



# EPISODE 1: HOW TO BE FUNNY IN ENGLISH

## Vocabulary Notes (from Episode 1)

### 1. Thought-provoking

Something that makes you think deeply or in a new way.

“The documentary was really thought-provoking — it made me reflect for days.”

### 2. Dysfunctional

Not working in a normal or healthy way, especially in relationships.

“He grew up in a dysfunctional family where no one listened to each other.”

### 3. To struggle

To find something hard or challenging.

“Many learners struggle with understanding fast speech.”

### 4. Diluted

Weakened or made less strong or effective.

“Her voice sounded diluted compared to when she spoke in her native language.”

### 5. To step into

To begin doing something new, especially a role or situation.

“He stepped into the position with confidence.”

### 6. Punchline

The final part of a joke that makes it funny.

“She waited a second, then delivered the punchline perfectly.”

### 7. Lets out a fart/sigh/moan

To suddenly make a sound from the body (fart, sigh, moan, etc.).

“He let out a massive sigh when the exam finally ended.”

## **8. Cope with**

To manage or deal with a difficult situation.

“She copes with her anxiety by practising deep breathing.”

## **9. Strengthen our social bonds**

To make our connections with other people closer or stronger.

“Laughing together helps strengthen our social bonds.”

## **10. Endorphins**

Chemicals your body releases that make you feel good or happy.

“Exercise helps release endorphins, which boost your mood.”

## **11. Observational humour**

Comedy based on everyday life and situations people recognise.

“His observational humour about public transport made the audience laugh.”

## **12. Stand-up comedy**

A form of comedy where someone tells jokes to a live audience.

“She started doing stand-up comedy in small clubs in her city.”

## **13. Wordplay**

Playing with words that sound alike or have double meanings to create humour.

“The title used clever wordplay that made people smile.”

## **14. Dad joke**

A simple, usually silly joke — often involving puns.

“I only know 25 letters of the alphabet. I don’t know y.” — classic dad joke.

## **15. Sarcasm**

Saying the opposite of what you mean to be funny or express annoyance.

“ ‘Oh brilliant, another meeting!’ she said with heavy sarcasm.”

## **16. Dry (humour)**

Humour delivered in a serious way, often without showing emotion.

“His dry humour made some people laugh and others confused.”

## **17. Groundbreaking**

Very new and different from what has been done before.

“This method of teaching pronunciation is truly groundbreaking.”

### **18. Cheat code**

An easy or clever way to get better results (borrowed from video games).  
“Watching interviews is a cheat code for learning real spoken English.”

### **19. Lean into this experience**

To embrace or accept a situation fully, especially one that’s challenging.  
“Instead of avoiding mistakes, try leaning into the experience.”

### **20. Tap into**

To make use of something valuable (like a skill, feeling, or perspective).  
“She tapped into her bilingual background to connect with students.”

### **21. Take the pressure off**

To reduce stress or remove the feeling of needing to be perfect.  
“Working in small groups can take the pressure off speaking in class.”

# Transcript: Episode 1 – How to Be Funny in English

Hi, and welcome to the Grow Your English with Jamie podcast. Let me introduce myself if you don't already know me.

As the name of the podcast suggests, I'm Jamie. I'm a former university lecturer in Phonology, and now I'm a British English Pronunciation Coach online.

And I've created this podcast to help you, and other English users, on your English pronunciation journey, as well as to help with your listening skills, your vocabulary knowledge and your overall growth in English.

To support you, I've also made full written transcripts available for you to download, with vocabulary notes, and you can find these at [growyourenglish.com](https://growyourenglish.com)

Besides language skills, my other aim is to provide you with interesting and **thought-provoking** content in English, so that you can actually enjoy this podcast, without it feeling too much like work. We'll cover a range of topics in self-development, society, language, culture, and just some random interesting topics, too.

So, are you ready? Then let's start.

Episode 1. How To Be Funny In English.

When the TV show Modern Family first came out, I loved it. It's a series about a **dysfunctional** family set in California, and it's a comedy. But my favourite scene from this series actually wasn't very funny at all — it was profound.

