

Chatterbox #183 – Comedy

Episode description

Do you like comedy? If you do, we have just the episode for you! Join Andrew and Suzanne as they discuss everything from dad jokes to stand-up and, along the way, you'll learn vocabulary to help you talk about different types of jokes and styles of comedy.

Fun fact

Just for Laughs, called Juste pour rire in French, is an annual comedy festival held in Montreal. Founded in 1983, it is now the largest international comedy festival in the world! During the day, performers put on more physical, vocal, or visual comedy outdoors. At night, stand-up and other comedy shows take place in many of the city's nightclubs and live theatres.

Expressions included in the learning materials

- Cheesy
- Stand-up
- Up-and-coming
- Mugging
- Ring true



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: Hey, guys. My name is Andrew.

Suzanne: And I'm Suzanne.

Andrew: And we're back with another Culips episode.

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Andrew: Hey, Suzanne. How are you?

Suzanne: Hey, Andrew. I'm great, how are you?

Andrew: Suzanne, I'm doing pretty well. Thanks for asking. And I got a question for you right off the top here.

Suzanne: All right. Shoot.

Andrew: Do you like jokes?

Suzanne: Yes! Of course I like jokes. Do you have a good joke?

Andrew: Oh, I have a nice one, yeah.

Suzanne: OK.

Andrew: OK. So what do prisoners use to call each other?

Suzanne: I don't know. What do prisoners use to call each other?

Andrew: Cell phones.

Suzanne: Honk, honk. That was good. I think it was made funnier because you were so excited and you said, "Cell phones!" Your enthusiasm, yeah.

Andrew: I found a website this week and it's called niceonedad.com.

- Suzanne: Oh my gosh. That is totally a dad joke, yes.
- Andrew: Yeah. And so this is an example of a dad joke. And I actually like dad jokes. They're quite funny, in my opinion.
- Suzanne: Yeah. I think it's funnier when non-dads say dad jokes.
- Andrew: Well, maybe we should define a dad joke for all our listeners. What is a dad joke?
- Suzanne: A dad joke is a joke that isn't that funny. It's clever and witty, but it kind of falls short of humour. It's maybe punny, meaning there are puns.
- Andrew: I think that's exactly right. We call them dad jokes because dads like to say these kind of **cheesy** jokes that aren't super funny to embarrass their children.
- Suzanne: Yes.
- Andrew: You know?
- Suzanne: It's **cheesy**, **cheesy** humour. That's it.
- Andrew: Yeah.
- Suzanne: Yeah, and awkward.
- Andrew: Maybe you can imagine a dad driving his kids to soccer practice, and he's got his kids in the car and some of his kids' friends in the car, and he says just an awkward joke that's not really funny. And all the kids roll their eyes, and they're like, "Aw, Dad, come on. That's not funny."
- Suzanne: Come on. You know, I have one that I also saw on Facebook today.
- Andrew: Mmhmm?
- Suzanne: And I'm going to tell it to you.
- Andrew: OK.
- Suzanne: OK. So are you ready for my dad joke?
- Andrew: I want to hear it, yeah.
- Suzanne: What does a thesaurus eat for breakfast?

- Andrew: What does a thesaurus eat for breakfast? Umm, OK. A thesaurus is a book, a reference book for finding similar-meaning words. Hmm, I don't know. What does it eat for breakfast?
- Suzanne: A synonym bun.
- Andrew: A synonym bun. I like it.
- Suzanne: You use a thesaurus to find a synonym, which is a word that is similar in meaning. Like another word for the word you already have in mind. So, like a synonym of, say, desk would be a table, a work area. These are other terms that you can use for desk.
- Andrew: And so this is an example of a pun.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: Because synonym sounds like cinnamon.
- Suzanne: Yes.
- Andrew: And a cinnamon bun is a popular breakfast food, so a synonym bun, I think everybody can see the connection. Jokes kind of lose their lustre when you explain them too much, but—
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: It's important to understand the components of humour. Suzanne, today we will do a Chatterbox episode. And in a Chatterbox episode, we have a natural conversation about an interesting topic. And what is our topic today?
- Suzanne: Today, if you haven't guessed, is all about jokes and comedy. Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.
- Andrew: So if you love to laugh, you will enjoy this episode. So let's get started.
- Suzanne: Great!
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- Andrew: Suzanne, do you enjoy watching **stand-up** comedy?
- Suzanne: I love **stand-up** comedy. I really, really do. I love going to see it live also, here at the Montreal Just for Laughs Festival.

