided recommendations and implications, based on this review, for the role of humor in computer based instruction (CBI). Teslow concluded by suggesting a variety of potential research questions designed to examine the effect of humor on CBI.

**Tümkiye, S. (2007). Burnout and humor relationship among university lecturers. *Humor: International Journal Of Humor Research*, 21, 73-92.**



<http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/HUMOR.2007.004>

In this correlational study of 283 university lecturers in Turkey, the researchers found that aggressive humor (e.g., teasing others) and self-defeating humor were positively correlated with job "burnout." On the other hand, other types of humor (i.e., coping, self-enhancing, and affiliative) were negatively correlated with burnout.

**Wanzer, M. B., Frymier, A. B., & Irwin, J. (2010). An explanation of the relationship between instructor humor and student learning: Instructional humor processing theory. *Communication Education*, 59, 1-18.**



<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03634520903367238>

In this article the authors acknowledged that there is mixed evidence regarding the effect of instructor humor on learning. To account for these disparate findings, they proposed a theory: Instructional Humor Processing Theory. In explaining why instructor humor may or may not facilitate student learning, this theory focuses on a number of processes and variables including whether or not the incongruity of an instructor's humorous message is perceived and resolved as well as the type of humor used (i.e., appropriate or inappropriate). Wanzer, Frymier, and Irwin then tested their theory using a sample of 378 college students. Results provided partial support for Instructional Humor Processing Theory. Appropriate humor and self-disparaging humor (e.g., an instructor poking fun at himself or herself) were positively related to self-reported learning. Neither inappropriate humor nor unrelated humor had any relationship—positive or negative—to learning.

**Weaver, R. L., II, & Cotrell, H. W. (1987). Ten specific techniques for developing humor in the classroom. *Education, 108*(2), 167-179.**

Weaver and Cotrell provided descriptions of 10 strategies designed to enable instructors to increase their comfort-level incorporating humor in their teaching. The 10 strategies come from research that involved asking 150 undergraduates in an upper-level communications course how they would like instructors to show humor. For example, one of the recommendations involves breaking a lecture into segments while infusing humor or taking a “commercial break” (p. 170). In addition to describing and summarizing the students’ ideas, Weaver and Cotrell arranged these strategies hierarchically, beginning with those that seem easier to implement (i.e., “smile/be lighthearted”) and ending with more challenging strategies (i.e., “tell a joke or two/do outrageous things”). The authors also highlighted the importance of using humor in moderation.

**Wilson, J. H., & Taylor, K. W. (2001). Professor immediacy as behaviors associated with liking students. *Teaching of Psychology, 28*, 136-138.**

The authors investigated the relationship between instructor immediacy and students perceptions of instructors’ attitudes toward them. Results indicated that that instructors’ use of humor was associated with students’ perceptions that the instructor had a “positive attitude toward students,” “a genuine concern for students,” and “wants students to succeed” (pp. 136-137).

**Ziv, A. (1988). Teaching and learning with humor: Experiment and replication. *Journal of Experimental Education, 57*, 5-15.**



Ziv presented the findings from two studies examining the effect of instructors’ use of humor on learning. The first study employed a sample of students taking an introductory statistics course, whereas the second study sampled students in an introductory psychology course. In both studies, instructor humor had a positive effect on learning as evidenced by exam scores that were significantly higher than those of students who were not exposed to instructor humor.



***Book Chapters***

**Helitzer, M., & Shatz, M. (2005).** *Comedy writing secrets: The best-selling book on how to think funny, write funny, act funny, and get paid for it.* Cincinnati, OH: Writer's Digest Books.

In Chapter 18, "Teach, learn, and laugh" (pp. 315-326), Helitzer and Shatz provided practical suggestions for how and when to incorporate humor into instruction. While acknowledging that humor can increase students' interest and retention, the authors emphasized the importance of prudent use of instructional humor.

