Did you ever notice how many jokes start with, "Did you ever notice?"

And what's the deal with, "What's the deal?"

There's a lot of funny to be found

by simply noticing the ordinary, everyday things

you don't ordinarily notice everyday.

So if you'd like to add a little humor

to that story, or speech, or screenplay you're writing,

here are a few tips and tricks for finding the funny.

All great storytelling, including comedy writing,

consists of a handful of basic ingredients:

who,

what,

when,

where,

why,

and how.

Writers have been asking these questions since at least the 1st century BC,

yet none can be answered with a simple yes or no.

They demand details,

and the more specific the details, the funnier the story.

Let's start with the who, the comedic character.

Think about the books, TV shows, and movies that make you laugh.

They're usually filled with funny types, or archetypes.

The know-it-all,

the loveable loser,

the bad boss,

the neurotic,

the airhead.

Incidentally, these are all stock characters found in Commedia Dell'Arte,

or the artists comedy of late Renaissance Italy,

and they have yet to get old.

The Commedia rule for creating comic characters is find the flaw,

then play it up.

Or you can try playing with opposites.

When the smartest guy in the room does the stupidest thing,

or the doofus outwits the brainiac,

we tend to laugh because we didn't see that coming.

Ancient Greek funnyman Aristotle is said to have said,

"The secret to humor is surprise."

This surprise, or incongruity theory of humor,

says we laugh at things that seem out of place

or run up against our expectations,

like a frog dating a pig,

or a lizard selling insurance,

a baby disco dancing,

a nun disco dancing,

a cat disco dancing.

Actually, a baby, a nun, or a cat doing pretty much anything,

especially involving disco.

One fun way to find incongruities is by drawing connections.

Actually drawing them with a mind map.

Start small.

Pick a word,

I choose pickle.

Jot it down, then quick as you can, try making connections.

What do pickles make me think of?

Who eats pickles?

What treasured pickle memories do I have from childhood?

Another great way to generate comedic material

is to shift from observation to imagination.

Try going from "what is" to "what if?"

Like, what if instead of a horse, for example,

you just had a pair of coconuts?

Okay, let's think of some other memorable moments in history,

literature,

or film.

Now, what if they featured coconuts?

Get wild, let it go.

Even if an idea seems overdone,

or too obvious,

or just plain dumb,

try jotting it down, anyway.

What's obvious to you may not be to the next person.

And the opposite of the dumbest idea might just turn out to be the smartest.

What about all that dumb stuff that happens in real life?

Have you ever noticed how much comedy revolves around things

that irritate, frustrate, and humiliate us?

Will Rodgers said, "Everything's funny as long as it happens to somebody else."

So if you're having a crummy morning,

imagine it happening to a character you're writing about,

and by afternoon, you may at least get a funny story out of it.

Once you've got your characters and story,

here are a few quick and easy comedy writing tricks to make them zing.

The rule of three,

or zig zig zag.

Try setting up an expected pattern, zig zig,

then flip it, zag.

A rabbi, a priest, and a coconut walk into a bar.

The punchline rule says put your punch at the end of the line.

A rabbi, a priest, and a coconut walk into a disco.

That brings up the rule of K.

For some reason, words with a k-sound catch our ears

and are considered comical.

Coconut,

disco,

pickles,

crickets?

Okay, so we don't always get the laugh.

Humor is subjective.

Comedy is trial and error.

Writing is rewriting.

Just keep trying.

Find the flaws,

discover the details,

insert incongruities,

incorporate k-words,

and remember the most important rule of writing funny:

have fun.

As Charles Dickins said,

"There is nothing in the world so irresistibly contagious

as laughter and good humor."

And disco.