



Course ID and Title:

PSYC-412, Current Topics In Social Psychology: The Psychology of Humor

Units: 4

Term—Day—Time: Spring, 2025; Mondays and Wednesdays 10am - 11:50am

Location: TBD

Instructor: Drew Gorenz

Office: <https://usc.zoom.us/my/gorenz>

Office Hours: Office hours by appointment

Contact Info: gorenz@usc.edu

Course Description

Extensive examination of current research on the psychology of humor, based on original research papers and popular science articles.

Course Summary

Humor is an important part of everyday life. A good sense of humor predicts greater success in friendship creation and maintenance, romance, career success, negotiation, leadership, and more. The course begins by exploring how scientists measure and operationally define humor appreciation and production. We'll discuss the pros and cons of using different means (i.e., audience's laughter vs. self-reports of humor appreciation) to measure what is funny. Students will learn different psychological theories of humor and how to apply them to understand and create comedy. Throughout the course, students will learn to apply psychological research to better predict how subtle characteristics of a joke's 1) content, 2) delivery, or 3) presentation setting can make it more or less funny for an audience. We will discuss what personality and contextual variables are associated with greater creativity and more specifically, greater production of humor. We will explore recent findings on humor and AI (e.g., DALL-E, ChatGPT, etc) and how to better utilize AI programs to create comedy. We'll end the course by exploring different applications of humor in marketing, persuasion, leadership, the workplace, and health.

Learning Objectives

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

1. **Understand** psychological approaches to analyzing humor and **discuss** the core theories of humor

2. **Learn** how psychologists study humor, **appraise** the merits and weaknesses of what methods or stimuli they use, and **critique** the conclusions drawn from studies
3. **Recognize** and **explain** what factors (contextual, perceiver, stimulus, presentation) make a joke more (vs. less) funny
4. **Create** jokes and **critique** what elements make or break examples of recent comedy (e.g., popular memes, sketches from *Key and Peele*, *I Think You Should Leave*, and *SNL*, and standup comedy jokes) using learnings from psychology research
5. **Discuss** the significance of humor in different domains from work to social life to health

Recommended Preparation:

PSYC 274Lg and PSYC 314L (course work that is advisable, not mandatory)

Course Notes

Students will be given a letter grade. Classes will be held in person. Class attendance is expected. Participation in in-class discussion and exercises is crucial for performing well in this class.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials

Required readings will be posted online on Brightspace ahead of class deadlines. Please download the required readings from Brightspace. No materials will need to be purchased.

Description and Assessment of Assignments / Grading Breakdown

30% Paper presentations (15% each)

- To foster students' science communication skills and develop a deeper understanding of the research, students will be required to give three short presentations on empirical papers (choose from the "supplemental readings" list for each class). Students' lowest presentation grade will be dropped

20% Take-home quizzes

- Students' comprehension of class readings and lectures will be assessed periodically through three take-home quizzes. Students' lowest quiz grade will be dropped.

15% Group project presentation

- Students will be asked to show their understanding of core humor theories by learning about an assigned alternative theory of humor and presenting it. Groups will discuss which aspects of their assigned theory provide value and which are redundant with prior theories

10% Competition participation

- Students will apply course learnings and submit entries and evaluate other classmates' entries in class competitions (e.g., Competition to get an AI model to produce the best jokes; Competition to produce the best New Yorker cartoon caption). Grades will be determined by full participation in the competitions.

10% Discussion questions

- To help guide class discussions, students will take on the responsibility of creating discussion questions for three classes based on the assigned readings

15% Participation/Attendance

Extra credit opportunities:

- 2.5% - Write and present your own standup comedy jokes, comedic sketch script, satirical news jokes, or memes. The class will consider what we have learned this semester and give feedback applying those learnings
- 2% - Revise your jokes with audience feedback, and present your modified set/script for class feedback once again
- 1% - Win either comedy competition in class

Participation

Regular weekly attendance is the only way to get high points for participation, comprehension, and application in class. Two unexcused absences are allowed per student. Missing more than two classes will lower your participation grade. Arriving at the start of class ready to work is part of your participation grade. If you are to be absent, e-mail the instructor to verify the reason. Please inform the instructor immediately if you have any injuries, conditions, approved Travel Request Letters, or advance notice of religious observation that might prevent you from participating fully in the class. No cell phone use in class unless instructed. Alternative coursework may be provided for partial makeup on class absences in rare circumstances.

