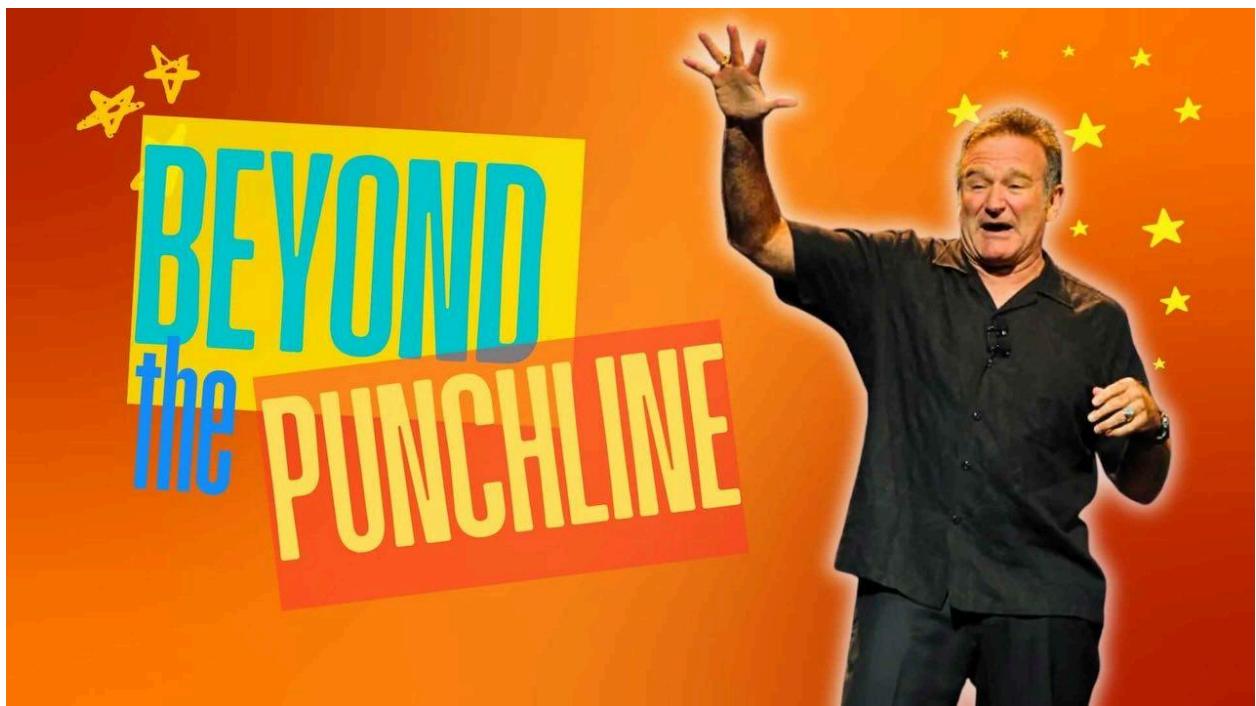




"Yesterday, I was--wait, that wasn't me..."
-- Charlie Stone

Beyond the Punchline - The Art of Shifting Dynamics



What is a Dynamic Shift?

A Dynamic Shift is any change in character, energy, information, perspective, status, emotion, sound, or circumstance that changes the audience's experience of a joke or story.

A punchline is a dynamic shift—but it is only **one** kind.

Great comedy continually changes what the audience is **seeing, hearing, thinking, anticipating, or feeling.**



The question isn't always:

“What's the next punchline?”

Sometimes the more powerful question is:

“What changes next?”

By that rule alone you can think of a 3-Way Build-Up, a pattern disrupter as kind of a template for a dynamic shift. We're moving in one direction, then suddenly--- ***Tire Squeal!***

1. THE 18-MINUTE RULE

In live theater, an audience can only experience the same dynamic for so long before attention begins to drift.

So something changes.

A phone rings.

A character screams.

Someone bursts through a door.

A secret is revealed.

The lights change.

A character who was calm suddenly explodes.

The dynamic has shifted.

The familiar **18-minute TED Talk format** demonstrates the same basic attention principle: TED recommends talks of 18 minutes or less, describing that length as short enough to hold attention while still allowing an idea to be developed.