Gloria is a character from Colombia who is usually portrayed as strong and confident, but she has a rare moment of vulnerability, when her American husband allows their American son to skip Spanish class. And she breaks down, with the line 'For once it would be nice to speak to someone in my own language in my own home. Do you even know how smart I am in Spanish? Of course you don't.'

Back when I first watched this episode in 2014, this sentence hit me deeply. I had just moved to Japan as part of my degree, but despite having a solid level in Japanese, I really **struggled** to 'be myself' in the language. I felt like a **diluted**, weak version of my English personality, and especially, my sense of humour just wasn't translating into my new language. Like Gloria, I just wanted to say, I promise I sound funnier and more intelligent in English — this isn't the real me!

Now, 10 years later, working as an English pronunciation coach, I realise that this experience that Gloria and I share is far from unique to us. So many of my clients over the years have exclaimed their frustration at struggling to express their personality in English, and especially their humour. Have you ever felt like your personality disappears a bit when you're speaking in English? Maybe you can relate to this feeling too.

But that's why, in this episode, my mission is to help you discover the secret to being funny in English, to make you feel more like yourself in English. We'll include the reasons why humans laugh in general, then we'll uncover what types of humour are particularly appreciated in the English-speaking world, and we'll finish with 3 practical pieces of advice for you **to step into** your own humour in English. So, by the end of this episode, you'll be ready to feel more like yourself in English than you could've imagined.

But why do humans laugh in the first place? Well, there are 3 main theories.

First up, the unexpected. Humour often stems from an unexpected outcome. That's why we laugh when a joke takes an unexpected turn with a clever **punchline**.

We laugh due to a violation of our expectations or a violation of logic, as long as this violation is harmless, and doesn't actually do any damage — and this is according to researchers from the Colorado Humour Research Lab — yep, apparently that's a real place.

For example, imagine you're in a crowded lift, it's completely silent, and then all of a sudden, someone **lets out a massive fart**. Many people would laugh here, because it's a violation of the expectation to, well, to not fart in public. But it's funny because it's still a harmless situation, and no damage is actually done. Well, at least, hopefully, no damage is done.

Besides laughing because something is unexpected, we also laugh due to our biology, since laughter does some amazing things for our bodies. It cuts down our stress hormones, it relaxes our muscles, and it can even calm down a rapid heartbeat. Have you ever made a joke in a stressful situation or laughed during an awkward moment? Well, that was probably your body trying to **cope with** the stress or the anxiety of the situation.

The third and final piece of the puzzle of why we laugh is connection. Laughter is something that we share to **strengthen our social bonds**, and that's the main theory as to why monkeys laugh, as well. Have you ever noticed how laughing with someone can make you feel closer to them? It's because laughing with someone actually releases more **endorphins** than just laughing on our own, it's as if we've been designed to laugh WITH other people.

So, humans laugh to respond to the unexpected, to regulate our bodies, and to build connection with the people around us.

As much as this might be true globally, the ways in which we express our humour vary significantly from culture to culture — as I'm sure you've noticed on your own language-learning journey. So what about the English-speaking world in particular — what types of humour are popular?

Well the most common is **observational humour**. This is based on everyday situations that most people find relatable, like romance, technology, or just the things and people in your surroundings. There's a Brazilian comedian called Rafi Bastos, who does **stand-up comedy** in English in the USA, where he now lives, and in one interview, he said this. 'Many jokes, you can translate and they work in English as well. When you talk about marriage and dating and Tinder, those subjects are international. Talking about my kid and pregnancy — we are all the same in those areas'.

Another very common type of humour in English is **wordplay**, where the fun comes from playing with words that have several meanings or similar sounds. And wordplay that's a bit silly might even be called a '**dad joke**', for example, what did the ocean say to the beach? Nothing, it just waved. 'Wave' has a double meaning, of waves in the water, and waving to say hi, so this is a classic play on words, and this kind of wordplay can be found everywhere in the UK and the USA.

Now, the third and final type of humour that's popular in the English-speaking world is **sarcasm**, and this involves saying the opposite of what you mean. A classic example is Chandler Bing from Friends, and he's known for his sarcastic comments like, "Could I BE anymore excited?" when actually he means that he's not excited at all. And we often use sarcasm to express our feelings without explicitly stating them, so it's popular in both British and American culture.