- Andrew: Yeah, the Just for Laughs Festival is one of the biggest comedy festivals in the country, and maybe even in North America.
- Suzanne: In fact, many, many American comedians come to the Montreal festival, the Just for Laughs Festival. Some of them are big names and some of them are getting their start, like they're **up-and-coming** comedians.
- Andrew: Right. They're **up-and-coming** comedians, yeah.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: It's interesting, the words that we use to talk about people who do **stand-up** comedy. Because I use the word comedian and you use the word comedian.
- Suzanne: Mmhmm.
- Andrew: But comedians themselves don't like this word.
- Suzanne: No.
- Andrew: They call themselves comics.
- Suzanne: Comics, yeah.
- Andrew: Yeah. Isn't that strange?
- Suzanne: It's so strange. Because I don't know about you, Andrew, but for me a comic is like something I would read as a kid in the Sunday paper.
- Andrew: Mmhmm.
- Suzanne: The comic strip. Or like a comic book, like Batman or Marvel Comics.
- Andrew: That's what I think of too, a comic book.
- Suzanne: Yeah. And a lot of the times, those books are not funny.
- Andrew: That's right.
- Suzanne: They're pretty scary or action oriented.
- Andrew: Mmhmm.
- Suzanne: So comedians call themselves comics, a **stand-up** comic.

- Andrew: Yeah, or a **stand-up** comedian. I think you can use both expressions without any problems. People will understand both. Another expression that's related to comedy and **stand-up** comedy that I hear often is a hack.
- Suzanne: Huh, I've never heard that.
- Andrew: So somebody could be a hack or a hack comedian, a hack comic. You've never heard this before?
- Suzanne: No.
- Andrew: So a hack is somebody who performs jokes onstage, is a comedian, but uses some sort of technique to get easy laughs.
- Suzanne: Oh.
- Andrew: So instead of spending a long time creating a really perfectly worded joke, maybe they will use a prop or a sound effect to get what is called a cheap laugh.
- Suzanne: Oh.
- Andrew: OK? A cheap laugh.
- Suzanne: Maybe like a ... Um, like what's-his-name from *The Mask*?
- Andrew: Jim Carrey.
- Suzanne: Jim Carrey. Jim Carrey would do a lot of **mugging** with his face.
- Andrew: Right.
- Suzanne: And kind of like whooooaaa, like goofy kind of movements.
- Andrew: Yes.
- Suzanne: But I think for him it was pretty well done, actually.
- Andrew: We call it physical humour, right?
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: So making a joke, making people laugh by using facial expressions or body movements. And this can be really funny too.
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: And I think Jim Carrey is an example of somebody who did it really well.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: And I've seen interviews with him before where he said he would practise for hours—

Suzanne: Hmm.

Andrew: In front of the mirror, perfecting—

Suzanne: Those faces?

Andrew: His facial movements.

Suzanne: Wow.

Andrew: Yeah.

Suzanne: That's amazing. I think I did that too as a kid. I would make weird faces until I got like the perfect fish face, or the perfect frog face, or something.

Andrew: Oh, nice.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: Yeah.

Suzanne: I am admitting that right now on Culips.

Andrew: Well, that's awesome. I wish I could see it. You have ... Maybe. I won't ask you to take a video of yourself doing a frog face, but I'm sure it was good.

Suzanne: I wanted to say there's a famous French comedian named Gad, G-a-d.

Andrew: Oh, I know him.

Suzanne: And recently he's been learning English and English pronunciation.

Andrew: OK.

Suzanne: And he's gotten so good at English, he's moved to New York City and he is under the tutelage, or, like, mentorship, or the guidance of Seinfeld, Jerry Seinfeld.

