

The World's Funniest Joke [B1]

L'umorismo si definisce come la capacità di percepire ed esprimere qualcosa di divertente. Nel migliore dei casi una battuta viene accolta con una risata. Ma il senso dell'umorismo è soggettivo, sia culturalmente, sia a livello individuale: è possibile individuare la miglior barzelletta del mondo?



The 1969 pilot of the now-iconic British comedy show Monty Python's [Flying Circus](#) ended in a sketch called "The funniest joke in the world". In it, a man invents a joke so funny that he literally dies laughing. During the Second World War, the joke is used by the British military as a [deadly](#) weapon. It proves extremely effective, even in translation, [wiping out scores](#) of Nazis while Allied forces protect themselves by covering their ears.

A REVOLUTIONARY ACT

[Laughter](#) is usually thought to be beneficial to our health. Laughing can be a [coping](#) strategy at times of crisis, while laughter therapy and laughter yoga are both based on the [belief](#) that humour has physiological and psychological benefits. What makes us laugh is subjective, however. Finding one joke that everyone laughs at is [surely](#) impossible.

LAUGH LAB

In 2001, best-selling British writer and psychologist Richard Wiseman hoped to prove that such a joke did exist. He [teamed up](#) with the British Science Association for a study named LaughLab — the scientific search for the world's funniest joke. By the end of the project, forty thousand jokes had been [submitted](#), including some generated [by](#) artificial intelligence. The jokes were [rated](#) on a scale of 1 (bad) to 5 ([hilarious](#)) by more than 350,000 people from seventy countries.

COUCH HUMOUR

The winning joke came from a British psychiatrist called Gurpal Gosall. He appeared [to prove Wiseman right](#); the joke, Gosall said, was one he told his patients to help them gain perspective on their problems. [It went like this](#): “Two hunters are out in the [woods](#) when one of them [collapses](#). He doesn't seem to be breathing and his [eyes are glazed](#). The other guy [whips out](#) his phone and calls the emergency services. He [gasps](#), “My friend is dead! What can I do?”. The operator says “Calm down. I can help. First, let's [make sure](#) he's dead.” There is a silence, then a [shot](#) is heard. Back on the phone, the guy says “OK, now what?”

CULTURE CLASH

While the world has become more globalised (if [arguably](#) more absurd) since, recent research has shown that there are still significant cultural differences when it comes to humour. In a 2019 study by psychologists in Hong Kong, a country with [close ties](#) to both Britain and China, they found that while in the [West](#) humour is taken seriously as something that [enhances well-being](#), in the [East](#) it is viewed as trivial, and as such less likely to be effective as a [coping](#) strategy or as therapy.

PUBLIC REACTIONS

Even in the [West](#) the same joke can be received very differently, depending on where you're from. Monty Python were four Englishmen (Graham Chapman, John Cleese, Eric Idle and Michael Palin), one [Welshman](#) (Terry Jones) and one American (Terry Gilliam). The four-series show, which ended in 1974, was a massive hit in both the UK and the US and was also highly [rated](#) in the Netherlands and in Japan. [Yet](#) as research into public reactions revealed, audiences in the UK and in the US, for example, laughed at different parts of the exact same sketch.

THE GOONS

Some years after LaughLab had concluded, Wiseman made a discovery. That winning joke by Gosall was actually a version of one written by Irish comedian Spike Milligan back in 1951. Milligan was a member of a comedy trio called the [Goons](#), with British actors Michael Bentine and Peter Sellers. The joke was a dialogue between the [latter](#) two men. [It went like this](#):
Michael Bentine: I just came in and found him [lying](#) on the [carpet](#) there.
Peter Sellers: Oh, is he dead? **Michael Bentine:** [I think so](#). **Peter Sellers:** [Hadn't you better make sure?](#) **Michael Bentine:** Alright. Just a minute. Sound of two gun [shots](#). **Michael Bentine:** He's dead. Wiseman was [stunned](#). Milligan was by then a controversial figure: a comic genius for some, he was also [prone to](#) making [unpleasant](#) and even racist [remarks](#). [Nevertheless](#), this one morbid joke by Milligan is still considered to be the closest thing we have to a 'humour pill': the funniest and most therapeutic joke in the world.

Glossary

- **submitted** = presentare
- **to prove Wiseman right** = dare ragione
- **eyes are glazed** = occhi vitrei
- **East** = l'Oriente
- **Welshman** = gallese
- **wiping out** = sterminare
- **scores** = un mucchio
- **Yet** = tuttavia
- **Hadn't you better** = non faresti meglio a...?
- **stunned** = sbalordito
- **prone to** = incline a
- **deadly** = mortale
- **Laughter** = risata
- **latter** = questi ultimi
- **lying** = giacere
- **surely** = sicuramente
- **rated** = valutare
- **hilarious** = divertentissima
- **collapses** = crollare a terra
- **gasps** = parlare ansimando
- **enhances** = aumentare
- **coping** = modo di superare
- **It went like this** = recitava così
- **Goons** = stupidi, idioti
- **I think so** = penso di sì
- **remarks** = commenti
- **whips out** = tirare fuori
- **shot** = sparo
- **West** = l'Occidente
- **carpet** = tappeto
- **belief** = idea
- **woods** = boschi
- **make sure** = assicurarsi

- **arguably** = verosimilmente
- **close ties** = stretti legami
- **Nevertheless** = comunque, ciononostante
- **teamed up** = unirsi, collaborare
- **well-being** = benessere
- **unpleasant** = spiacevoli