But, there is one big difference. British sarcasm is rather different from American sarcasm in its delivery. Americans usually use an exaggerated tone and expressive facial cues, just like the American Chandler Bing saying 'Could I BE anymore excited?'. If Chandler were British, he would probably say, with a straight face and without any emotion of course, something like 'How exciting.' to portray his lack of excitement.

And this ties in to the major difference between British and American humour. Have you ever felt a different flavour of comedy watching a British series compared to watching an American one? Well, American humour is more expressive and exaggerated in general, while British humour is more **dry**, and delivered with less emotion.

And although I've been saying British and American humour up until now, we can note two broad styles of humour across the Western English-speaking world in general. On one side, you have the typically dry humour found in the UK, Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand. On the other, is the more expressive style of humour in the US — and Canadian humour sits somewhere between the two.

But enough about us Brits and Americans. Let's talk about you. What's the secret so that YOU can feel funnier and more like yourself in English? Well let me share 3 secrets with you, that I've realised over my years of language learning and language teaching, and the last one might really surprise you.

Secret number one is simple: work on your English skills. **Groundbreaking**, I know. That was some emotionless British sarcasm for you there, by the way. To enjoy and create humour in your second language, you need a decent level of vocabulary and idioms. And the best way to do this? Well, engaging with authentic English material to learn new expressions — which is what you're actually already doing right now, so well done on that. A good knowledge of English pronunciation also helps, because similar sounding words are often the punchline of our humour. And guess what? You've got an English pronunciation coach in your ears right now, that has a free 30-page essential pronunciation guide, that you can download at [growyourenglish.com](https://growyourenglish.com)

I actually recommend talk shows for this, because you can observe natural, funny interactions between the hosts and the guests, it's like a **cheat code** for seeing how humour is actually used in real-life conversations.

My personal favourite is the Graham Norton Show, because it has a mixture of British and American celebrities. And some positive reality TV shows like the Great British Bake Off are also fantastic for understanding how humour fits in to everyday conversations.

Now, secret number three is the surprising one. Often, my clients worry that being a non-native speaker is harming their ability to be themselves or to be funny in English. But let me tell you, this might actually be your special superpower. Think about it, if humour is all about observational skills and unexpected conclusions, as someone who is from a different culture with a different first language, you have a unique way of observing the English-speaking world, and you're naturally going to come to unexpected conclusions, conclusions that would never be spotted by people who speak English as their first and only language.

And there are many successful non-native comedians, that actually **lean into this experience** to be even funnier in English. Some of my personal favourites are, Yumi Nagashima, a Japanese native living in Canada, Sergi Polo, who is from Spain but now lives in the UK, and Uyen Ninh, a Vietnamese woman in Germany who creates funny social media videos about her experiences. And if you watch any of their performances on YouTube, you'll see just how they use their unique observations to come to unexpected conclusions that are both incredibly funny and relatable.

Consider this quote from Rafi Bastos, the Brazilian comedian I mentioned earlier. He says, 'I think it's amazing that there's a likability to a foreigner talking in English. In Portuguese, I'm considered an a-hole. But in English, there's a likability behind the way I speak, and I'm taking advantage of it. I found a new perspective on my own personality talking in a different language. That's the craziest thing for me.'

And just like all these comedians, your unique perspectives and experiences are not a barrier to being funny in English — they're actually a powerful tool for humour that you can **tap into**. So, embrace it and use it to your advantage. Look, it's in our biology to want to laugh as it has so many benefits for our bodies. And it's in our human nature to want to laugh at things to build connection with people too.

We want to laugh — the barrier is lower than you think. So, if you **take the pressure off** of yourself, and lean into your unique viewpoint, you might just find yourself being funnier in English than you ever imagined.

And that's it for the first episode of the Grow Your English with Jamie podcast. Thank you so much for being here, I really appreciate it. And just a quick reminder that you can go to my website [growyourenglish.com](https://growyourenglish.com) to download the free written transcripts of the episodes with vocabulary notes, as well as my free 30-page essential pronunciation guide.

And you can join me next time, where we'll be exploring the pressure to be perfect, both in life and in language learning, as well as the surprising reason why aiming for perfect actually usually gives us the opposite result.

Take care, and see you next time.