

Question B – Article | Sample answer

The writing group, to which you belong, has decided to develop a website, aimed at aspiring young writers. You have been asked to contribute an article on the genre of humour. Write the article you would contribute, discussing at least two important characteristics of your chosen genre and offering advice to young people wishing to engage in this type of writing. (2015)

Writing to amuse is a much more difficult task than merely telling a few knock-knock jokes. The classic one-liners and puns that make your friends chuckle are not enough to engage a critical audience, craving a bellyful of laughter. The difficulty often lies in the fact that not everyone has the same humour: some people get a giggle out of even the saddest of tragedies, while on the other hand, I would personally find it easier to make a wall laugh than some of the tougher critics I have encountered. The differences between people's comedic tastes is one of the toughest challenges a humorous writer faces, but fear not. It is not your job to entertain all audiences, but to provide quality entertainment to those who engage with your style of humour.

One of the key characteristics of good, classic humour is that it is inoffensive. As the wise rapper Drake once said, "Speak without offending", however, it is instantaneously clear that Drake wasn't engaging in humorous writing and wasn't aware of the enormous difficulty that this simple command presents. Sometimes it seems almost too easy to make a cutting, yet entertaining remark when writing, and other times, people seem to be begging to be made fun of. But show restraint. Mocking people's behaviours and attitudes or making jokes about certain social issues will only come back to bite you, and believe me, the bite hurts. As a humorous writer you will find yourself almost walking on eggshells, eager to entertain, but equally as eager not to offend those who are only waiting to snap at you. It is an art, but it is one that can be learnt. Besides, where's the real genius in mocking others? Little skill is required to entertain in a way that is insulting to many, and often it is the writer who ends up worse off as a result. It's hard to praise a writer whose success has come from being downright ignorant to the feelings of others. There is a fine line between offending and

amusing, and as a writer, it is your duty not to cross it. If others take offence at something you have written, then have you done your job properly? The secret to successful humorous writing is to provide good, clean entertainment, but not at the expense of others.

How often have you picked up a book from the “comedy” section of your local bookshop, only to find that it is missing the very essence of its being? No, I am not talking about the “comedy” aspect, but rather the all-important purpose for writing. Yes, you are writing to entertain, but there is more to humorous writing than that. An essential, yet often forgotten, characteristic of humorous writing is that of purpose. The amusement you offer your readers must be based around something, whether this be a story, an event or a topical issue. There must be more to your writing than just a few jokes in order to fully engage the reader. In this sense, humorous writing is not a genre that can be employed on its own, but rather a genre that is used along with another, be it short-story, autobiography or report. A few jokes scribbled on a page isn’t going to impress anyone – your writing must have a backbone. Truly successful humorous writers are those who have skilfully woven their humour into their stories and articles, using it to complement their writing rather than it being the sole purpose for their work. Humour on its own is not enough to grip an audience, the purpose element is an essential must-have.

It is quite ironic that humorous writing, the writing genre intended to make you laugh and feel at ease, is in fact one of the most daunting and terrifying genres of writing out there. Despite what they might tell us, I can guarantee that every comedy writer’s greatest fear is that they won’t make the reader laugh. It appears to me that the more pressure put on somebody to be funny, the more likely they are to slip up. So, relax. My key advice to all budding comedy writers is this: be yourself. Be comfortable in your writing and let your unique sense of humour radiate from your work. There is nothing worse than forced humour, and it is clear to all readers when a writer isn’t being true to themselves. Be mindful that your sense of humour won’t appeal to everyone, and that’s okay. Your humour won’t make everyone laugh, but by being true to your style, you are guaranteed to get more than a few hearty chuckles. Put your heart, soul and laughter into your work. This jumps off the page at a reader and draws them into your writing. One of the most important elements of successful humorous writing is that of individuality, don’t omit this from your work. Most of all, enjoy it. If you don’t enjoy your own

work, how can you expect someone else to? The road to success is long, but you will get there, one laugh at a time.

The greatest feat of humorous writing is in the name itself – humour. Unsurprisingly, the key characteristics of successful amusing writing are based around this idea of humour, from not offending with your jokes, to giving more purpose to your writing than merely making one laugh. These essential elements leave little room for the writer’s individual flair, and it seems that writing to entertain almost involves following a rule book, but this is not the case. The trick is to find your niche, your style, and let the pen take hold. Embrace your passion for writing and entertainment, and you are half way there. It is a skill that we all have the ability to perfect, be confident in yourself. Make sure you have the last laugh.