**Martin, D. M., Preiss, R. W., Gayle, B. M., & Allen, M. (2006).** A meta-analytic assessment of the effect of humorous lectures on learning. In B. M., Gayle, R. W. Preis, N. Burrell, & M. Allen (Eds.), *Classroom communication and instructional processes* (pp. 295-313). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum

The authors discussed the results of a meta-analysis of studies relating instructional humor to perceived and actual learning as well as enjoyment of the class. Additionally, they provided a brief overview of three major theories of humor—incongruity, relief, and superiority. The meta-analysis reveals that whereas students perceive that instructor humor enhances the classroom environment, makes lectures more appealing, and leads to improved learning, support for actual increases in learning is slight. The authors also briefly discussed other variables that may affect the instructor humor and learning relationship including relevance of the humor, humor orientation, and gender.


**Oppliger, P. A. (2003).** Humor and learning. In J. Bryant, D. R, Roskos-Ewoldsen, & J. Cantor (Eds.), *Communication and emotion: Essays in honor of Dolf Zillmann* (pp. 255-273). New York, NY: Routledge.

Oppliger reviewed research, particularly some of the earlier research, related to the role of humor in learning and teaching. Although the chapter addressed a range of research, work by Dolf Zillmann provided a focal point for much of the coverage. Oppliger described research findings related to how and when instructors use humor, the effect of instructor humor on the learning environment, and the effect of humor in textbooks. In closing, Oppliger emphasized that research demonstrates that instructor humor can enhance the learning environment; however, findings related to the effect of instructor humor on learning are equivocal.

**Pollio, H. R. (2002).** Humor and college teaching. In S. F. Davis and W. Buskist (Eds.), *The teaching of psychology: Essays in honor of Wilbert J. McKeachie and Charles Brewer.* (pp. 69-80). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Pollio began this chapter by suggesting that although comedians and instructors can often be described in similar ways (e.g., articulate, spontaneous, wise), some academicians have not been

comfortable with such comparisons. He hypothesized that this discomfort comes from the assumption that teaching should be a solemn endeavor and that humor only serves to divert attention. He asserted that the uneasiness about using humor in the classroom may also stem from a lack of knowledge about the effect of humor in teaching and learning. From there Pollio summarized some of the themes and research related to the use of humor in higher education including frequency of use, type of humor utilized, and target of the humor. He also discussed empirical work exploring the degree to which the humor used in teaching is relevant to the course material and whether or not humor affects learning and retention. Pollio concluded by proposing that in addition to the potential benefits of content-relevant humor, spontaneous humor can increase the “presentness” of instructors and students, as well as increase attendance and attention.

 **Powers, T. (2008). Engaging students with humor. In B. Perlman, L. I. McCann, & S. H. McFadden (Eds.), *Lessons learned, volume 3: Practical advice for the teaching of psychology* (pp. 53-62). Washington, DC: Association for Psychological Science.**

Drawing on both literature and experience, Powers asserted that humor is a tool instructors can use to connect with students, hold their attention, decrease test anxiety, and facilitate classroom management. Powers provided some direction in the use of humor. For example, he cautioned against humor that has the potential to offend or disaffect students and suggested that humor is most effective when it relates to the subject matter. Powers offered specific suggestions for ways to incorporate humor in teaching and stresses the importance of an instructor using the type of humor that fits his or her personality and teaching style. The chapter also included a list of references to the humor and teaching literature.

**Books**

**Berk, R. A. (2002). *Humor as an instructional defibrillator: Evidence-based techniques in teaching and assessment*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.**

The content of this book was divided into two parts that include four chapters on the use of humor in teaching and four chapters on the use of humor in testing/assessment. In the former part of the book, Berk also reviewed both the psychological and physiological benefits of humor and laughing. Throughout the book the reader is presented with specific techniques for incorporating humor in both teaching and assessment. The book contained a number of scholarly references related to humor, and Berk's infusion of humor in his writing made the read both informative and enjoyable.

**Berk, R. A. (2003). *Professors are from Mars, students are from Snickers: How to write and deliver humor in the classroom and in professional presentations*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.**

In this brief (185 pages) book, Berk discussed various forms of humor and provided suggestions on ways that humor can be used and effectively communicated in teaching. Additionally, he provided a chapter focused on the use of humor in formal presentations.

