

***Easy English!***  
*By Adrian Wallwork*

# *Jokes*



*Have a Laugh and  
Improve Your English*

 **Springer**

# **Easy English!**

## **Series Editor**

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English for Academics SAS

Pisa, Italy

Easy English is a series of books intended for students and teachers of English as a foreign language.

More information about this series at <http://www.springer.com/series/15586>

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# Student's Introduction

## What Is *Easy English*?

*Easy English* is a series of books to help you learn and revise your English with minimal effort. You can improve your English by

- reading texts in English that you might well normally read in your own language e.g. jokes (this book), personality tests, lateral thinking games, wordsearches.
- doing short exercises to improve specific areas grammar and vocabulary, i.e. the areas that tend to lead to the most mistakes - the aim is just to focus on what you really need rather than overwhelming you with a mass of rules, many of which may have no practical daily value.

## What Level of English Do I Need in Order to Benefit from This Book?

If your level is intermediate and above, then you should be able to understand the majority of the jokes, apart perhaps from those that are based purely on word play.

One massive benefit of jokes is that they are generally short and also contain a lot of dialogue. The sentences are also simple in structure. Even if you don't understand the joke the first time you read it, re-reading it only involves another 30 seconds of your time.

## How Will This Book Help Me Improve My English?

The aim of this series is to enable you to do something you would have done in your own language and can have fun doing in English. The added benefit is that in reading the jokes in this book, you will learn a lot of new vocabulary and revise your knowledge of grammar.

Jokes are great for learning vocabulary, expressions and grammar.

Jokes are also designed to be retold. If you learn a joke by heart and tell it to other people, then by doing so you will also learn the grammar involved in a specific context which should help you to remember the rules.

Because jokes are short, you can read them quickly. So this is the kind of book that you can pick up and put down easily. You can set yourself any easy task such as to read two jokes a day. Most other kinds of reading exercise require much more time and dedication on the part of the reader.

## **How Will I Know Whether I Have Understood the Joke or Not?**

The first test is whether you smiled or laughed!

In any case, the jokes contain a related exercise designed to reveal whether you have understood the joke or not. Typical exercises include:

- A joke is presented to you but with the paragraphs mixed up. Your task is to put them in the correct order. This obviously entails you understanding the structure of the joke.
- The joke has a choice of three punch lines. If you select the correct one, this should be an indicator that you have understood the joke.
- The joke has the verbs in the infinitive form (or a choice of two forms). Your task is to choose the correct form/tense.
- Several two-line jokes are presented together. You have to match the first line and the second line.
- A joke is presented with some key words missing. You have to insert the right word in the right place.

Obviously in some cases you will not 'get' (i.e. understand) the joke. Bear in mind that this might not be a language problem, but simply that you cannot see the humor in the joke (because the joke for you is not actually funny). In any case, if you don't understand the joke, this is a great opportunity for you to ask a native speaker to explain it to you.

## **How Difficult to Understand Are the Jokes in This Book?**

The chapters are not in any order of difficulty.

The jokes that appear in this book are authentic. This means that they have not been adapted to suit a non-native learner. However the jokes that have been selected do not generally contain much slang, and the 'bad' language has been reduced. The overall idea was to give you an opportunity to experience jokes in the same way as a native speaker might experience them.

Jokes by nature require a good knowledge of the language. They also contain some unusual words. However this does not mean that you will not be able to 'get' (i.e. understand) the jokes.

## **How Funny Are the Jokes?**

This is an impossible question to answer.

The main purpose of this book was not simply to make you laugh, but to improve your English. However, I hope you like my selection of jokes.

My criteria for choosing the jokes was that they had to make me smile and/or contain some useful vocabulary, phrase, or example of grammar usage. Humor is totally subjective. Some jokes may make you laugh out loud (I hope!), others may amuse you a little less, others (a minority I hope) you may think are not funny at all.

## **What Should I Do if I Don't Understand Some of the Words in the Joke?**

Below each joke is a list of words (glossary). This glossary is shaded in grey and contains words that you might be unfamiliar with plus their definitions. Note: These definitions are for the word as it is used in the particular context of the joke.

If the word you don't know is not in the glossary, then try using [context.reverso.net](#) to see the word used in context and the various translations into your own language.

Alternatively do a Google search. In the search box, simply type in the word followed by 'definition'. This will automatically generate a definition.