Grading Scale

Course final grades will be determined using the following scale:

Letter grade	Corresponding numerical point range
A	95-100
A-	90-94
B+	87-89
B	83-86
B-	80-82
C+	77-79
C	73-76
C-	70-72
D+	67-69
D	63-66
D-	60-62
F	59 and below

Assignment Submission Policy

Assignments must be finished and submitted before the start of the class session they are due.

Grading Timeline

Students can expect grades and feedback for smaller assignments within one week of their submission and for quizzes within two weeks of their submission.

Course Specific Policies

Late policy for Quizzes and Take-Home Assignments

Any assignment received after the deadline but within 12 hours past the due date will receive a one full letter grade deduction (e.g. minus 10 points, from a B to a C). Assignments received later than 12 hours but within 24 hours past the due date will receive two full letter grade deductions (e.g., minus 20 points, from an B to a D). Assignments received after 24 hours will be treated as missing and receive zero points. Students' lowest assignment grade will be dropped and not counted toward the final grade.

Course Schedule

[Note this is a draft. Readings and schedule may change. Details will be finalized the final syllabus on Brightspace]

Monday 1/13 - Introduction

We will explore why studying humor matters and key terminology and methods. What is the difference between “comedy” and “humor”? How do people express humor appreciation? How do scientists measure it? What are the pros and cons of different methods?

Wednesday 1/15 - How to read research

Because we will read and discuss many research papers over the semester that empirically explore the psychology of humor, we will take today to review how to properly read a research paper and critique it. We will discuss how subtle characteristics of a study's participants, questionnaire materials, experimental design, or context can drastically shape the results of a study and limit the conclusions one can draw from it.

Core reading:

- Jordan, C.H., & Zanna, M.P. (1999). How to Read a Journal Article in Social Psychology. In R. F. Baumeister (Eds.), *The Self in Social Psychology* (pp. 461-470). Philadelphia: Psychology Press.

Monday 1/20 - MLK Day

Wednesday 1/22 - Incongruity theory of humor

What element does every joke have in common? How can we train ourselves to identify it across many different types of jokes?

Core reading:

- Martin R. A., Ford T. E. (2018). Chapter 2—Classic theories of humor. In Martin R. A., Ford T. E. (Eds.), *The Psychology of Humor* (2nd ed., pp. 33–69). Academic Press.

Supplemental readings:

- Deckers, L., Edington, J., & VanCleave, G. (1981). Mirth as a Function of Incongruities in Judged and Unjudged Dimensions of Psychophysical Tasks. *The Journal of General Psychology, 105*(2), 225–233.
- Hillson, T. R., & Martin, R. A. (1994). What's so funny about that?: The domains-interaction approach as a model of incongruity and resolution in humor. *Motivation and Emotion, 18*(1), 1–29.
- Westbury, C., & Hollis, G. (2019). Wiggly, squiffy, lummoxy, and boobs: What makes some words funny? *Journal of Experimental Psychology: General, 148*(1), 97–123.

Monday 1/27 - Gricean norms of cooperation and how they relate to humor

Much of humor involves breaking the norms of society. In this session, we will discuss the norms of conversation most people abide by whether they consciously realize it or not. By learning how to explicitly identify the subconscious norms of society, we can learn how to better identify what elements in comedy are subverting them.

Core reading:

- Grice, H. P. (1975). Logic and conversation. *Syntax and semantics, 3*, 43-58.

Supplemental readings:

- Singer, E., Hippler, H. J., & Schwarz, N. (1992). Confidentiality assurances in surveys: Reassurance or threat? *International Journal of Public Opinion research, 4*(3), 256-268.
- Zhang, Y. C., & Schwarz, N. (2013). The power of precise numbers: A conversational logic analysis. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 49*(5), 944–946.