**Earleywine, M. (2011). *Humor 101*. New York, NY: Springer.**

This book provided a brief overview of humor as a process and construct and included chapters focused on relationships between humor and personality, health, and well-being. Earlywine also addressed the role of humor in education (pp. 129-138). However, he also stated that the type of humor employed is a critical component. For example, he suggested that aggressive humor can be harmful whereas affiliative humor can be helpful. He noted that humor can increase immediacy and lead to improved learning, the latter being the case when humor relevant to the subject matter is employed. Earleywine also discussed the role of humor in exams and textbooks.

**Franzini, L. R. (2012). *Just kidding: Using humor effectively*. Plymouth, UK: Rowman & Littlefield.**

Psychologist Louis Franzini discussed ways to increase one's use of humor in an effective way. Although the book does not directly target the use of humor in education, instructors may find some of the information useful, particularly a chapter—"Not All Humor Is Good"—that focused on the potential negative effects of humor.

**Kottler, J. A., Zehm, S. J., & Kottler, E. (2005). *On being a teacher: The human dimension*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.**

In a book that seems primarily geared toward K-12 teachers, Kottler and colleagues provided a contemplative discussion of the teaching profession. The authors briefly discussed the role a sense of humor can play in relating to students, sparking their interest, and capitalizing on “teachable moments.” They asserted that “Of the personal dimensions of teaching, humor is the most human of all” (p. 19).

**Lundberg, E. M., & Thurston, C. M. (2002). *If they're laughing they just might be listening: Ideas for using humor effectively in the classroom—even if you're not funny yourself*. Fort Collins, CO: Cottonwood Press.**

Although targeted more toward the elementary and high school classroom, this short book (96 pages) presented 29 techniques for integrating humor into teaching. In addition to providing a rationale for incorporating humor, the authors discussed the disadvantages of using humor and presented guidelines for its use. For example, Lundberg and Thurston suggested that instructors should “do what fits you and your personality” and “tie humor to the subject you are teaching” (p. 12).

**Martin, R. A. (2007). *The psychology of humor: An integrative approach*. London, England: Elsevier Academic Press.**

Humor researcher Rod Martin provided a comprehensive overview of the psychological research literature on humor. Chapters include a synopsis of research and theory examining humor from multiple psychological domains including cognitive, biological, and social psychological. In the chapter “Applications of humor in psychotherapy, education, and the workplace” (pp. 335-371), Martin described the use of humor in real-world settings and reviews the research relevant to the effect of humor in these settings. Particularly noteworthy for instructors is the portion of this chapter Martin devoted to the use of humor as an instructional tool (pp. 349-360). He summarized research related to the ways in which instructors use humor, the effect of humor on learning, as well as the use of humor in textbooks and on exams. Martin concluded this section of the chapter with a discussion of precautions related to instructional humor and a concise summary of the research examining humor in teaching.

**Shade, R. A. (1996). *License to laugh: Humor in the classroom*. Englewood, CO: Teachers Idea Press.**

Although this brief book is geared more toward elementary and high school teachers, some of the information presented is applicable to college instruction. Shade acknowledged that humor has been considered to be both a positive influence and a detrimental one. Shade, however, advocated the use of appropriate and purposeful humor in the classroom. Much of the book is devoted to examples of ways to gather and implement humorous material. Shade argued that

humor can lead to a more relaxed classroom atmosphere, but recommended using humor that relates to the material being presented. He provided specific guidelines and cautions for using humor in teaching.

**Tamblyn, D. (2003). *Laugh and learn: 95 ways to use humor for more effective teaching and training*. New York, NY: AMACON American Management Association.**

Tamblyn asserted that the use of humor provides a number of benefits including reducing stress, making information memorable, increasing cooperation, and activating learners' emotions. Tamblyn provided a number of concrete examples for incorporating humor into teaching and training activities. Chapters also included "Reflection Sections" which call for the reader to think about and answer questions related to the chapter material—for example, "Think of your three favorite teachers. Did any of them use humor? How?" (p. 15).

