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Putting Humor to Work

How to use humor
effectively and ethically in
the office and at home

Michael K. Cundall, Jr.

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Michael K. Cundall, Jr.
Department of Liberal Studies
North Carolina Agri & Tech State Univ
Summit, NC, USA

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*This book is dedicated to my students, past, present, and future.
You have always provided me with new ways to laugh. It has been
a privilege to be your teacher.*

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***A note about chapter titles. As you may have noticed, each chapter contains a play on a famous children's book. I figured a little levity at the outset of every chapter would be fun. We can be serious and have fun at the same time—a fact that we seem to have forgotten.*



CHAPTER 1

An Introduction: Harold and the Laughter Crayon

From there to here, and here to there, funny things are everywhere
—Dr. Seuss

Abstract This introductory chapter sets forth the general plan and goals of the book. It covers the content of the chapters in synopsis and gives highlights of the overall content of the book. The chapter ends with some biographical information about the author and some helpful links and information that will allow the interested reader to more fully look into research on humor, laughter, and mirth. The overall book focuses on more recent research so as to give the reader an up-to-date rendering of the field of study.

Keywords Humor • Laughter • Mirth

WELCOME TO HUMOR STUDIES

Every couple of years a researcher or some interested person writes a book on the value of humor. That's because about that same time interval, another person stumbles into an area of research called humor studies. They become enamored of the field, see the value in it, and are confused

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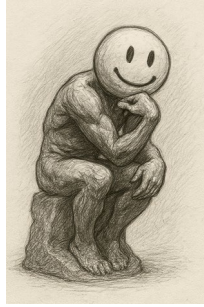
as to why more hasn't been done in this area. You may be on the cusp of such a journey yourself if you've picked up this book.

It's a wonderful journey, I can tell you from experience. I actually started a bit earlier than most. My interest in humor began when I was working on my dissertation on autism, where I thought humor could tell us something about autism. While I didn't get to pursue the research at all, it was the first step on my journey to where I am now.

The world of laughter and humor is complex, interesting, constantly surprising, and one of those areas where you get to use jokes and other bits of humor as part of your research. While the study of physics, biology, psychology, and engineering bring us great discoveries and wonder, the study of humor rivals them all in that our subject matter brings us laughs. There are worse ways to spend an evening for sure.

Many have found the study of humor, laughter, and mirth to be endlessly rewarding. Take Norman Cousins for example. His work as a patient who had become disenchanted with the way his medical treatment was going had him decide to augment his treatment with steady doses of laughter, humor, and mirth. His recovery and subsequent writing about it ushered in a new generation of researchers who have investigated the benefits of humor and laughter in medical care. My first anthology, *Cases on Applied and Therapeutic Humor*, co-edited with Dr. Stephanie Kelly, focuses on how one can use humor effectively in medical care.

The interest in humor crosses into many disciplines. Biologists wonder about the evolutionary origins and adaptive benefits of humor and laughter. Cognitive scientists wonder how we process humor and what it shows us about our mental architecture. Ha-ha and ah-ha may be more related than you think. Neuroscientists explore the areas of the brain responsible for the processing of humor as well as looking into why humor, laughter, and mirth feel so good. Medical researchers have known for years that humor, laughter, and mirth are beneficial for recovery and resilience. If you want to feel less apprehensive, literally feel less pain, a healthy dose of laughter and mirth go a long way. They're way better than morphine! Even lowly philosophers like me have found much that's interesting in laughter and humor.



Thought Break

Throughout this text there will be a text box appearing off to the side. The content of these boxes will focus on practical aspects, tips, and/or techniques for folks to increase humor. The goal is to provide you with ways to apply the content you've read. These thought boxes come with a smiley face emoji in August Rodin's 'Thinker' pose. Pay attention to the hairstyles.

The above list of people and disciplines isn't exhaustive. Sociologists, psychologists, communication experts, comics (obviously), human resources researchers, leadership scholars, and more, all have found ways to look at humor, laughter, and mirth. Any person willing to look can find that they are quite influential in our lives. If you doubt the influence that humor, laughter, and mirth have, take a look around you the next time you go out. How long does it take you to see a humorous bumper sticker on a car or a meme on your social media feeds? If you picked up your phone right now, it would take seconds to find some sort of humor in that feed.

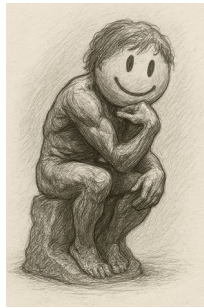
Given the diversity of perspectives that come to bear on humor studies, it's truly an interdisciplinary endeavor. This means that humor and laughter get discussed and researched through a variety of lenses. None are better than the other, and each can provide insight that helps other disciplines. Indeed, you will see much of this as this book unfolds. The interdisciplinarity of humor studies has benefits and drawbacks. One of the drawbacks is that one can't hope to cover all there is to be covered. Even this book only looks at a somewhat narrow range of issues related to

humor and laughter. This isn't a criticism; it's simply a fact. This book will cover as much as it can without becoming unwieldy. If I had elected to be as broad as I could be, I don't think the book would have ever been finished.

The broad range of disciplinary influence in humor studies is something that I consider as a strength. There is so much that we can know and the next discovery might come from the reading of an article from outside your field that offers insight into your discipline. This also means there is still more that could be explored. This book should be seen as something that can get you started in the world of humor studies with the express desire to have you go off into areas you feel are important.

WHAT THIS BOOK IS ABOUT

This book is all about the ways humor, laughter, and mirth intersect with two major areas of our lives: work and communication. There are other areas that could be and should be discussed, but those are for other books. We will have enough on our plate with just these two areas. Of course, being a philosopher, I'll probably drop a little philosophy into the mix here and there. One has to represent, as they say.



Thought Break

Where do you see humor being the most influential in your life? Where is it least present? Is there a big difference? Why do you think that is?