

## How Do I Write Humor and Satire?

By David Bruce

- Humor is funny; satire is humorous criticism.
- You may want to write humor simply to amuse other people; you may want to write satire both to amuse and to educate other people.
- If you are going to write satire, it will definitely help if you have some strong opinions.
- If you are going to write satire, it will definitely help if you recognize foolishness when you see it.
- If you are going to write satire, you will need to call a fool a fool, either directly or indirectly. (It is possible to call a fool something other than a fool, and still have the readers know that you are calling a fool a fool.)

### A Brief Satire

“When I started my junior year of high school, I was already the captain of the football team and the baseball team, I was a straight-A honors student, and girls were offering themselves to me. I just couldn’t say no to easy sex and free booze, but I knew I was risking my future. So I prayed on it, drove to Boise, and got this butt-ugly haircut. I haven’t been laid since, praise Jesus!”—MARK G., Atomic City, ID

Source: <http://www.theagitator.com/archives/012245.php>

### Even Briefer Satires: Bumper Stickers

- When Jesus said, “Love your enemies,” he probably meant don’t kill them.
- Who would Jesus torture?

### Humor/Satiric Techniques

*Write a Misleading Title and Introduction.*

#### Hunger in the First World

Hunger is widespread. Emaciated bodies, excessive thinness, lack of calories—such things are prevalent in many parts of the world, including countries that are considered rich.

Is there anything we can do to stop the hunger?

Yes.

The next time you see a fashion supermodel, give her a cheeseburger. ...

*Seem to Agree with the Position that  
You are Actually Attacking.*

I think that’s what we need: more people carrying weapons. I support the [concealed gun] legislation, but I’d like to propose one small amendment. Everyone should be able to carry a concealed weapon. But everyone who carries a weapon should be required to wear one of those little

beanies on their heads with a little propeller on it so the rest of us can see them coming.—Molly Ivins

The word “propose” helps show that Molly Ivins is writing satire. She is making a reference to Jonathan Swift’s famous satire titled “A Modest Proposal.”

*Be Funny in the Details—When Appropriate.*

*Not Funny in the Details*

And before you accuse me of being some kind of wussy, please note that I am a sports guy myself, having had an athletic career on the track team at Pleasantville High School.

*Funny in the Details*

And before you accuse me of being some kind of sherry-sipping ascot-wearing ballet-attending *MacNeil-Lehrer-NewsHour*-watching wussy, please note that I am a sports guy myself, having had a legendary athletic career consisting of nearly a third of the 1965 season on the track team at Pleasantville High School (“Where the Leaders of Tomorrow Are Leaving Wads of Gum on the Auditorium Seats of Today”).—Dave Barry

Note: Dave Barry uses parody in the passage above. Answers.com defines parody as “A literary or artistic work that imitates the characteristic style of an author or a work for comic effect or ridicule.” Mr. Barry parodies high school mottos when he writes a motto for Pleasantville High School: “Where the Leaders of Tomorrow Are Leaving Wads of Gum on the Auditorium Seats of Today.”

*Put the Punch at the End.*

“Women want men, careers, money, children, friends, luxury, comfort, independence, freedom, respect, love, and three-dollar pantyhose that won’t run.”—Phyllis Diller

“There ain’t nothin’ an old man can do but bring me a message from a young one.”—Moms Mabley

“Happiness is finding a book that’s three weeks overdue, and you’re not.”—Totie Fields

*Be Controversial.*

“I say this to the dude with a ‘Stop Abortion’ picket sign, ‘I have the answer to abortion: Shoot your dick. Take that tired piece of meat down to the ASPCA and let ‘em put it to sleep.”—Whoopi Goldberg

“I’m getting an abortion. I don’t need one, but I feel that as an American I should exercise that right before it’s taken away.”—Betsy Salkind

*Engage in Word Play.*

“I became a mom six months ago. I adopted a highway. I’m trying to teach it to pick up after itself.”—Nancy Jo Perdue

“I’m getting older, and I’m thinking about getting my eggs frozen. Well, just the egg whites. I’m trying to cut back on my cholesterol.”—Brenda Pontiff

“I’m descended from a very long line my mother once listened to.”—Phyllis Diller

“I love animals, especially with gravy.”—Cyndi Stiles

*Make a Twist on a Cliché or Well-known Expression.*

“Remember, we’re all in this alone.”—Lily Tomlin

*Exaggerate.*

“The walls of my apartment are so thin that when my neighbors have sex, I have an orgasm.”—Linda Herskovic

*Have a Weird Outlook on Things.*

“The other night I was home by myself, and all the lights went out. I absolutely freaked out. I thought, ‘There’s a guy in the basement, he flipped a switch, and he’s coming up to kill me.’ Then I looked out the window and saw the lights in the whole neighborhood were out. I was relieved because I thought, ‘Maybe he’ll start at the end of the block.’”—Paula Poundstone