Wednesday 1/29 - Benign violation theory

A variant of incongruity theory is benign violation theory. BVT hypothesizes that humor is the result of norm violations being appraised as benign. We will learn to identify more subconscious norms in society so we can better identify what elements in comedy are driving incongruity. We will also discuss what factors make an offensive joke seem benign. We will explore important social psychological concepts as they relate to humor appreciation such as psychological distance, social norms, power, and social dominance orientation.

Core reading:

- McGraw, A. P., & Warren, C. (2010). Benign Violations: Making Immoral Behavior Funny. *Psychological Science, 21*(8), 1141-1149.

Supplemental readings:

- Gutman, J., & Priest, R. F. (1969). When is aggression funny? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 12*(1), 60–65.
- McGraw, A. P., Warren, C., Williams, L. E., & Leonard, B. (2012). Too Close for Comfort, or Too Far to Care? Finding Humor in Distant Tragedies and Close Mishaps. *Psychological Science, 23*(10), 1215-1223.
- McGraw, A. P., Williams, L. E., & Warren, C. (2014). The rise and fall of humor: Psychological distance modulates humorous responses to tragedy. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 5*(5), 566–572.

Monday 2/3 - Benign appraisal in humor

We will continue our discussion of benign violation theory by examining a greater list of variables at the context-level (i.e., audience mood, physical place) and perceiver-level (e.g., gender, race, age, sexism, etc) that influence one's benign appraisal of a norm violation, and thus their humor appreciation.

Core reading:

- Grady, C. (2024, October 13). Why the **** does everyone swear all the ***** time? Vox. <https://www.vox.com/culture/24098830/holy-shit-brief-history-profanity-melissa-mohr-what-the-f-benjamin-bergen-praise-michael-adams>.

Supplemental readings:

- Priest, R. F., & Wilhelm, P. G. (1974). Sex, marital status, and self/actualization as factors in the appreciation of sexist jokes. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 92(2), 245-249.
- La Fave, L., McCarthy, K., & Haddad, J. (1973). Humor judgments as a function of identification classes: Canadian vs American. *The Journal of Psychology: Interdisciplinary and Applied*, 85(1), 53-59.
- Thomas, C. A., & Esses, V. M. (2004). Individual Differences in Reactions to Sexist Humor. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 7(1), 89-100.
- Gray, J. A., & Ford, T. E. (2013). The role of social context in the interpretation of sexist humor. *Humor*, 26(2), 277-293.

Wednesday 2/5 - Judgments of truth and coherence

Jokes involve incongruity or surprise. Incongruity, by definition, creates incoherence. Does a joke need to *feel* coherent in order to be funny? How do we reconcile a joke's need for surprise with its need for coherence? We begin to explore what factors affect one's judgment of truth and coherence.

Core reading:

- Song, H., & Schwarz, N. (2010). If it's easy to read, it's easy to do, pretty, good, and true. *The Psychologist*, 23(2), 108-111.

Supplemental readings:

- Lev-Ari, S., & Keysar, B. (2010). Why don't we believe non-native speakers? The influence of accent on credibility. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 46(6), 1093-1096.
- Newman, E. J., Garry, M., Bernstein, D. M., Kantner, J., & Lindsay, D. S. (2012). Nonprobative photographs (or words) inflate truthiness. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*, 19(5), 969-974.
- Newman EJ, Sanson M, Miller EK, Quigley-McBride A, Foster JL, Bernstein DM, et al. (2014) People with Easier to Pronounce Names Promote Truthiness of Claims. *PLoS ONE* 9(2), Article e88671.

Monday 2/10 - How do we use our feelings of ease (or difficulty) to make judgments of truth, beauty, and humor?

People tend to use their feelings as information to guide their judgments of truth, coherence, and beauty. We explore why. We will discuss what rhyme, alliteration, repetition, sound quality, print font accessibility, and portrait mode have in common. Lastly, we will organize what connects our judgments of truth, beauty, and humor through theory and empirical data.

We will allow some time for group work on presentations for 2/24 at the end of class.

