

An improviser and standup comedian walk into an education summit: How to use comedy to engage your audience

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Our Backgrounds

Jennifer

- Former professor in recreation and sport management
- Instructional designer for about 10 years
- Stand up comedian for about a year
- Performed at Standup Jam, Battle Royale, The People's Show, Chica Mic, Harvard Medical School, Mindy Mazur's Laughs and Company,
- The office comedian and prankster since 2002



Jake

- Liaison to all MIT PhD students from all departments
- Worked in career services since 2005
- Instructor at 5 colleges and universities
- PhD in Educational Leadership, Masters in Social Work
- Improv Asylum Training Center graduate, ImprovBoston courses, 80+ improv workshops



Objectives

- Become familiar with standup comedy principles and apply those to develop a plan for how to write, revise, and deliver a presentation that connects with your audience.
- Create a plan for how to cope with failing in front of an audience
- Utilize universal experiences and your personal stories to make your content more relatable and engaging
- Become familiar with improv concepts and apply those to unexpected situations while presenting



On average,
those in U.S.
fear public
speaking
similar to
dying.

44. Reptiles (snakes, lizards, etc.) 23.6

45. Devastating earthquake 22.6

46. Devastating Hurricane 21.4

47. Racial/Hate Crime 20.9

48. Dying 20.3

49. Illegal immigration 20.3

50. Insects/Arachnids 20.3

51. Financial Fraud 20.0

52. Public Speaking 20.0

53. Devastating Flood 19.8

*(Chapman University
Fear List 2014 – 2017)*



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Additional reasons to care about public speaking

- We can't prepare for everything!
- We do weird things when we're nervous



“Laughter relieves stress and boredom, boosts engagement and well-being, and spurs not only creativity and collaboration but also analytic precision and productivity.”

- Alison Beard, [Harvard Business Review](#)



Stand up Comedy

- Prepare to fail
- Find the point quickly
- Get out of your head and relate to the audience
 - Be endearing and relatable
 - Universal experiences
- Write, rewrite, practice, write, rewrite
 - Keep a journal
 - Use prompts
 - Practice making fun of the news
- Physical comedy
- Do not apologize for being you – you bring your unique view of the world -- Emily Ruskowski



Improv qualities for successful communication

- Unscripted
- “yes, and” mindset
- Listening
- Connecting with others
- Being present in the moment
- Overcoming doubts – “Fake it ‘til you make it.”
- Energy awareness



**I have a confession to
make ...**

Is that ok to
say?



I'm an introvert...

**And many of you may
wonder...**



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Improv concepts and warm-up activities

Related improv concepts:

- Yes, and
- Listening
- Connecting with others
- Being present in the moment
- Overcoming doubts – “Fake it ‘til you make it.”
- Energy awareness

- 7-count shakeout
- Greeting, dance move, high five
- Intro Superpower
- Word toss
- Word toss with confidence
- Mirror, mirror
- Wah



Connect with your audience

“Yes, and”
mindset



Unexpected is an opportunity; re-frame that it's normal.

Listen



Listen to energy of the room, audience needs

Present
& in the
moment



Model openness, engagement, overcome your own doubts



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