*Write a Triple (Three Things,  
with the Funny Thing Coming at the End).*

“‘Children need booundarieees,’ child psychologists harangue in that sing-songy, whiny voice that annoys the crap out of me. ‘They need limits on what they’re allowed to dooooo.’ I wholeheartedly agree. I am a firm believer in setting boundaries as a way to help children grow. My own kids have learned the Basic Rules for Getting Along in the Deckers’ House: be respectful to others, never hit your siblings, and never, ever cheer against the Colts.”—Erik Deckers

“Trapped in time. Surrounded by evil. Low on gas.”—Poster for the movie *Army of Darkness*, starring Bruce Campbell

“Dollywood surprises me. It embraces all the values of the American South—patriotism, Christianity and 3lb portions of apple pie...” — Simon Hattenstone.

*Point out Contradictions or Incongruities.*

“I just got junk mail from this organization that wants me to save the forest. I sent them back a letter saying, ‘Stop sending me junk mail and save the forest yourself.’”—Linda Herskovic

*Say Something Unexpected.*

“This woman goes into a gun shop and says, ‘I want to buy a gun for my husband.’ The clerk asks, ‘Did he tell you what kind of gun?’ ‘No,’ she replied, ‘he doesn’t even know I’m going to shoot him.’” — Phyllis Diller

*Tell an Anecdote.*

Humorist Frank Sullivan had a sister named Kate, who bought a TV in the days when TVs were rare. Very quickly, she called a TV repairman, who asked, “What seems to be wrong with it?” She replied, “Well, for one thing, a lot of the programs are lousy.”

*A Sample Satire*

“I recently made a public-records request to get a copy of the contract of a Division 1 football coach at a public university that is NOT Ohio University. The contract stated that the football coach would not make more money in salary than the highest-paid tenured faculty member at the university but could earn extra money from incentives of the type that are also available to tenured faculty members. Here are a few examples of the incentives: If a football player gets accepted into graduate school, the coach gets \$2,000. However, if the graduate school the football player is accepted into is a medical school, then the coach get \$3,000. In addition, the coach gets an additional \$2,000 when the football player graduates from graduate school—and \$3,000 if the graduate school the football player graduates from is a medical school. In addition, the coach can earn more money through other incentives. If the coach is able to retain 95 percent of his freshman recruits and have them graduate within four—not five—years, then the coach will receive a retention bonus of \$20,000. Also, whenever 95 percent of the members of the football team make the Dean’s List in a single quarter, the coach receives a bonus of \$20,000—\$25,000 if the quarter is fall quarter. Obviously, the university that gives its football coach a contract like this is located up on Cloudcuckooland. Real universities know what is truly important and have the right priorities in life.” — David Bruce

**Commentary: Zombie-killing excursion perhaps isn’t best use of a scholar’s time**

By □ David Bruce, *Athens NEWS* Writer □

May 10, 2007

I wrote this after receiving a letter from the Ohio University Club Sports Department telling me that the OU Waterskiing Club is traveling to Dale Hollow (a lake in Tennessee? The letter didn’t say) for a week to participate in spring training. Much of this letter is taken word for word from the letter I received. I leave it to you to guess which parts I wrote and which parts Ohio University wrote.

Dear Ohio University Faculty Member,

The Ohio University Zombie-Killing Club will be traveling to Dale Hollow to participate in spring training. The team will leave on Tuesday, May 8, 2007 and return to Athens on Sunday, May 13, 2007. This training is an important part of the club’s existence in order to kill zombies safely and at a high level and to compete in zombie killing as a sport at the club level. The team also develops its

sexual dynamics and teamwork skills throughout this week. During this week of training, the team will be studying zombie decapitation, zombie disembowelment, and waterskiing.

Understanding the value of out-of-class experiences, and understanding the lack of value of in-class experiences, you will no doubt support the Zombie-Killing Club's weeklong vacation in the middle of the 10-week quarter. After all, since the Zombie-Killing Club was formed, not a single Ohio University faculty member has died as a direct result of a zombie attack.

The Ohio University Zombie-Killing Club and Ohio University Zombie Club Sports Department would greatly appreciate it if these members could make alternate arrangements, no matter how much extra work they cause for you and no matter how much education the members will miss, to meet their academic requirements during the time period the team will be vacationing.

As long as the members get a passing grade (for retention) and pay their tuition (no IOUs, please, but high-interest credit cards may be used), no one really needs to care about their education. After all, this is Harvard on the Hocking, not Harvard, and thank God Harvard has not sued Ohio University for misappropriating its name.

Thank you in advance for your support of the lowering of Ohio University academic standards and the lowering of the academic reputation of Ohio University.