Core reading:

- Topolinski, S. (2014). A processing fluency-account of funniness: Running gags and spoiling punchlines. *Cognition & Emotion*, 28(5), 811-820.

Supplemental readings:

- Cunningham, W. A., & Derks, P. (2005). Humor appreciation and latency of comprehension. *Humor* 19(4), 389-403.

Wednesday 2/12 - Fluency and humor

We continue this week's theme by further exploring how we use our judgments of easy (or difficult) processing to facilitate our humor appreciation of jokes, and how to apply these learnings. We will review popular comedic techniques and tropes that seem to benefit from encouraging easier processing through repetition of content and structure, analogy, and more.

Supplemental readings:

- Deckers, L., Buttram, R. T., & Winsted, D. (1989). The sensitization of humor responses to cartoons. *Motivation and Emotion*, 13, 71-81.
- Dworkin, E. S., & Efran, J. S. (1967). The angered: Their susceptibility to varieties of humor. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 6(2), 233-236.

Assignment:

- Quiz 1 handed out. Due Friday (2/21) by 6pm

Monday - 2/17 - MLK Day

Wednesday 2/19 - Laugh tracks in comedy

Laugh tracks have been a big part of comedy, historically. What is the significance of them? Do they work? If so, when? Why?

We will allot some time for group work on presentations for 2/24 at the end of class.

Core reading:

- Gillespie, B., Mulder, M., & Leib, M. (2016). Who's laughing now? The effect of simulated laughter on consumer enjoyment of television comedies and the laugh-track paradox. *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, 1(4), 592-606.

Supplemental readings:

- Martin, G. N., & Gray, C. D. (1996). The effects of audience laughter on men's and women's responses to humor. *The Journal of social psychology, 136*(2), 221-231.
- Provine, R. R. (1992). Contagious laughter: Laughter is a sufficient stimulus for laughs and smiles. *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society, 30*(1), 1-4.

Monday 2/24 - Debate alternative theories of humor

Students will present group presentations on their assigned alternative theory of humor. Students must define their theory, explain what context it arose out of, what types of jokes or humor it accounts for, what types of jokes it doesn't explain, what aspects are redundant with the theories we have already learned, and apply the theory by creating a new joke aligned with its thinking.

Wednesday 2/26 - Authenticity and humor

On the one hand, people often evaluate things more positively when they are authentic (Bullot & Reber, 2013; Newman & Bloom, 2012). On the other hand, people may understand that a lot of comedy builds on false premises. Comedians often make things up or exaggerate details to create humor. Many jokes are written by teams of writers, not just the person performing them. Does authenticity matter in comedy? If so, when?

Core reading:

- Malone, C. (2023, September 15). Hasan Minaj's "Emotional Truths". *The New Yorker*. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/annals-of-communications/hasan-minhajs-emotional-truths>

Supplemental readings:

- Kovács, B., Carroll, G. R., & Lehman, D. W. (2014). Authenticity and consumer value ratings: Empirical tests from the restaurant domain. *Organization Science, 25*(2), 458-478.
- Rose, R. L., & Wood, S. L. (2005). Paradox and the consumption of authenticity through reality television. *Journal of Consumer Research, 32*(2), 284-296.
- Beverland, M. B. (2005). Crafting brand authenticity: The case of luxury wines. *Journal of management studies, 42*(5), 1003-1029.

Monday 3/3 - Creativity

Comedy is as much an art as other forms. How does one create a novel joke? How do psychologists define and measure creativity? What factors facilitate creativity across many domains? What is the difference between convergent and divergent creativity? And how do they factor into the process of producing humor?

Core reading:

- Baer, J. (2015). The importance of domain-specific expertise in creativity. *Roeper Review, 37*(3), 165-178.

Supplemental readings:

- Lu, J. G., Akinola, M., & Mason, M. F. (2017). "Switching On" creativity: Task switching can increase creativity by reducing cognitive fixation. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 139, 63-75.
- Eisenberger, R., Armeli, S., & Pretz, J. (1998). Can the promise of reward increase creativity? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 74(3), 704-714.