### Humor on Exams

**Berk, R. A. (2000). Does humor in course tests reduce anxiety and improve performance? *College Teaching*, 48, 141-148. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/87567550009595834>**

Reporting data across six years (1994-1999), Berk examined the effect of incorporating humor into exams in both undergraduate and graduate statistics courses. Students' self-report indicated that they consistently found that exam humor lowered their anxiety—the most common median rating across classes was “extremely effective.” Students also felt that the humor improved their exam performance, although these ratings were not quite as strong as those pertaining to anxiety reduction—the most common median rating was “very effective.” Berk ended with concrete suggestions and examples for using humor in exam items.

**Berk, R. A., & Nanda, J. (2006). A randomized trial of humor effects on test anxiety and test performance. *Humor*, 19(4), 425-454.**



Using a pretest/posttest design with an experimental and a control group, Berk and Nanda examined the effect of humorous test directions and humorous test items on test anxiety and performance across three exams in a graduate biostatistics course. Results indicated that the use of humorous directions did not reduce test anxiety but did improve exam performance. The use of humorous test items did not reduce anxiety or affect test performance. Berk and Nanda pointed out that the levels of pretest anxiety were very low in their sample and suggested that this “floor effect” may have made decreasing anxiety unlikely. Additionally, students in this sample consistently performed extremely well on all exams. This made it difficult to have any meaningful impact on performance. Berk and Nanda suggested that teaching practices may be more effective than humor at reducing test anxiety and improving exam performance.

**McMorris, R. F., Boothroyd, R. A., & Pietrangelo, D. J. (1997). Humor in educational testing: A review and discussion. *Applied Measurement in Education*, 10, 269-297. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15324818ame1003\\_5](http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15324818ame1003_5)**



In this extensive review, the authors examined research and provided detailed accounts of studies focused on the effect of humor on test performance. Additionally, they offered some explanations that might account for the sometimes mixed results of this literature. For example, they suggested that given the variability in types of humor, results might be affected by the nature of the humor employed in a study. They indicated that studies often differ in the way in which humor was integrated into the test (e.g., content-relevant, content-irrelevant). The authors concluded that there is not consistent support demonstrating a positive effect of humor on test performance. However, they did cautiously suggest guidelines for incorporating humor in testing. For example, they recommended that humor be used in exams if the instructor used humor in teaching, if the test is considered “low-stakes,” and if the students and the person writing the test share the same culture.

**Perlini, A. H., Nenonen, R. G., & Lind, D. L. (1999). Effects of humor on test anxiety and performance. *Psychological Reports, 84*, 1203-1213. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2466/pr0.1999.84.3c.1203>**

The authors examined the role of humor in lowering test anxiety and improving test performance. In this study, 85 undergraduates took six quizzes and two exams that varied in the amount of humor involved (i.e., no humor, moderate humor, high humor). Neither the amount of humor included in the quizzes and exams nor participants' level of text anxiety led to significant differences in performance. Exam performance was positively predicted, however, by students' disposition to use humor as a coping mechanism.


**Townsend, M. A., & Mahoney, P. (1981). Humor and anxiety: Effects on class test performance. *Psychology in the Schools, 18*, 228-234. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807\(198104\)18:2<228::AID-PITS2310180221>3.0.CO;2-N](http://dx.doi.org/10.1002/1520-6807(198104)18:2<228::AID-PITS2310180221>3.0.CO;2-N)**

In this study of 106 college students, the researchers added five humorous items to some students' exams (these additional items did not test course content and were not graded). Overall, the study found that students who were more anxious during the exam performed significantly worse on the exam with the extra humorous items than on the normal exam. Students with lower anxiety did a little better on the exam with the extra humorous items (this result approached significance).

**Townsend, M., Mahoney, P., & Allen, L. G. (1983). Student perceptions of verbal and cartoon humor in the test situation. *Educational Research Quarterly, 7*, 17-23.**

This study of 132 college students evaluated student perceptions of humor on tests. The authors concluded that students were overall positive regarding the use of humor on tests. They also compared student perceptions of funny test items to perceptions of Peanuts cartoons on the test. Students gave higher humor ratings to the humorous test items than they did to the cartoons; although, the students also indicated that the humorous test items had greater potential to be irritating and harm concentration.