Movies shift dynamics much more frequently.

Modern online video can change the visual or auditory experience every few seconds.

Comedy is no different.

If the comedian stays in the same:

Voice + Rhythm + Energy + Perspective + Physicality

for too long, the audience begins to acclimate to it.

Change renews attention.

2. THE DYNAMIC SHIFT TOOLBOX

A Dynamic Shift can occur **before, during, or after the punchline.**

DYNAMIC SHIFT

WHAT CHANGES

Act-Out

Narration → experience

Character Switch

One POV → another POV

He-Said/She-Said

Description → live dialogue

Catalyst

Someone imposes a
problem/demand

Status Shift

Power changes hands

Comedic Irony

Audience knows what
character doesn't

Emotional Shift

Confidence → fear, calm →
anger



Diegetic Interruption	Something within the story interrupts using a sound effect.
Voice/Dialect	Vocal character changes
Sound Effect	Description → sensory experience
Physicalization	Words → visual information
Sudden Stop	Motion/energy → stillness
Silence	Sound → anticipation
Tempo Shift	Slow → fast / fast → slow
Song	Speech → music
Revelation	New information changes meaning
Escalation	Stakes/absurdity/intensity increase
Reaction	Action → emotional consequence

Let's Look at Robin Williams



[Video and Transcript](#)

EXERCISE 1 — MAKE SOMETHING CHANGE

Start with:

I went to the grocery store yesterday because I needed milk.

Choose **three different Dynamic Shifts** from the toolbox.

Write three different continuations.

Version A — Character

Someone enters the story.



Version B — Circumstance

Something happens.

Version C — Information

We discover something.

Compare: Which version creates the strongest desire to hear what happens next?

3. NARRATION VS. EXPERIENCE

Compare:

NARRATION

My wife told me I needed to make more money and get a second job.

We understand what happened.

But now:

EXPERIENCE

My wife said, “You need to make more money. You need to be a better provider. You need to get another job.”

Something has changed.

We're no longer hearing a comedian **report the conversation**.

We're experiencing the wife.

That creates another important dynamic:

CHARACTER A WANTS X.



CHARACTER B WANTS Y.

Now there's friction.

My student had this situation. His wife is an immigrant which gives him a chance to not only do her voice but also her accent. Is an accent another form of escalation and a dynamic shift? [checks the list] YES!

Also, we can set up the wife to be more demanding. This sets up an opportunity for benign retaliation.

"You need to be a better earner. You need to provide for me. Stop being so lazy and get a second job."

"So I applied for a job with ICE."

Let's Look at Maria Bamford

<https://youtu.be/v0pB5gB5geQ?si=vnEb9VvXRYoY1PzQ&t=542>





Watch Maria Bamford and note each of the dynamic shifts she includes in her act.

THE CATALYST

A **Catalyst** is something that changes the protagonist's situation and forces a response.

Someone:

Demands something.

Rejects something.

Challenges something.

Accuses someone.

Threatens something.

Reveals something.

Takes something away.

The protagonist now experiences an:

IMPULSE

Fight.

Run.

Hide.

Defend.

Lie.

Retaliate.



Prove them wrong.

Comply.

Maliciously comply.

That impulse gives the comedy somewhere to go.

EXERCISE 2 — ADD THE ANTAGONIST

Each premise currently belongs entirely to the protagonist.

Add another character who IMPOSES the situation.

A.

I need to lose 20 pounds.

Who tells you?

Doctor?

Spouse?

Child?

Mother?

Personal trainer?

Airline employee?

Write the conversation.

B.

I decided I spend too much money.

Who imposes the realization?

C.



I need to stop drinking so much coffee.

Who demands it?

D.

I decided to start dating again.

Who pushes you into it?

E.

I need a better job.

Who tells you?

THEN ADD THE IMPULSE

Ask:

What do I WANT to say in response?

Don't worry about being reasonable.

Write the **impulse**.

Then turn that impulse into the comedic response.

HE-SAID/SHE-SAID

One of the easiest Dynamic Shifts available to a storyteller:

STOP REPORTING THE CONVERSATION.

