

“Suggestions for Humor in Classes”

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The use of humor in the classroom depends upon the objectives. My advice is based on the review of research on humor in my forthcoming book, *Persuasive Advertising*.

If the objective is to entertain, use humor.

Humorous presentations will give students good feelings about the class sessions and will aid you in obtaining high teacher ratings. Of course, if high ratings are the top priority, you, especially male teachers, should also consider cosmetic plastic surgery because student ratings of teachers depend heavily on your looks (Hamermesh and Parker 2005).

Humor is particularly relevant for low-involvement situations. Use humor when the students have no interest in the material and where it is difficult to gain their attention. Humor is especially important where you do not have good arguments to support your content, and when presenting to large groups.

If you use humor,

- it should reinforce what the students already believe, otherwise it can be upsetting to them.
- make it relevant to the point you want to reinforce.
- avoid parodies, because they are not obvious to all. In one study, a substantial percentage of college students did not recognize parodies based on Whistler's Mother, the Iwo Jima flag raising, and Saul Steinberg's *New Yorker* cover that showed a Manhattanite's view of the rest of the country.
- avoid humor when there are international students in the class. For example, few foreign students recognized the above parodies. Certainly, then, the use of humor is not politically correct.
- avoid humor that might seem inappropriate to anyone. (At a large East coast business school, a popular faculty member was reprimanded and sent for sensitivity training when a few students took offense at his humor).
- end your lecture with a good joke as this will wipe out memories of what went before . . . which, in terms of learning, is nothing.

If the objective is to aid learning, avoid humor.

Humor distracts. It draws attention to itself, not to the content. When you have new information and strong arguments for the material, avoid humor.

References

Hamermesh, Daniel S. & Amy Parker (2005), "Beauty in the classroom: Professors' pulchritude and putative pedagogical productivity," *Economics of Education Review*, 24, 369-376.

P.S. I am looking for people to act as reviewers for the short section on humor in *Persuasive Advertising*.