## Humor in Online Teaching

 Anderson, D. G. (2011). Taking the “distance” out of distance education: A humorous approach to online learning. *MERLOT Journal of Teaching and Online Learning*, 7(1), 74-81.

Anderson compared two versions of an online undergraduate production operations management course—one that included humor and one that included little to no humor. Student participation in online discussions was greater in the humor condition. Additionally, students’ perceptions of the course content, instructor, and class environment were more positive in the humor condition. Anderson concluded that instructors’ use of humor has the potential to create a more personalized online class experience and increase students’ interest in participating in online discussions.

Goldsmith, D. (2001). Communication, humor and personality: Students’ attitudes to online learning. *Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium* (originally published in *Academic Quarterly Exchange, Summer 2001*).

Goldsmith conducted a qualitative study of students’ opinions regarding their experiences with online courses. Among other conclusions, Goldsmith suggested that an online instructor’s use of humor is an element that can “help bring students fully into this virtual classroom” (p. 11).

Hellman, S. V. (2006, October). *Online humor: Oxymoron or strategic teaching tool*. Presented at the Midwest Teaching-to-Practice Conference in Adult, Continuing, and Community Education, St. Louis, MO. Retrieved from [http://www.academia.edu/233200/Online\\_Humor\\_Oxymoron\\_or\\_Strategic\\_Teaching\\_Tool](http://www.academia.edu/233200/Online_Humor_Oxymoron_or_Strategic_Teaching_Tool)

Hellman briefly reviewed some of the research demonstrating the benefits of instructional humor in face-to-face courses. He suggested that online instructors can also use humor in teaching; however, he pointed out that certain forms of humor may be more difficult to discern in an online format (e.g., puns). Consequently he advocated that online instructors consider other forms of humor such as “cartoons, pictures, and sound files.” Hellman concluded by calling for increased research examining the extent to which findings on instructor humor in face-to-face courses generalizes to online courses.

James, D. (2004). A need for humor in online courses. *College Teaching*, 52, 93-94. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3200/CTCH.52.3.93-120>

James highlighted some of the research supporting the use of humor in teaching. He asserted that incorporating humor into online courses often requires much more work and planning for instructors. For example, he pointed out that online forms of humor are usually language-based



and that an instructor using humor in an online course does not typically have the nonverbal communicators of humor that an instructor in a face-to-face course does. James concluded by calling for colleges and universities to provide online instructors with training that will enable them to successfully incorporate humor into their teaching.

**Krovitz, G. E. (2010). Humor helps in online classes. Retrieved from <http://blog.ecollege.com/WordPress/?p=215>**

Although the link to Krovitz's (2007) article, *Using humor in online classes*, is broken, she included text from that article at the link above. Krovitz noted that although instructors in face-to-face courses use humor to connect with students and enhance attention, retention, and learning, instructors in online courses often do not. Alluding to the work of Shatz and LoSchiavo (2006) as well as Berk (2002), Krovitz presented multiple ideas for incorporating humor in an online course.

**LoSchiavo, F. M., & Shatz, M. A. (2005). Enhancing online instruction with humor. *Teaching of Psychology, 32*, 246-248.**




LoSchiavo and Shatz compared student performance in two versions of an online general psychology course, one of which was purposefully designed to contain more humor (e.g., jokes related to the material, cartoons on quizzes). Although the two courses did not differ significantly in terms of exam performance or final grades, students in the humor-infused section participated more and engaged in the “social/interactive” features of the course more frequently than their counterparts in the regular online section. The authors recommended that instructors use humor primarily as a pedagogical tool and not solely as a means to entertain students. They also suggested that because online humor can be easily misconstrued and, consequently, offend students, instructors should exercise care in their use of humor online. LoSchiavo and Shatz concluded that humor offers online instructors a tool for creating “interesting and inviting online courses” (p. 248).