Wednesday 3/5 - Humor production

How do researchers measure how funny a person is? What are the strengths and weaknesses to different methods? We will explore these questions with respect to different elements of a joke such as its writing and its delivery. We will also explore professional comedians' advice on writing jokes.

Core reading:

- Ruch, W., & Heintz, S. (2019). Humor production and creativity: Overview and recommendations. In S. R. Luria, J. Baer, & J. C. Kaufman (Eds.), *Creativity and humor* (pp. 1-42). London: Academic Press.

Supplemental readings:

- Moran, J. M., Rain, M., Page-Gould, E., & Mar, R. A. (2014). Do I amuse you? Asymmetric predictors for humor appreciation and humor production. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 49, 8-13.
- Kellner, R., & Benedek, M. (2017). The role of creative potential and intelligence for humor production. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 11(1), 52.
- Christensen, A. P., Silvia, P. J., Nusbaum, E. C., & Beaty, R. E. (2018). Clever people: Intelligence and humor production ability. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 12(2), 136.

Assignment:

- Quiz 2 handed out. Due Friday (3/28) by 6pm

Spring Break

Monday 3/17 - Effects of humor on thinking and feeling

After exploring what makes things funny, we now look at how comedy affects our thinking. How does reading a joke affect your subsequent thinking? How does re-appraising an aversive stimulus as humorous affect our subjective well-being?

Core reading:

- Samson, A. C., & Gross, J. J. (2012). Humour as emotion regulation: The differential consequences of negative versus positive humour. *Cognition & Emotion*, 26(2), 375-384.

Supplemental readings:

- Ziv, A. (1976). Facilitating effects of humor on creativity. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 68(3), 318-322.
- Cheng, D., & Wang, L. (2015). Examining the energizing effects of humor: The influence of humor on persistence behavior. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 30, 759-772.

Wednesday 3/19 - Humor styles

Not all humor leads to positive outcomes. Some humor can be defined as disparaging to the self or others. We will learn about how proclivities toward producing or appreciating some kinds of humor can predict more positive or negative outcomes.

Core reading:

- Martin, R. A., Puhlik-Doris, P., Larsen, G., Gray, J., & Weir, K. (2003). Individual differences in uses of humor and their relation to psychological well-being: Development of the Humor Styles Questionnaire. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 37(1), 48-75.

Supplemental readings:

- Plessen, C. Y., Franken, F. R., Ster, C., Schmid, R. R., Wolfmayr, C., Mayer, A.-M., Sobisch, M., Kathofer, M., Rattner, K., Kotlyar, E., Maierwieser, R. J., & Tran, U. S. (2020). Humor styles and personality: A systematic review and meta-analysis on the relations between humor styles and the Big Five personality traits. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 154, Article 109676.
- Hampes, W. P. (2010). The relation between humor styles and empathy. *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 6(3), 34-45.
- Ford, T. E., Lappi, S. K., & Holden, C. J. (2016). Personality, Humor Styles and Happiness: Happy People Have Positive Humor Styles. *Europe's journal of psychology*, 12(3), 320–337.

Monday 3/24 - Individual differences and humor

How do individual differences (e.g., personality, gender, age, political orientation, need for humor, etc) predict differences in humor appreciation and production?

Core reading:

- Evans, J. B. (2023). Gender and humor. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 54, Article 101719.

Supplemental readings:

- Sulejmanov, F., Dostál, D., Grundman, V., & Ruch, W. (2024). Associations between personality and humor structure appreciation. *Current Psychology*, 43(5), 4698-4709.
- Greengross, G., Martin, R. A., & Miller, G. (2012). Personality traits, intelligence, humor styles, and humor production ability of professional stand-up comedians compared to college students. *Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts*, 6(1), 74.

Wednesday 3/26 - Forecasting humor

How good are people at predicting their future emotions? What do they struggle with? How good are people at assessing their own skills? What are the unique difficulties in predicting whether a joke will be funny for another person or assessing how funny one's own jokes are?

Core reading:

- Wilson, T. D., & Gilbert, D. T. (2003). Affective forecasting. In M. P. Zanna (Eds.), *Advances in experimental social psychology* (pp. 345–411). Elsevier Academic Press.

