



Hi graduate friends,

Why did the graduate student become a gardener? They wanted to experience the thrill of seeing something grow and flourish in less than 2-4 years!

Let's talk about humor! Seeking, experiencing, and participating in humor has been shown to enhance well-being, optimism, and stress-coping skills (Ruch & McGhee, 2014). Humor has also been connected to better learning. When it comes to assessments, research has shown that students (both grad and undergrad) believe using humor embedded within their exams helps increase their test performance and lower their stress (Berk, 2000). Humor has also been shown to help focus students' attention, increase their retention of material, and enhance their academic social relationships (Ulloth, 2002). Students who have supervisors/advisors who use humor feel more supported and satisfied with their supervisor/supervisee relationship (Wrench & Punyanunt-Carter, 2008). So... laughter is the best medicine?

Well, I can't tell you to just make jokes about everything and then you'll learn better. There's a risk that humor can be a distraction more than an aid (Bolkan et al., 2018). Especially if it's irrelevant (Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977) or if it's too frequent, then nothing stands out as *different* any longer (Ziv, 1988). To test out



the benefits of humor, welcome it as a potential component of learning (Chauvet & Hofmeyer, 2007). Give it importance and allow your brain to create and find relevant humor. Especially consider adding humor to topics that are difficult for you to work on. For example, you're doing interviews and the contents of one of the transcripts is stressing you out. In such a case, intentionally using humor may help reduce your stress.

If you're hoping to use humor for better focus, learning, and retention of the material, make sure to limit the frequency of humor you use (e.g., only use it for whatever you find hard to understand or really important things you want to remember) and try to make it as content related as you can. If you'd like to go even one step further, try and *integrate* humor (Fitzpatrick, 2010) into the content you're studying by activating your background information and using creativity to process information in different ways. This will later help reduce the risk of just remembering the humor without retaining the learning material.

For example, if you're in health sciences and you read about the possibility that more diseases are seen that come from a lack of sun exposure than from excessive sun exposure (Mead, 2008), you may start to refer to human beings as *solar-powered* creatures to remind yourself of the need for more sun exposure and its benefits. If you incorporate humor in your learning, I'd love to hear about it!

Best,



Aldean Ellis (he/him), from your [Learning Development & Success team!](#)

GRADUpdATE is a monthly e-newsletter dedicated to helping students succeed in graduate school. This information is provided by Lea

Reference:

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