

Why to Avoid Humor in Business Writing

by Carol Dunitz, Ph.D.

Everyone loves to laugh. That's why you may be tempted to use humor in some of your business communications. You may want to start a speech with a joke, or break the ice at a meeting with a funny story. It seems like a good idea, but it may backfire. That's because everyone does not find the same things funny.

Here's the problem. You share a joke or humorous story and ...

- Half the group already heard it.
- Many attendees previously received it in e-mail.
- No one gets it.
- Someone in your group is offended.
- It gets groans instead of laughs.
- You find you are the only one laughing at it.

The upside of the telling is you get a laugh. The downside may be a steep fall that at best reflects poorly on your judgement. My advice? Stick with human interest stories. They're a lot safer and everyone can identify with them.

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