Supplemental readings:

- Kruger, J., & Dunning, D. (1999). Unskilled and unaware of it: how difficulties in recognizing one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 77(6), 1121–1134.
- Silvia, P. J., Greengross, G., Cotter, K. N., Christensen, A. P., & Gredlein, J. M. (2021). If you're funny and you know it: Personality, gender, and people's ratings of their attempts at humor. *Journal of Research in Personality*, 92, 1–10.

Monday 3/31 - Humor and AI

Can AI models predict how funny a joke is? Can they produce quality jokes themselves? How can people utilize recent progress in AI development to their advantage? What prompt-engineering strategies can be used to get LLMs to create better jokes? We will have a competition to see who can get an LLM to produce the best jokes.

Core reading:

- Gorenz, D., & Schwarz, N. (2024). How funny is ChatGPT? A comparison of human-and AI-produced jokes. *PLoS ONE* 19(7), Article e0305364.

Supplemental readings:

- Hu, Zhe & Liang, Tuo & Li, Jing & Lu, Yiren & Zhou, Yunlai & Qiao, Yiran & Ma, Jing & Yin, Yu. (2024). *Cracking the Code of Juxtaposition: Can AI Models Understand the Humorous Contradictions*. arXiv. arXiv:2405.19088v1.
- Ekin, S. (2023). *Prompt engineering for ChatGPT: a quick guide to techniques, tips, and best practices*. TechRxiv. 10.36227/techrxiv.22683919.v2.

Wednesday 4/2 - Developmental Psychology of Humor

At what age, does laughter occur? How do peoples' senses of humor change over their lifespans? Do people prefer different types of humor as they grow older?

Core reading:

- Kerckänen, P. & Findlay, B. (2024). 14 Humor Appreciation Across the Lifespan. In T. Ford, W. Chłopicki & G. Kuipers (Ed.), *De Gruyter Handbook of Humor Studies* (pp. 257-270). Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter.

Supplemental readings:

- Stanley, J. T., Lohani, M., & Isaacowitz, D. M. (2014). Age-related differences in judgments of inappropriate behavior are related to humor style preferences. *Psychology and Aging*, 29(3), 528–541.

Monday 4/7 - Evolutionary theories of humor

Why do people laugh and tell jokes? How pervasive is laughter and humor across other species? What would the evolutionary advantages be of having a sense of humor in one's culture?

Core reading:

- Provine, R. R., & Emmorey, K. (2006). Laughter among deaf signers. *Journal of Deaf Studies and Deaf Education*, 11(4), 403-409.

Wednesday 4/9 - Humor in interpersonal relationships

To what extent do people seek out humorous partners? To what extent does humor in a relationship predict its longterm success? Is a humorous opening line a good strategy in dating?

Core reading:

- Hall, J. A. (2015). Sexual selection and humor in courtship: A case for warmth and extroversion. *Evolutionary Psychology*, 13(3).

Supplemental readings:

- Kurtz, L. E., & Algoe, S. B. (2015). Putting laughter in context: Shared laughter as behavioral indicator of relationship well-being. *Personal Relationships*, 22(4), 573-590.
- Hall, J. A. (2017). Humor in romantic relationships: A meta-analysis. *Personal Relationships*, 24(2), 306-322.

Monday 4/14 - Applications of humor in leadership, education, and the workplace

How can a business use humor to outperform its competitors? How can a person use humor in their interviews or resume to land a job? How can humor help one negotiate a better deal? What are the dangers and opportunities of using humor in a workplace?

Core reading:

- Pai, J., Chou, E. Y., & Halevy, N. (2023). The Humor Advantage: Humorous Bragging Benefits Job Candidates and Entrepreneurs. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*.

Supplemental readings:

- [Bitterly, T. B. \(2022\). Humor and power. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 43, 125-128.](#)
- Kurtzberg, T. R., Naquin, C. E., & Belkin, L. Y. (2009). Humor as a relationship-building tool in online negotiations. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 20(4), 377-397.

