



Pandemic U Cheat Sheets

Short Humour for Beginners with James Folta

- ➔ Follow him at [@JamesFolta](#)
- ➔ Book James Folta for virtual consultation at pandemicuniversity.com/one-on-ones
- ➔ Read his work at jamesfolta.com

Short Humour for Beginners with James Folta

Pieces for Inspiration

An assortment from the top of my head, but there is a longer (but not complete!) list of sites to read at [the Satire & Humor Fest website, here](#). You can also (*shameless-self-promotion klaxon blaring*) subscribe to my newsletter, [A Newsletter of Humorous Writing](#), for weekly humour picks.

- ["Please Let Me Join Your Heist" by Karen Chee](#)
- ["The Only Kitchen Knife in Your Airbnb" by Sarah Aswell](#)
- ["I Have Commandeered This Haunted Hayride" by Lucas Gardner](#)
- ["Data 4 Sale" by Evan Waite and River Clegg](#)

Referenced in Class

- ["More Cowbell" by Will Ferrell, Donnell Campbell, and Erika Perez](#)
- ["How to Reduce Screen Time" by Evan Waite](#)

Terminology

Beat: Moments, usually comedic, that comprise the structure of a short humour piece. A piece builds and explores from beat to beat, often resting or resetting in between

Heighten: The change over the course of a piece that intensifies the funny thing, makes it more absurd, stranger, farther from reality

Justification: The reason why the funny thing is happening, an explanation of the logic that grounds and gives reason for an absurd situation, behaviour, etc

Mapping: A type of humour piece that puts the known qualities of one situation, thing, or dynamic onto another

Parody: Imitating a style, voice, genre, etc. and exaggerating, undercutting, inverting it for comedic effect

Point of View: What the author, narrator, or character thinks or says about a topic. Has opinion and emotion

Premise: The set up and thesis statement of a humour piece. An unusual or unique perspective or angle on an idea, typically exaggerated or heightened to differentiate it from reality for comedic effect

Satire: Using humour and jokes to criticize or shine a light on the target of the piece (a person, institution, organization, etc.)

Short Humour: Style of short comedy writing, often with a premise that is heightened or explored, similar to sketch comedy.

Tone: The character, attitude, or mood of a piece of writing, situation, etc.

Voice: The distinctive style used in a work, or by an author or character, as evidenced by word choice, sentence structure and length, cadence, etc.

Questions to Ask Before You Write

- What's my premise?
- How am I exploring it?
- What's my format?
- What are my beats?

Strategies on Finding Premises

- **Situation:** What's a situation that can highlight this funny thing?

- **Character:** Who or what might think this way?
- **Format:** What is the best format to highlight your idea?

Tips on Getting Better

- Read short humour and think about it critically
- Find a partner or a writers group to share notes and feedback
- Challenge yourself with different styles, formats, and
- Write! But don't beat yourself up about it, please! You'll be a better writer if you read, explore, and be in the world

–James

* * *

*©2021 James Folta; published by Pandemic University with author's permission.
Unauthorized distribution of this file is prohibited.*