**Shatz, M. A., & LoSchiavo, F. M. (2006). Bringing life to online instruction with humor. *Radical Pedagogy, 8*(2), 8. Retrieved from [http://www.radicalpedagogy.org/radicalpedagogy.org/Bringing\\_Life\\_to\\_Online\\_Instruction\\_with\\_Humor.html](http://www.radicalpedagogy.org/radicalpedagogy.org/Bringing_Life_to_Online_Instruction_with_Humor.html)**

Shatz and LoSchiavo discussed the relevance and benefits of humor in teaching, while acknowledging that few resources exist for incorporating humor into online teaching. Consequently, they discussed a variety of sources for instructional humor as well as a number of ways in which that humor can be employed in an online learning environment. The authors suggested that visual forms of humor, including amusingly altered photographs or videos, are particularly suited to online instruction. They also mentioned use of a discussion board in which students can post content-relevant humor or humor sources. Finally, Shatz and LoSchiavo

provided specific guidelines regarding the timing, duration, and format of the humor used in online instruction.

 Taylor, C., Zeng, H., Bell, S., & Eskey, M. (2010). Examining the do's and don'ts of using humor in the online classroom. *TCC Worldwide Online Conference, 2010(1)*, 31-46. Retrieved from <http://etec.hawaii.edu/proceedings/2010/Taylor.pdf>

Taylor and colleagues briefly reviewed some of the research related to the role of humor in teaching. They recommended a number of questions that instructors think about prior to implementing humor as a part of online instruction (e.g., Will the humor cause some students to feel excluded due to cultural differences? Is the humor tied to course material?). The authors made recommendations for the use of instructional humor and also discuss precautions for using humor as a teaching device. For example, they provided a helpful table describing legal concerns that can be associated with the instructional use of humor (e.g., copyright and plagiarism issues related to use of comedic material, humor that has the potential to be slanderous or offensive). For each of these issues, the authors provided relevant resources. Taylor and colleagues further cautioned online instructors to avoid offensive humor—humor that if posted online can also be printed or sent to university officials.

### Students' Perceptions of Instructor Humor

**Berk, R. A. (1996). Student ratings of 10 strategies for using humor in college teaching. *The Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, 7(3), 71-92.**

Berk suggested that humor can not only facilitate student learning but also breaks “down the barriers to communication between professors and students so that professors may better connect and communicate their message” (p. 73). Berk had students evaluate the perceived effectiveness of 10 humor techniques that the instructor had employed during undergraduate and graduate courses. These techniques included the following: “(a) humorous material on syllabi; (b) descriptors, cautions, and warnings on the covers of handouts; (c) opening jokes; (d) skits/dramatizations; (e) spontaneous humor; (f) humorous questions; (g) humorous examples; (h) humorous problem sets; (i) *Jeopardy*<sup>TM</sup>-type reviews for exams; and (j) humorous materials on exams” (p. 71). At the end of the course students rated these humor techniques in terms of the extent to which they reduced anxiety related to the course/material, improved the ability to learn, and optimized performance on exams and problem sets. Results indicated that students perceived the 10 humor techniques as “very effective” or “extremely effective” in reducing their anxiety, facilitating learning, and enhancing academic performance.

**Bryant, J., Comisky, P. W., Crane, J. S., & Zillmann, D. (1980). Relationship between college teachers' use of humor in the classroom and students' evaluations of their teachers. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 72, 511-519.**  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037//0022-0663.72.4.511>

Bryant and colleagues explored the relationship between instructor humor and student appraisals of instructors. Correlational analyses showed that instructors' use of humor was positively associated with students' perceptions of instructors' appeal and effectiveness, but not with perceived competence. However, the positive relationships emerged only for male instructors. Female instructors were perceived as less appealing, less effective, and less competent when students judged that their use of humor diverted attention from the didactic point of the lesson. These negative relationships did not hold for male instructors. In fact, male instructors' use of this type of humor was positively associated with perceived appeal. The authors suggested that the sex differences in this study may be a function of stereotyping on the part of students—stereotyping that characterizes the use of humor as acceptable for male instructors, but less so for female instructors.

**Frymier, A. B., Wanzer, M. B., & Wojtaszczyk, A. M. (2008). Assessing students' perceptions of inappropriate and appropriate teacher humor. *Communication Education*, 57, 266-288.** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03634520701687183>

The authors examined students' views about what types of instructor humor they considered appropriate and inappropriate. Results suggested that students' views related to some extent to student attributes and the perceived attributes of instructors. Additionally, possible correlates of these perceptions, such as humor orientation, were explored. The authors discussed three

theoretical approaches that offer reasons why students perceive some humor as appropriate but other humor as inappropriate. These three theoretical frameworks encompassed disposition and incongruity-resolution theories, student characteristics, and instructor characteristics.