You can also hear the pronunciation of the word by clicking on the sound icon - both for Google and [context.reverso](#).



## How Should I Use the Glossaries at the End of Each Chapter?

These glossaries list alphabetically the words in the mini-glossaries (shaded in grey throughout each chapter). You can use them to:

- check whether you remember the meanings of the words or phrases. To do this, simply cover the right-hand column
- use the white space between the words and their definitions in order to write down the translation of the word/phrase

Note: The glossaries only contain the definition of the word/phrase as used within the context of the joke.

## How Does a Joke Work?

A joke typically takes the form of a story, generally with dialog. A joke is generally structured in three stages as follows:

- 1) a setting - the context, scene and characters of the joke are established. This setting may be well already familiar to the listener, as many jokes on a similar topic follow an identical or very similar structure. This stage of the joke will also probably indicate who, if anyone, is going to be the 'butt' of the joke. The 'butt' means the target, the person/s who we are going to laugh at. Typical butts of jokes are lawyers (and other professions), drunks, stupid people, and unfortunately women (though I have reversed the trend by focusing mainly on jokes where men, rather than women, are the target).
- 2) false expectation/interpretation - the joke leads you to expect a certain outcome.
- 3) punch line - this is the final line/sentence of the joke, which gives a conflicting meaning to the expectation/interpretation of stage 2.

## How Do People Typically Introduce a Joke?

If you want to recount one of the jokes in this book to another person, you could begin, as a native-speaker would begin, by saying one of the following:

That reminds me of a joke I know/a joke I heard. ...

Have you heard the joke about ...?

Do you want to hear a good joke ...?

So, there's an engineer, a computer programmer and an elephant ....

## **What Comments Do People Typically Make After Hearing a Joke?**

If they don't understand the joke, they might say: "I don't get it"

So you need to prepare an explanation of the joke for the eventuality that someone doesn't understand it.

If they think the joke is unsuitable, they might say: "Oh, that's bad".

In this case you may think you need to justify why you thought the joke was acceptable/appropriate.

If they like the joke, they might say: "That was a great joke, where did you get it?"

In this case 'get' means 'find'.

## **If I Tell a Joke Do I Need to Use the Exact Same Wording as the Original Joke?**

No. But you do need to stick to the same structure. And be careful that the punch line is as close to the original as possible. In fact, even if you tell the joke badly (e.g. you forget a couple of words, you hesitate, or you start again), the joke can still be funny providing that you get the punch line correct.

## **What Kind of Jokes Are Included in this Book?**

The book contains no racist jokes and I have tried to avoid jokes that might be considered not politically correct. However, given the male dominated world we live in, women are far more frequently the butt of jokes than men. I have tried to compensate for this by including several feminist jokes.

In any case, I apologize if by chance you do find any jokes in this book that you consider to be unsuitable in some way.

## What Tenses Tend to Be Used in Jokes?

Jokes tend to be told in two tenses: the present simple and the past simple. As you know, the PRESENT SIMPLE is usually used in English to talk about a regular event:

I walk to university on foot.

She plays tennis every day.

We live on the third floor.

In the context of jokes, the present simple is known as the historical present. It is used to make the joke/story come alive. It's as if we are participating in the situation, or at least observing it first hand. Here is an example:

A man walks into a bar and orders a beer. After a few minutes he says to the bartender, "Hey, if I show you the most amazing thing you've ever seen, will you give me another beer on the house?" "We'll see," said the bartender, "I've had a lot of strange people come in here, and I've seen some pretty amazing things in my day." So the man pulls out a hamster and a tiny piano from his briefcase, and puts them on the bar. Then the hamster begins to play Chopin. "Not bad," said the bartender, "but I'll need to see more." "Okay, hold on," says the man as he pulls out a frog from his briefcase. Suddenly the frog starts singing "My Way." A patron nearby jumps up from his table and says, "That's amazing! I'll give you \$1,000 right now for that frog!" "Sold!" says the man, who exchanges the frog for the cash. The bartender then says to the man, "You know, it's none of my business, but I think you just gave away a real fortune in that frog." "Not really," says the man, "the hamster is also a ventriloquist."

The historic present is the tense that drives the joke forward and recounts the main actions.

