

## "An Irishman, a Welshman, an Englishman and a Scotsman all walk into a bar..."

*When learning a second language the last thing you usually 'get' is the humour. The British sense of humour is notoriously unique and difficult to understand. To help you on your learning journey here is a rough guide to British humour and a classic joke.*

**to get** (something): to understand  
**flaws**: imperfections, faults  
**humble**: to have a modest or low opinion of oneself  
**awkward**: causing difficulty  
**deadpan**: impassive or expressionless  
**to spot**: to notice  
**tongue in cheek**: with ironic or playful intent  
**to spar**: to disagree, differ  
**to spark**: to initiate or start something  
**misfortune**: unfortunate condition or event  
**gallows humour**: ironic humour in a desperate situation

### Laughing at ourselves

Contrary to the stereotypes we do not take ourselves too seriously. Our humour starts with our own **flaws**. We make light of our failures so as to appear more **humble** and approachable. There is no room for egos in British humour. **Awkward** encounters, clumsiness and embarrassing moments are all well-established self-deprecation material.

### Was that a joke?

Sarcasm and irony are part of the DNA of British humour. They are produced with world-class timing and nearly always with a **deadpan** delivery that will leave you wondering as to whether it was indeed a joke (or not?)

Sarcasm can be hard **to spot** in a new language and a new culture, and in Britain the usual clues of hyperbole or exaggeration and an overemphasis on adjectives are stressed even less, making it harder to pick up. Luckily,

sarcasm is used so often in day-to-day life that you will soon be a natural at detecting it. Be sure to use the tone, context and non-verbal clues such as the proud smile that spreads across the speaker's face (Brits struggle to hide their delight at a perfectly timed sarcastic comment) as a guide. Surrealism and word plays are also an integral part of British humour.

### Don't always take what we say seriously

Brits are famous for being very, very polite, but a clear sign that a Brit likes you is if they happily 'offend' you with the occasional witty, **tongue-in-cheek** comment. These are not mean-spirited statements, but rather a playful exchange of verbal **sparring** delivered with a smiling face and no apology. It can be used to make light of differences with new friends in an attempt to **spark** conversation.

### Brits find humour in almost everything

Brits use humour to lighten even the most unfortunate, miserable moments. There are few subjects we don't joke about. It's not used to shock and offend but rather because Brits turn to laughter as a form of medicine when life knocks them and those around them down.

**Misfortune** and failure are commonplace in British comedy – provided the jokes are in good taste (although '**gallows humour**' is not uncommon). In most cultures, there is a time and place for humour. In Britain, this is not the case. We will happily make sick jokes about the Royal Family and laugh at death.

And finally... "An Irishman, a Welshman, an Englishman and a Scotsman all walk into a bar. The barman says: "Is this some sort of a joke?"

By ECP coach John Hird (inspired by [this article](#))

"Let's chat about that."

- Do you understand British humour?
- What are the main differences between your humour and British humour?
- What do you find funny?
- What are your favourite comedy shows and who are your favourite comedians?
- Is there anything you would NOT make a joke about?

## Weekly English Practice

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# “iLook, iThink, iSpeak” Express yourself better!

## Do you get these jokes? Learn them and tell them to your classmates and teacher. Did they laugh?

A ham sandwich goes up to the bar and says:  
"A pint of lager please."  
To which the barman replies: "Sorry - we don't serve food."

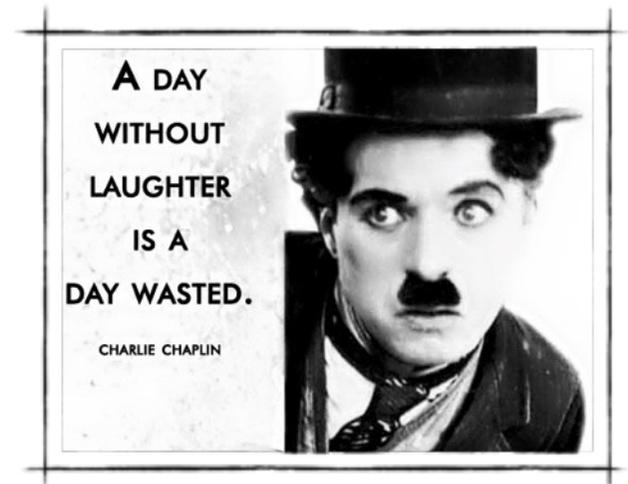
A dyslexic walks into a bra....

A woman walks into a bar and asks the barman for a  
Double Entendre, so the barman gives her one.

A man walks into a bar with a steering wheel on his dick. He walks  
up to the barman. The barman looks at him and says:  
"Hey, did you know you've got a steering wheel on your dick?".  
The man replies: "Yeah, it's driving me nuts"



Two fat blokes in a bar and one  
says to the other: "Your round".  
The other replies: "You can talk  
you fat bastard".



## Comedy links

- Extras (TV comedy show): A sketch with David Bowie [www.dailymotion.com/video/xnleu\\_extras-david-bowie\\_shortfilms](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xnleu_extras-david-bowie_shortfilms)
- Stewart Lee deconstructing comedy and insulting Scotland: <https://youtu.be/tHA1uflZQY>
- Geordie humour: viz (a comic) [www.viz.co.uk](http://www.viz.co.uk)
- BBC Comedy: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio/programmes/genres/comedy/player>

## Are there limits to humour?

The French satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo recently published a cartoon (right) depicting drowned Syrian refugee Aylan Kurdi, the 3-year-old who died while enroute to Europe late last year, with the caption:

**'What would little Aylan have grown up to be?  
An ass-groper in Germany?'**

Another separate drawing says: **'Christians walk on water - Muslim children sink'**

Many comedians argue that humour is a weapon of the powerless and oppressed which they use to poke fun at the powerful and so 'jokes' which laugh at the weak are not really acceptable.

**What do you think about the Charlie Hebdo cartoons explained above? Are they acceptable?**



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