**Frymier, A. B., & Weser, B. (2001). The role of student predispositions on student expectations for instructor communication behavior. *Communication Education, 50*, 314-326. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03634520109379258>**

Frymier and Weser studied the extent to which student variables (i.e., communication apprehension, humor orientation) related to their expectations for instructor communication. Students' humor orientation related to their expectations that instructors would display immediacy behaviors and was weakly related to expectations that instructors would employ humor. Students with a stronger focus on grades (i.e., grade orientation) had stronger expectations for instructors to utilize humor.

**Gorham, J., & Christophel, D. M. (1992). Students' perceptions of teacher behaviors as motivating and demotivating factors in college classes. *Communication Quarterly, 40*, 239-252. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/01463379209369839>**

Gorham and Christophel sampled 308 undergraduates from introductory communications courses to explore instructor behaviors that are perceived as motivating and those that are not. Students identified instructor use of humor as one motivating influence (frequency count placed it at 9.5 out of 20 behaviors). Instructor lack of sense of humor/loss of temper/pessimism was identified as demotivating (frequency count placed it at 19 out of 20 behaviors).

**McMorris, R. F., & Kim, Y. (2003). Humor for international students and their classmates: An empirical study and guidelines. *Journal of Excellence in College Teaching, 14*(1), 129-149.**



This study included 93 international students, most of whom were graduate students. Overall, the study indicated that the students appreciated the use of humor in the classroom. Students with better familiarity with English appreciated humor more. The study also provided descriptive statistics regarding their perceptions of the type of humor, the way they experience humor (during lecture or on an exam), and the effects of humor. The authors offered some guidelines regarding the use of humor in the classroom.

**Nienaber, K., Abrams, G., & Segrist, D. (2013, February). *Professor approachability: What's humor got to do with it?* Poster presented at the Southeastern Conference on the Teaching of Psychology, Atlanta, GA.**

In this study participants were presented with one of three scenarios involving a professor who used affiliative humor, aggressive humor, or no humor in teaching. Humor depictions were

based on items from the *Humor Styles Questionnaire* (Martin et al., 2003). Participants rated a series of items assessing their comfort level with the professor. These items were based on the *Professor-Student Rapport Scale* (Ryan, Wilson, & Pugh, 2011). Results of a 2 (Professor Gender) x 3 (Humor Style) ANCOVA (controlling for participant introversion) indicated that the participants' comfort level was highest for the professor using affiliative humor, followed by no humor, and aggressive humor. The effect of professor gender was not significant. The authors highlighted the finding that students showed a preference for a professor who used no humor over one who used aggressive humor.

**Stuart, W. D., & Rosenfeld, L. B. (1994). Student perceptions of teacher humor and classroom climate. *Communication Research Reports, 11*, 87-97. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/08824099409359944>**

Stuart and Rosenfeld examined the associations between the frequency and type of instructor humor on students' judgments of the classroom atmosphere. Their sample comprised 195 university students randomly selected from a variety of academic departments. Results suggested that when students viewed instructors as using no humor, they perceived the classroom as having a relatively formal classroom atmosphere—very controlled and task-focused but also low in instructor support. When instructors primarily used hostile humor, even when it was minimal, students perceived the classroom environment as nonsupportive, competitive, and controlled.

**Tamborini, R., & Zillmann, D. (1981). College students' perceptions of lecturers using humor. *Perceptual and Motor Skills, 52*, 427-432.**

The authors examined the relationship between instructor humor and attributions made about the instructor's appeal. One hundred undergraduates (50 female and 50 male) listened to an audio recording of a lecture. The lecture was modified to create four conditions: no humor, sexual humor, self-disparaging humor, and other-disparaging humor. Instructors' use of humor had no effect on perceptions of instructors' intelligence. Sex differences emerged in that an instructor using self-disparaging humor was seen as more appealing when the sex of the instructor and the student matched. However, when the instructor used sexual humor, that instructor was perceived as more appealing when the instructor was of the opposite sex of the student.