However, within the joke itself, other tenses can be used. The above joke also contains examples of the present perfect and the future using *will*:

*The most amazing thing you've ever seen.* (present perfect: previous experience from the past leading up to the present moment)

*I've had a lot of strange people come in here, and I've seen some pretty amazing things in my day.* (present perfect: previous experience not specifically related to a single point of time in the past)

*Will you give me another beer on the house?* (*will* used as a request)

*I'll need to see more.* (*will* to indicate a decision made now)

*I'll give you \$1,000 right now* (*will* to indicate a decision made now, an intention)

The other tense used to recount the main actions of a joke is the past simple, sometimes in combination with the past continuous which indicates something that was already taking place when a second action intervened. Below is an example:

A boy with a monkey on his shoulder was walking down the road when he passed a policeman who said, "Now, now young lad, I think you had better take that monkey to the zoo." The next day, the boy was walking down the road with the monkey on his shoulder again, when he passed the same policeman. The policeman said, "Hey there, I thought I told you to take that monkey to the zoo!" The boy answered, "I did! Today I'm taking him to the cinema."

Note that in the above joke, the short actions are expressed using the past simple: *passed, said, answered*. The long actions, in this case *walking*, are expressed by the past continuous.

## **What Are the Other Books in this Series? Which One Should I Read Next?**

Currently there are six books in the series.

Jokes - *have a laugh and improve your English*

Test your personality - *have fun and learn useful phrases*

Wordsearches - *widen your vocabulary in English*

Word games, riddles and logic tests - *tax your brain and boost your English*

Top 50 grammar mistakes in English - *how to avoid them*

Top 50 vocabulary mistakes in English - *how to avoid them*

These books are designed to be dipped into rather than being read from the first page to the last. 'Dipped into' means that you can pick up the book and read any page you like, and for as long as you like.

You are likely to have more fun with the books if you read two or three at the same time. So rather than spending the next month reading 200 jokes or learning/revising 100 words, you might find it more fun and stimulating to read a few jokes one day, and do a few wordsearches or word games the next day.

# Teacher's Introduction

## Why Use Jokes?

Jokes are very motivating for students. They are short (generally) and memorable. And because they are designed to be retold, your students can practice telling them and at the same time learn, for example, some grammar usage (see *What tenses are used in jokes?* in the Student's Introduction).

You can do lots of other joke-related activities:

- Students can translate jokes from their own language into English and discuss the difficulties of doing so (puns, culture etc.)
- Students can try and explain the humor to each other
- As a class, you can analyze how jokes are typically structured (see next subsection)
- You can analyze the use of vocabulary e.g. often synonyms are used in jokes, particularly for the main characters (*this guy ... so the man ... and then the bloke*), in order for the teller to create variety and not to have to keep repeating the same word
- You can teach the language associated with jokes (*butt, quip, punch line* etc.) and the expressions typically used to talk about or react to a joke, e.g. *I didn't get it. D'you get it? I didn't find it very funny. That's so funny!*

## How Do Jokes Work? How Are they Structured?

Jokes are designed to play with the listener's expectations. If I ask you:

What do zebras have that no other animals have?

Your first thought is likely to be stripes, given that no other animals have stripes. But actually the answer is 'baby zebras'. It is the unexpected answer that makes you laugh.

Again, if I ask you:

How do you get an elephant into a matchbox?

This will set your brain thinking about the massive size of an elephant and the impossibility of it ever being able to get inside a matchbox. And you start trying to think of some 'logical' answer, even though the situation is clearly absurd. The answer is in fact: Take out all the matches first.

Some jokes come in pairs or in a series. The first joke gets you to think in one way, and then the second reveals that you were headed in totally the wrong direction:

How do you get two whales in a Mini?

One in the front, one in the back.

How do you get two ants in the same Mini?

You can't. It's full of whales.

How do you get four whales in a Mini?

Two in the front, two in the back.

How do you know when a whale is visiting your house?

There's a Mini outside with four whales in it.

Below is a snippet of dialog from the movie *Four Weddings and a Funeral*. The dialog begins:

A: So, John, how's that, how's that gorgeous girlfriend of yours??

B: She's no longer my girlfriend.

When you hear "She's no longer my girlfriend" you imagine that they have broken up, or for some reason they are no longer together. In a real situation your inclination might be to offer some form of condolence, which is what John's friend does:

A: Oh dear. Still, I wouldn't get too gloomy about it. Rumor has it she never stopped bonking old Toby de Lisle just in case you didn't work out.

B: She's now my wife!?

A: Excellent! Excellent! Congratulations!