Wednesday 4/16 - Persuasion and humor

How does one persuade another person to say yes? Does humor help? First, we will discuss social psychology theories of influence and persuasion and how people form implicit and explicit attitudes.

Core reading:

- Goldstein, N. J., Cialdini, R. B., & Griskevicius, V. (2008). A room with a viewpoint: Using social norms to motivate environmental conservation in hotels. *Journal of Consumer Research*, 35(3), 472-482.

Supplemental readings:

- Nolan, J. M., Schultz, P. W., Cialdini, R. B., Goldstein, N. J., & Griskevicius, V. (2008). Normative social influence is underdetected. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 34(7), 913-923.

Monday 4/21 - Persuasion and humor continued

We will build onto the last class's readings on theories of persuasion by connecting them to humor. How can humor help or hurt a persuasion attempt? What types of jokes help or hurt

one's message? How do jokes often carry contradicting implicit and explicit messages? Do jokes change peoples' attitudes or are they only funny because they fit an audience's preconceived attitudes?

Core reading:

- Nabi, R. L., Moyer-Gusé, E., & Byrne, S. (2007). All joking aside: A serious investigation into the persuasive effect of funny social issue messages. *Communication Monographs*, 74(1), 29-54.

Supplemental readings:

- Skurka, C., & Cunningham, J. J. L. (2023). Seeing the funny side: humor in pro-environmental communication. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 53, Article 101668.
- Hendriks, H., & Strick, M. (2020). A laughing matter? How humor in alcohol ads influences interpersonal communication and persuasion. *Health Communication*, 35(14), 1821-1829.

Wednesday 4/23 - Health and humor

How is humor used therapeutically? Do people who laugh more, live longer? What are the health benefits of laughter? We will practice laughter yoga in class, and explore whether laughter can still be beneficial even when faked.

Core reading:

- Dunbar, R. I., Baron, R., Frangou, A., Pearce, E., Van Leeuwen, E. J., Stow, J., Partridge, G., MacDonald, I., Barra, V., & Van Vugt, M. (2012). Social laughter is correlated with an elevated pain threshold. *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 279, 1161-1167.

Supplemental readings:

- Sliter, M., Kale, A., & Yuan, Z. (2014). Is humor the best medicine? The buffering effect of coping humor on traumatic stressors in firefighters. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 35(2), 257-272.
- Simone, L., & Gnagnarella, C. (2023). Humor coping reduces the positive relationship between avoidance coping strategies and perceived stress: a moderation analysis. *Behavioral Sciences*, 13(2), 179.

Assignment:

- Quiz 3 handed out. Due Tuesday (5/6) by 6pm

Monday 4/28 - Session left open to explore additional topics students want to explore

Potential options:

- Humor in politics?
- Explore the psychology of a specific form of comedy in more depth (consider comedic formats: memes, sketch, improv, standup, satirical news, comics, TV) (consider types of jokes: wit, absurdism, shock, physical comedy, musical comedy, observational, deadpan, insult, dark, anti-jokes, one-liners, etc)?
- Seek input from students

Wednesday 4/30 - Session left open to explore additional topics students want to explore

Academic Conduct

Plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences. Please familiarize yourself with the discussion of plagiarism in SCampus in Part B, Section 11, “Behavior Violating University Standards” policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-b. Other forms of academic dishonesty are equally unacceptable. See additional information in SCampus and university policies on scientific misconduct, policy.usc.edu/scientific-misconduct.

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university’s mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the [USC Student Handbook](#). All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or “recycle” work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the [student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity’s website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS)

accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relationship to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. ([Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook](#), page 13).

Policy on Use of Technology in the Classroom

Security of Course Content. All material presented in class or discussion, sent via email, or posted on Brightspace is “all rights reserved.” In addition, some of it is copyrighted and distributed for in-class use only by a publishing corporation. You may not store these materials—whether on paper or electronically—for use by students not presently enrolled in this course, nor may you post the materials anywhere on the internet. Out of fairness to all current and future students, please do your part to protect our course content.

Please see the addendum attached to the syllabus for detailed information about Student Support Services and Academic Integrity.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university’s mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or “recycle” work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender - and power- based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.