Andrew: Wow.

Suzanne: And he's trying to be a comedian in English. And I listened to a podcast with him, and he was saying how difficult it is because the humour is different. And the humour, apparently, in North America, is more personal. It's more about your personal situation and feelings. Whereas in France, it's more universal and more physical comedy, and reactionary comedy.

And this was so interesting to me. And it was evident because I got to see him here in Montreal at the Just for Laughs Festival. And it was true. Some things were really funny, but some things to me were not so personal, didn't **ring true**.

Andrew: That's so interesting. And I think each culture has a different source for humour.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: I feel like North America has even a different sense of humour than the UK. And North American-style comedy is very self-deprecating and personal.

Suzanne: Yes, mmhmm.

Andrew: So self-deprecating means that you are critical of yourself.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: And making fun of your own life and maybe saying, "Oh, I'm bad at this and I'm bad at that." And a lot of them ... Top comedians these days do a lot of self-deprecating humour.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: And yeah. Actually, it's funny that you mention Gad, because Jerry Seinfeld, the famous comic and comedian—

Suzanne: Mmhmm.

Andrew: He has a web series called *Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee*, and it's available to watch for free online. So if anybody is interested, just Google that phrase. And what Jerry does is he picks up his guest in a vintage car, and they have a conversation in the car while they are on the way to a café. And then they stop at the café and drink coffee.

Suzanne: That's great.

Andrew: And yeah. And Gad was on one of the episodes, so I was able to—

Suzanne: Oh.

- Andrew: Be introduced to him there.
- Suzanne: That's so cool! Interestingly enough, his speech and English teacher, I've actually taken over some of her classes at Concordia. She was an accents and dialects and pronunciation teacher at our alma mater, at Concordia University in Montreal. And she is now in New York as his private teacher.
- Andrew: Wow.
- Suzanne: So it's kind of interesting.
- Andrew: Yeah. That's very cool. Well, props to him, because that's a difficult thing to do.
- Suzanne: To do in your second language, right?
- Andrew: In your second language, yes, very difficult.
- Suzanne: I'd love to know if any of our listeners have ever had trouble telling jokes in English, in their second language, or third language, or whatever English is for you.
- Andrew: I think humour is one of the most difficult aspects of a language to learn. But if you have a funny joke in English that you would like to share, we would love to hear it. You can contact us through our Facebook page. It is [Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast](https://www.facebook.com/CulipsPodcast).
- Suzanne: Yeah.
- Andrew: We can also be reached at our website, Culips.com. That's the place where you can also learn about becoming a Culips member and studying with our learning materials that we specifically design to help you become a more fluent English user.
- I think that's it for now, Suzanne.
- Suzanne: Yup.
- Andrew: Thanks for listening, everybody. We will be back soon with another episode. Bye.
- Suzanne: Bye!
- Announcer: Do you like listening to Culips? If so, please show your support by leaving Culips a five-star rating and a review on iTunes or Stitcher. This helps new listeners find the show. So don't delay. Rate and review today.

Detailed Explanations

Cheesy

Cheesy is an adjective that, in general, means cheap, fake, or of bad quality. If someone calls something **cheesy**, they mean that it is a bad-quality version of that thing. For example, in this episode Andrew and Suzanne said that dad jokes are **cheesy**. In other words, they are bad jokes.

Cheesy is most commonly used to describe media, such as TV shows and movies. When describing media, **cheesy** has two extra meanings: either inauthentic and not believable, or overly sentimental and emotional. In both cases, **cheesy** still means bad because of being unoriginal and lacking interesting style or substance.

An example of this use of **cheesy** would be saying that you didn't enjoy a movie because the romance was too **cheesy**. In other words, it was bad because it was overly sentimental and not believable.

Here are a couple more examples with **cheesy**:

Marsha:	Hey, Joel, did you have a good trip to Toronto?
Joel:	It was pretty fun overall. I'm not so sure about the hotel I stayed in, though.
Marsha:	Oh yeah? What was wrong with it?
Joel:	It was generally a nice place, but they always had really cheesy music playing in the lobby and the elevator. And it was always really loud!
Marsha:	Yeah, that's no good. I hate being forced to listen to bad music!

