

# Laughter & Learning

Mary Poppins didn't have a degree in educational psychology, but she knew what it was all about: "Just a teaspoonful of sugar helps the medicine go down in the most delightful way." Take our old friend the past continuous, for example:

*While Mr Jones **was eating** his breakfast, the telephone **rang**.*

We teachers write hundreds of such sentences on the blackboard in the course of a normal teaching week. The only disadvantage is that sentences disappear from the minds of our students within a very short period of time, because the sentence itself is not 'memorable'

With a few minor changes, we can improve the sentence:

*While **Frankenstein** **was eating** his hamster, **Dracula** **rang** the door bell.*

The last sentence at least has that certain 'teaspoonful of sugar' - something absurd in it - that can help the student to retain the difference between the two tenses. With a little thought we can find many opportunities in the course of the day to give our pupils a little laughter and help them in their learning:

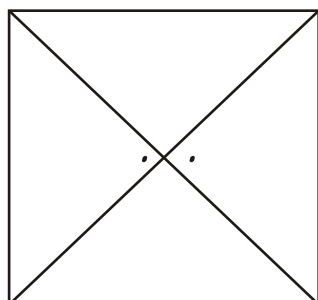
Agatha played the electric guitar very loudly in the bath at midnight.



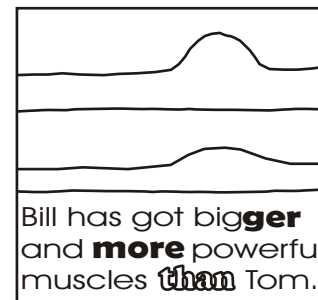
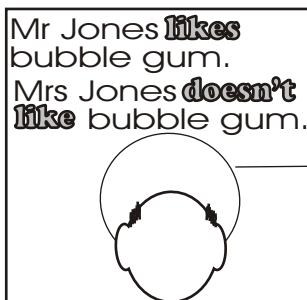
Tom kissed his girlfriend *without taking* the cigarette out of his mouth.

**After** Brunhild *had eaten*① garlic, she *kissed*② her boyfriend.

A very effective method of enhancing learning with laughter, in my experience, is to make use of those fascinating little pictures called doodles. Doodles are pictures which show either only a part of the object, or the object from an unusual perspective. The advantages of doodles are a) that they stimulate the imagination of the students, as it is not always immediately obvious what they are about, b) you don't need to attend a course in art at your local VHS to be able to draw them on the blackboard:



The two flies **met** **while** they **were flying** over the Pyramids **during** their holidays.



Jokes are always extremely welcome and effective as a means of embedding a structure in a situation and introducing that humour which is often sorely missed in the classroom. For practically all structures in English there are dozens of jokes to exemplify them:

## Present perfect:

"Did you pass your driving test yesterday?"  
"I don't know - the driving instructor hasn't come out of hospital yet."

"Have you had any accidents in your new car?"  
"Only twenty small ones."  
"And how long have you had your car?"  
"Only since 11 o'clock this morning."

## Conditionals:

The father wants to test his son:  
"Now tell me, if you had twenty apples and you ate four, how many apples would you still have?"  
"I'm sorry, but I can't tell you that, Dad," says his son,  
"Our teacher always uses oranges in the class."

"Oh, Peter! What beautiful roses you've brought me," says Mary to her boyfriend Paul.

"I would have brought you more roses," says Paul, "if Mrs Jones hadn't seen me and called the police."

## Past Continuous

Policeman: "We know that you broke into the bank. Your fingerprints are on the safe."

Man: "That's not possible I was wearing gloves."

Patient: "Dr Smith, why have I got two scars on my chest? You operated on my leg ?!"

Dr Smith: "I'm sorry, but I sneezed twice while I was operating."

### **Gerunds:**

"My brother worked in a submarine, but he lost his job."

"Why did he lose his job?"

"He kept opening the window when he wanted some fresh air."

"Stop!" Shouts the policeman to the driver on the motorway. "You're driving on the wrong side of the road!"

"Yes, I know," the driver says. "We're going to England for our holiday and I want to practise driving on the left side of the road."

"Terry is such a polite guest. He always takes his shoes off before putting his feet on the table."

### **Infinitive constructions:**

A man wants to buy a canary in a pet shop. He sees that the canary the shop owner has given him has only got one leg.

"Hey, one moment," he says, "This canary has only got one leg!"

"Well," the shop owner replies, "do you want it to sing, or do you want it to dance?"

"Do you want to play with our new dog?"

Tania asks Robert.

"Does it bite?" Robert asks, rather nervously.

"I don't know," says Tania. "I would like you to find that out."

George is at the barber's:

"Why is your dog looking at me all the time?"

He asks the barber.

"Well, sir," the barber replies, "he's waiting for a piece of your ear to fall onto the floor."

### **Passives:**

Mary's mother is angry: "Look how dirty you are!"

"Im sorry," says Mary, but I fell onto the grass."

"But that doesn't look like grass!" Says her mum.

"No, that's true, but before I fell onto it, it had been eaten by a cow."

### **Adjective/adverb:**

"Are you sure that this beautiful, old table comes from England?" Baron Schmidt asked.

"Yes," said the butler. "The woodworms speak English fluently."

Believe me, dear colleagues, telling jokes in English is not as hard as you think. If, however, you do have difficulty just recite the jokes a few times in front of the bathroom mirror while you are brushing your teeth in the morning and you'll be surprised at how good your joke-telling skills become!

Bernard Brown

Colleagues interested in jokes and humour in the English lesson may find the author's book:

***Begin with a smile*** worth dipping into! Bernard brown (bernard.brown@web.de / Tel:08024/3502)