So all the time, the joke is taking you in one direction before suddenly hitting you with a totally unexpected outcome.

[The analysis of the joke owes much to Francisco Yus's analysis of the same joke in his paper *A relevance-theoretic classification of jokes*. Yes, jokes are also widely studied in academia!]

You can get students to analyze the jokes you give them in a similar way to the Four Weddings joke analysis.

## How Can I Exploit a Joke in the Classroom?

Read this joke and think how you could exploit it in the classroom. Imagine that you have pre-taught any key vocabulary (e.g. *furniture importer*, *four-poster bed*).

On the last night of his first buying trip to Paris, a young furniture importer from America met an attractive French girl in the hotel elevator. She spoke no English, however, and neither of them could understand a word the other was saying.

So the resourceful merchant devised a means of communication for the occasion. Taking out a pencil and a notebook, he drew a sketch of a taxi. The girl nodded approvingly, and off they went for ride in the Bois de Boulogne.

A little later, he drew a picture of a table laden with food and wine bottles, and when she nodded her assent, they headed for a sumptuous meal at Maxim's. After dinner, she was delighted with a sketch he made of a dancing couple, so they danced the evening away at a popular Left Bank night club.

Finally, the girl picked up the pencil and, with a knowing glance at her clever escort, she proceeded to make a crude drawing of what was clearly intended to be a four-poster bed. He stared at his charming companion in amazement. When he took her home, while he was kissing her goodnight on her doorstep, during the long ride back to his hotel, and even on his flight back the following afternoon, he still couldn't figure out how she had known he was in the furniture business.

Below are some ideas. You could:

- Add two more punch lines and give students three alternatives to choose from.
- Scramble the five paragraphs and put them into the correct order.
- Put once sentence in the wrong position. Students then have to find the sentence and relocate it to its correct position.
- Delete words (or phrases or complete sentences), put them in a box, and get students to insert them in the correct places.
- Put students in pairs and get them to explain the meaning of the joke to each other - they may have interpreted it in different ways.
- Ask them specific vocabulary questions. For example: Which adjective+noun combinations are used to refer to the man? [Answer: young furniture importer, resourceful merchant, clever escort] And which to the woman? [Answer: attractive French girl, charming companion]. You then discuss why synonyms are used in jokes.
- Put some of the verbs in brackets for students to put in the correct tense.
- Ask students to learn the joke (or another joke) at home and recount it in the next lesson.

## How Can I Practice Grammar Using Jokes?

You can create a tense usage exercise in one of the following ways:

- A man and his wife *traveled/were traveling* down the highway when they *saw/were seeing* the lights. [Students choose the correct tense].
- A man and his wife *travel* down the highway when they *see* the lights. [Students convert the infinitive form into the correct form].

You can focus on just distinguishing between two tenses, or between multiple tenses. For example the following joke contains six different forms of the verb (highlighted in italics).

A prisoner in jail receives a letter from his wife:

"Dear husband, *I have decided* to plant some lettuce in the back garden. When is the best time to plant them?"

The prisoner, *knowing* that the prison guards *read* all mail, replies in a letter:

"Dear wife, whatever you do, do not touch the back garden. That is where I *hid* all the money."

A week or so later, he receives another letter from his wife.

"Dear husband, you *wouldn't believe* what happened. Some men came with shovels to the house and *dug* up the back garden." The prisoner writes back:

"Dear wife, now is the best time to plant the lettuce."

The following joke, like many jokes, contains a lot of dialog. Students could put what the characters say into reported speech. You can limit the number of sentences by indicating them italics.

Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson go on a camping trip. After a good dinner and a bottle of wine, they retire for the night, and go to sleep. Some hours later, Holmes wakes up and nudges his faithful friend.

"*Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see.*"

"*I see millions and millions of stars,* Holmes" replies Watson.

"*And what do you deduce from that?*"

Watson ponders for a minute. "Well, astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets. Astrologically, I observe that Saturn is in Leo. Horologically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three. Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow. Theologically, I can see that God is all powerful, and that we are a small and insignificant part of the universe."

"But what does it tell you, Holmes?"

Holmes is silent for a moment.

"*Watson, you idiot!*" he says. "*Someone has stolen our tent!*"

The amount of work you expect from your students will obviously depend on their level. In the next joke, if as part of your exercise you used all the verbs that I have put in italics, it would take quite a lot of time for students to put them into the correct