

OPINION: SPECIALTY COLUMNS

Writing the Humor Column

“You can’t analyze humor because, like beauty, there’s no standard of measurement. No one can say what’s beautiful. We know it when we see it, but we can’t put our finger on what causes us to think so.”

~ Andy Rooney

So you want to write funny, huh? It’s not easy. But it can be done. Carefully and consciously, you can write a humor column. I know, humor shouldn’t be too careful or conscious at all, right? But remember: writing is a craft. Follow these basic guidelines for humor writing and then make us laugh [but don’t forget to make us think]!

Stay Close to the NEWS

For good humor, the timing has to be right.

What is everybody talking about?

Story ideas are everywhere.

You don’t have to spend precious space explaining the topic.

“What is Congress doing today?” ~ Will Rogers

When the news is over, It’s the humor column they will remember.

Stay Close to HOME

Don’t know anything about it? Don’t write about it.

What do we ALL have in common? Stick to the everyday.

You can get into the humor quickly. You SHOULD get into it quickly.

What is the deal with kitchen appliances? Prom? Car problems? Cell phone use? [Sienfeld approach]

Sometimes, you can have special impact by getting away from everyday subjects.

Think SMALL

The little irritations, little pleasures, the nonessential but, nevertheless, on the minds of many.

Play counterpoint. Airline food, dating rules, the flu, homework, drivers ed.

Write as if your are speaking to a single reader, a real person. Write a letter first.

“Write it for the Kansas City milkman”

Have a chat with Slats Grobnik.

Exercise: Outline four ideas for humor columns that tie to the small, insignificant stuff of everyday student life on your campus. Avoid the hard-news content of the today’s newspapers and TV newscasts. Think Small. Limit each story idea to 150 words. Then, write a 140 character ‘tweet’ for each of your four story ideas. Remember, find story ideas in the everyday life of the students on campus.