We realize that you may have concerns. You may be concerned that these team members should be in class, not vacationing for a week in the middle of the quarter. You may be concerned that Ohio University keeps raising tuition, yet is running a budget deficit. You may be concerned that Ohio University recognizes many, many excused absences for varsity sports, thus giving club sports the idea that they too can have many, many excused absences, even though they are not varsity student-athletes, aka indentured servants, whose major purpose at Ohio University is to win so that their coaches can keep their high salaries and not get fired. You may be concerned that Ohio University is becoming a badly inadequate academic institution, despite the rhetoric of paid people whose job is to insist, despite evidence to the contrary, that Ohio University (with the exception of the truly excellent Honors Tutorial College, whose students tend to win the awards that Ohio University boasts about) is an almost adequate academic institution and is becoming even more almost adequate. You may be concerned that many Ohio University students are graduating with a degree, \$40,000 of debt, and a job that a fairly bright high-school dropout could perform.

If you have any questions or wish to share your concerns, please call us at 1-740-EAT-CRAP.

Sincerely,

Roberta Zombie

Graduate Assistant Director

Ohio University Zombie Club Sports Department

Ping Recreation Center

P.S. by David Bruce: Why don't we get rid of any club sport that abuses the academic mission of Ohio University? Maybe it will save us some money and get the soul of the graduate assistant director of the Ohio University (Zombie or otherwise) Club Sports Department back in her body.

Maybe I'm wrong, but in my opinion, she can't feel good writing letters asking teachers to let students go on weeklong vacations in the middle of the quarter.

### Letter To Dr. Laura

Dear Dr. Laura,

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and I try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind him that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the specific laws and how to best follow them.

a) When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odour for the Lord (Lev. 1:9). The problem is my neighbours. They claim the odour is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

b) I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

c) I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness (Lev. 15:19-24). The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offence.

d) Lev. 25:44 states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighbouring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own a few Canadians?

e) I have a neighbour who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obliged to kill him myself?

f) A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination (Lev. 11:10), it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?

g) Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

h) Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?

i) I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

j) My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev. 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of thread (cotton/polyester blend). He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? (Lev. 24:10-16) Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? (Lev. 20:14)

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

Your devoted disciple and adoring fan.

**Source:** This satire has been emailed many times and has appeared on many places on the WWW. No one is sure who its author is.

### **Questions:**

- State your honest reaction to what you read.
- How do we know that this is satire? How do we know that this is not to be taken literally?
- What is the main point of the satire?
- Is it possible that the writer of the satire is a Christian?
- If God is omnibenevolent, can God ever will something that is unethical?
- Is gay-bashing unethical?

### **Top 10 Reasons Gay Marriage Should Be Illegal**

1. Being gay is not natural. Real Americans always reject unnatural things like eyeglasses, polyester, and air conditioning.
2. Gay marriage will encourage people to be gay, in the same way that hanging around tall people will make you tall.
3. Legalizing gay marriage will open the door to all kinds of crazy behavior. People may even wish to marry their pets because a dog has legal standing and can sign a marriage contract.
4. Straight marriage has been around a long time and hasn't changed at all; women are still property, blacks still can't marry whites, and divorce is still illegal.

5. Straight marriage will be less meaningful if gay marriage were allowed; the sanctity of Britany Spears' 55-hour just-for-fun marriage would be destroyed.
6. Straight marriages are valid because they produce children. Gay couples, infertile couples, and old people shouldn't be allowed to marry because our orphanages aren't full yet, and the world needs more children.
7. Obviously, gay parents will raise gay children, since straight parents only raise straight children.
8. Gay marriage is not supported by religion. In a theocracy like ours, the values of one religion are imposed on the entire country. That's why we have only one religion in America.
9. Children can never succeed without a male and a female role model at home. That's why we as a society expressly forbid single parents to raise children.
10. Gay marriage will change the foundation of society; we could never adapt to new social norms. Just like we haven't adapted to cars, the service-sector economy, or longer life spans.

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### Anecdote

- Marion Dane Bauer once invited fellow young adult writers to submit short stories for a book about gay teenagers. Bruce Coville wrote "Am I Blue?"—which became the title story of the book, whose full title is *Am I Blue? Coming Out from the Silence*. Mr. Coville is a happily married heterosexual, and his story is about a narrator who is beaten up by the school bully, Butch, because Butch thinks that the narrator is gay. An effeminate fairy godfather named Melvin, visits the narrator and gives him the power of seeing whether someone is gay. A person who is totally gay will be dark blue, and a person who is wondering if he or she is gay will be light blue. The narrator's skin is light blue, and as he looks around he sees that a man whom everyone "knows" is straight is dark blue and he sees that a woman whom everyone "knows" is a lesbian is not blue at all. When the narrator looks at Butch, he sees that Butch is dark blue.