**Torok, S. E., McMorris, R. F., & Lin, W. C. (2004). Is humor an appreciated teaching tool? Perceptions of professors' teaching styles and use of humor. *College Teaching, 52*, 14-20. <http://dx.doi.org/10.3200/CTCH.52.1.14-20>**



Using a sample of undergraduates from three disciplines—biology, theater, and educational psychology—the authors examined students' views of instructor. Students perceived that their instructors were “witty” and used humor quite a bit. The majority of students advocated instructors' use of humor and considered it as adding positively to the classroom environment. The types of instructor humor most commonly experienced were funny stories, funny comments,

professional humor, and jokes. Similarly, instructor humor techniques recommended by students were funny stories, funny comments, jokes, and professional humor. Only about 25% of the students, however, recommended such humor on exams. Although sarcasm was considered an acceptable form of humor by 35% of the students, sexual humor, ethnic humor, and hostile humor were seldom recommended by students.

**Van Giffen, K. (1990). Influence of professor gender and perceived use of humor on course evaluations. *Humor - International Journal of Humor Research*, 3, 65-73.**  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/humr.1990.3.1.65>

Van Giffen examined the course evaluations of instructors across 11 disciplines. Although use of humor did not relate to the perceived friendliness or helpfulness of instructors, it did positively relate to perceived teaching effectiveness. Regression analyses indicated sex differences such that use of humor was a significant predictor of perceived teaching effectiveness and course evaluations for female instructors but not for male instructors.

**Wanzer, M. B., & Frymier, A. B. (1999). The relationship between student perceptions of instructor humor and students' reports of learning. *Communication Education*, 48, 48-62.** <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03634529909379152>

Wanzer and Frymier examined the role of humor orientation—in both students and instructors—in affective and behavioral indicators of learning. Their sample comprised 314 university students enrolled in an introductory communication course. Results indicated that the stronger an instructor's perceived tendency to engage in humor, the more positively students felt toward the course and the instructor, and the more course-related learning activities students reported participating in. Students who had a strong humor orientation and perceived their instructor as having a strong humor orientation showed a higher degree of affective and behavioral learning than students who perceived their instructors as low in humor orientation. Additionally, a stronger humor orientation in instructors was positively related to perceptions of instructor immediacy. The authors suggested that training sessions could be developed to assist instructors in incorporating humor into their teaching.

**Wanzer, M. B., Frymier, A. B., Wojtaszczyk, A. M., & Smith, T. (2006). Appropriate and inappropriate uses of humor by teachers. *Communication Education*, 55, 178-196.**



In this study, Wanzer and colleagues asked undergraduates to provide examples of both appropriate and inappropriate instructor humor that they had witnessed. Based on these data, the authors developed a typology that comprised four general categories of appropriate instructor humor and four inappropriate instructor humor categories. Appropriate humor, in order of the frequency as identified by students, were “related humor,” “humor unrelated to course material,” “self-disparaging humor,” and “unintentional humor.” Inappropriate humor, again in order of the frequency as listed by students, were “disparaging humor: targeting students,” “offensive humor,” “disparaging humor: targeting others,” and “self-disparaging humor.” The authors

provided examples of each category. For example, “sexual jokes/comments,” “morbid humor,” and “sarcasm” are specific types of “offensive humor.” The authors concluded by suggesting that this type of data can guide instructors who intend to use humor in their teaching.

**White, G. W. (2001). Teachers’ report of how they used humor with students perceived use of such humor. *Education, 122*, 337-347.**

White surveyed instructors and students for their views of how humor is used in teaching. Instructors clearly believed that they use humor to attract students’ attention, alleviate stress, and enhance the classroom environment. Similarly, students experienced instructors using humor to attract attention and alleviate stress. Instructors indicated rarely using humor against students and students’ self-reported experiences of instructor humor support this as a seldom used strategy. Although the majority of instructors did not consider humor to be acceptable for addressing difficult classroom situations, the majority of students indicated having instructors use humor in those situations.