Sharon:	Did you watch that horror movie I recommended to you?
Ethan:	Yeah, I watched it last night.
Sharon:	What did you think? Did you like it?
Ethan:	Well, I didn't hate it, but it was too cheesy for my taste. I like horror movies, but I prefer ones that are really scary and realistic. All the death scenes just looked so fake!

Stand-up

The adjective **stand-up** has two common meanings. The first meaning is the one used in today's episode: comedy performed by one person speaking directly to the audience, telling jokes and funny stories. **Stand-up** comedy is very popular in North America. A performer who puts on this type of show is called a **stand-up** comic, a **stand-up** comedian, or simply a **stand-up**.

Stand-up can also be used to describe people who are loyal and dependable. This is the second common meaning of **stand-up**. When using **stand-up** to describe someone, it must always be directly followed by a noun. For example, you couldn't say, "Oh, Sandra, she's **stand-up**." You would have to say, "She's a **stand-up** person." Because of this, **stand-up** often appears in the set phrase "a **stand-up** guy." So, if you want to say that someone is reliable, loyal, and trustworthy, you can call them a **stand-up** person.

Here are a couple more examples with both common meanings of **stand-up**:

Geoff:	I'm so excited for my trip to New York City!
Nina:	I would be excited too if I were you. Do you have any activities planned?
Geoff:	Not many. I mostly want to explore the city. However, I did get tickets to see a stand-up show at the famous Comedy Cellar.
Nina:	Oh, cool! I've always wanted to see a show there. I've heard that Louis C.K. sometimes joins shows as a last-minute surprise.
Geoff:	I've heard that too. I would be so happy if that happened on the night I'm going. He's my favourite stand-up comic!

Ben:	Hey, Kate, are you dating anyone right now?
Kate:	No, I'm not. Why do you ask?
Ben:	Would you be interested in going on a blind date with a friend of mine? He's a smart, kind, reliable, honest person. He's also one of my oldest and most loyal friends—a real stand-up guy!
Kate:	I dunno, going on a date without meeting someone first seems kinda weird. But I guess going on one date couldn't hurt.
Ben:	Great! I'm sure you'll both have a great time.
Kate:	I hope so!

Up-and-coming

Up-and-coming is an adjective used to describe someone or something that is gaining in popularity and likely to become successful soon.

In this episode, Suzanne mentions that some of the comics who perform at the Just for Laughs festival are already famous and some are **up-and-coming**. In other words, in addition to well-established comics, you can see performances by people who aren't well known, but who are rapidly becoming more popular and will probably become successful soon.

You can use **up-and-coming** to describe both people and things that seem likely to succeed soon. For example, people often talk about **up-and-coming** young actors. An **up-and-coming** actor is not well known, but has the potential to become a star.

You don't have to use **up-and-coming** to just talk about people. For example, saying that a business is **up-and-coming** has the same meaning as saying that a person is **up-and-coming**: not successful yet, but likely to be soon.

Here are a couple more examples with **up-and-coming**:

Jessica:	I'm getting really tired of all my music. Do you think you could recommend some new stuff to me?
Marc:	Hmm, that's tough. You listen to a lot of music! I don't know what I could tell you that you don't already know.
Jessica:	It's true that I listen to a lot of music, but it's all from decades ago. I've never been good at keeping track of up-and-coming bands and musicians.
Marc:	Oh, in that case I can probably come up with some recommendations for you. I'll think about it and give you a list sometime soon.
Jessica:	Thanks, that would be great!

Annie:	I want to check out this up-and-coming restaurant that just opened downtown. Everyone I know thinks it's the best. I've had three people recommend it to me this week!
Dan:	Why don't you go try it out?
Annie:	I wish I could! It might already be too popular to call it up-and-coming because I've been trying for a week to get a reservation without any luck!