BECOME THE PEOPLE.



Instead of:

My boss told me I wasn't taking my job seriously.

Try:

My boss goes, **"I don't think you're taking this job seriously."**

I said...

Now the audience expects the response.

That creates tension.

The response doesn't necessarily have to be verbal.

It could be:

A look.

Silence.

Internal dialogue.

Physical behavior.

A lie.

A sound.

EXERCISE 3 — THE ROBIN WILLIAMS PASS

Premise:

I tried using the self-checkout at the grocery store.



Potential characters:

YOU

THE MACHINE

EMPLOYEE

PERSON WAITING BEHIND YOU

STORE ANNOUNCEMENT

Write 30–60 seconds.

Use at least **four Dynamic Shifts**.

Mark each shift with:

D

MARIA BAMFORD — CHARACTER = POINT OF VIEW

Maria Bamford demonstrates something more subtle.

A character isn't simply:

A FUNNY VOICE.

The voice represents:

Attitude.

Psychology.

Status.



Desire.

Worldview.

Bamford's extensive voice work also makes this especially visible: her official biography highlights her numerous animated voice-over roles, while her own web archive contains material built around characters including her mother.

EXERCISE 4 — SAME WORDS, DIFFERENT CHARACTER

The sentence is:

“I’m really happy for you.”

Perform it as:

Your mother

Your ex

Your therapist

A jealous coworker

Someone trying desperately to convince themselves

NOTHING ABOUT THE WORDS CHANGED.

Yet the meaning changed.

Why?

Character creates subtext.

Now write a short joke in which the character's delivery communicates something the words don't.



BRIAN REGAN — PHYSICALIZING THE INTERNAL EXPERIENCE



Brian Regan demonstrates another powerful form:

You don't have to become someone else. You can become YOURSELF experiencing the event.

Confusion.

Embarrassment.

Panic.

False confidence.

Trying to appear intelligent.

Trying not to get caught.



One of Brian Regan's favorite things to do is play how dumb he is. [Watch the bit closely and see how he plays the same joke, multiple ways with his experience trying to have UPS pick up his packages.](#)

The Dynamic Shift: Narration → Experience

There's nothing wrong with telling an audience how you felt.

"I was completely confused."

That's useful information.

But compare that with allowing the audience to watch you BE confused.

That's where the Dynamic Shift occurs.

Brian Regan's routine about trying to arrange a UPS pickup is a great example. He doesn't simply report that the instructions were confusing. The interaction becomes a scene: we're watching someone receive instructions, trying to follow them, falling behind, attempting to maintain the appearance that he's keeping up, and reacting to the increasing confusion.

EXERCISE 5 — “YEAH, YEAH, I GOT IT.”

STEP 1: Identify the Moment

Think of a time when someone was explaining something to you and you couldn't keep up—but you didn't want to admit it.

It could be:

- Rental-car instructions
- How to operate an EV
- A doctor explaining a procedure



- A pharmacist explaining instructions
- Someone helping with your taxes
- Tech support
- Setting up a new phone
- Assembling IKEA furniture
- A mechanic explaining what's wrong with your car
- Someone explaining directions
- Learning a new piece of software
- A contractor explaining a repair
- A teacher explaining something you should supposedly already know
- Your kid explaining how some new technology works

STEP 2 — WRITE THE NARRATIVE VERSION

First, simply tell us what happened.

Who were you talking to?

What were they explaining?

Why couldn't you follow it?

Why didn't you want to admit you were lost?

What were you feeling?

Tell us the emotion if it's useful:

“At this point I'm completely lost.”

That's fine.

Now comes the Dynamic Shift.

STEP 3 — SHOW US

Go from: “I was completely lost.”



To: **“So he’s going...”**

Become the person giving you the instructions.

Then become yourself trying to follow them.

Act-out the story that you are telling. Every time you go from 3rd person narrative to 1st person act-out, that’s the dynamic shift.

Don’t Overthink It

There’s a lot of data on these pages. The important thing is to have fun exaggerating trying to explain a dilemma to your audience and describing the nuances of the situation.

Get personal 1 on 1 Coaching with Jerry just follow [this link](#) to learn more!