Mugging

In this episode, Suzanne mentions that some comedians, like Jim Carrey, do a lot of **mugging**. In the context of comedy, **mugging** is the action of making extreme or strange facial expressions. So, when a comic makes funny faces to make people laugh, this is called **mugging**. While this use of **mugging** is mostly used to talk about comics making funny faces, you can use **mugging** to describe anyone making strange or funny faces. For example, do you have a friend who always makes silly faces in photographs? That's **mugging** too!

However, this first definition is not the most common meaning of the noun **mugging**. Most often **mugging** refers to the crime of attacking someone, or threatening to attack someone, and stealing their money and valuable possessions. So, if you read that there have been several **muggings** in an area, it doesn't mean that people have been making funny facial expressions in public!

Here are a couple more examples with both meanings of **mugging**:

Luke:	You went to a comedy show last night, right? How did you like it?
Olivia:	It was good! I was surprised by how much I enjoyed myself, actually.
Luke:	Why were you surprised?
Olivia:	The woman who was performing wasn't my usual favourite type of comic. She told jokes and everything, but she was also a really physical performer. I don't usually find it funny when comics rely on mugging and other physical humour, but she did it really well! I definitely want to see her again when she comes back to town.

Matt:	Hey, are you OK? You don't look so good.
Dee:	I'm not OK at all, actually. Some guy just stole my purse!
Matt:	What? What happened?
Dee:	I was just on my way home from work and someone at the bus stop ran up and demanded that I give him my purse. I was so scared I just gave it to him.
Matt:	Oh my god, that's terrible! I've heard that there were a few muggings in the neighbourhood recently, but I was hoping that it wasn't true.

Ring true

Ring true is an idiom you can use to describe something that seems true or gives the impression of being real and correct. When you say that something **rings true**, you're not saying that it is true for certain, just that it seems to be.

A common use of this idiom is to point out something that doesn't seem correct by saying that it doesn't **ring true**. For example, if you don't believe an excuse that someone tells you, you could say that their excuse doesn't **ring true**. In other words, it doesn't seem like the person is telling the truth.

In this episode, Suzanne uses **ring true** in this negative sense when she says that some of the less personal comedy she saw at the Just for Laughs festival didn't **ring true**. In other words, Suzanne felt that the less personal comedy acts seemed less true to reality.

So, if something seems real and truthful, you can say that it **rings true**, and if something seems fake or unbelievable, you can say that it doesn't **ring true**.

Here are a couple more examples with **ring true**:

Isla:	Can you believe that Adam has decided to give up his job as a lawyer to follow his new life passion of becoming a yoga teacher?
Sean:	I don't think it's that crazy. He never seemed to like his job and has been talking about wanting to find a new career for a long time now.
Isla:	OK, but do you actually believe that he's going to devote his life to yoga? I don't think he's going to go through with it.
Sean:	I don't know, the whole situation rings true to me. I think he's more suited to being a teacher than having the crazy, stressful career he has now.

Veronica:	Why are you so late? I've been waiting for you for an hour!
Bill:	I'm sorry! It wasn't my fault. The bus never came.
Veronica:	Why didn't you take a taxi?
Bill:	There weren't any on the street and I forgot my phone at home so I couldn't call one.
Veronica:	You forgot your phone? You're so addicted to your phone, I don't believe you'd ever leave it at home. The whole thing doesn't ring true .

Quiz

1. If someone or something seems likely to succeed in the near future, which of these adjectives can we use to best describe them?

- a) stellar
- b) unpromising
- c) up-and-coming
- d) straight-A

2. When something seems or sounds true, you can say that it:

- a) clanks accurately
- b) rings true
- c) chirps correctly
- d) chimes right

3. Cheesy can mean:

- a) unoriginal
- b) fake
- c) overly emotional
- d) all of the above

4. True or false: Stand-up comics often talk to the audience during their shows.

- a) true
- b) false

5. When talking about comedy, mugging means the act of:

- a) making extreme facial expressions
- b) performing with your whole body
- c) telling good jokes
- d) falling to make people laugh

Quiz Answers

1.c 2.b 3.d 4.a 5.a

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