

How to Write Successful Satire

http://www.bandersnatch.com/how_to_write_satire.htm

1. First, is **understand the importance of context**. For example, the Obama cartoon in the New Yorker was out of context, which is why it didn't work as well as it might have in, say, Mad Magazine.
 - If a satirical article catches the reader by surprise, they might not get the humor.
 - Thus, in plying your satirical wit, make sure you target it in a context where the reader is looking for humor
2. Second, **vicious does not work**. "Trenchant" is a key word to remember. Sharp, vigorously effective. Words like "delightfully vicious" is more the goal.
3. Third, **obscenity detracts from good satire**. The best satire is very literate.
4. Fourth, the **more subtle and authoritative your satire is, the more effective it is**. British humor is very understated, and absolutely funny as a result. American's tend to be over the top. Appearing to be serious while in fact the content is not, works very well. The best satire mimics authoritative presentation so that at a glance it might appear to be real.
 - The best satire works in tandem with the level of the reader's understanding of the subject or topic of the satire. If people care enough about a subject, they will be current on it and knowledgeable about it. Assume your reader is intelligent.
5. Fifth, the trick is **to make sure the made-up farcical element is clear**. For example, the authoritative quotations in the Frumious Bandersnatch almost always from some faculty member of the General Delivery University, which is billed as "America's only genuine diploma mill".
6. Sixth, one path to good satire is taking **an existing trend or direction of a story, and keep going as far over the edge as you dare**. The ultimate truth (and justification for seeing something as outrageous) is to follow the logical trend way out there and see where it takes you. A lot of satirical humor has erupted from the current economic bailout efforts...if banks can get bailed out, why not...someone who just blew \$42,000 in Vegas last weekend?
7. Seventh, another path to effective satire is **turn the story upside down**. For example, my book "Get In Touch With Your Inner Rodent" is a parody of self-help books...and is based on advice that is just the opposite of anything that could really be useful.
 - One of the Bandersnatch's best stories was when the first Martian lander started reporting from Mars. We started running stories from the Martian resistance point of view as the Martians tried to repel the Earth invaders.
8. **Eighth, pick your subject carefully**. The more visible and serious the target is, the easier it is to satirize them. This is what editorial cartoonist do...take highly visible people or topics, then stretch the most identifying elements. Thus George Bush has grown smaller over the years, and his ears grow bigger (and his nose gets longer). People or subjects that aren't highly visible make poor satirical targets because no one will get it because they don't know who you are talking about.

9. Ninth, in order to avoid getting sued for libel in the United States, your target really must be a public person, because they have a harder path to suing. A public person can only sue for reckless disregard for the truth and actual malice. Satire is the essence of disregard for the truth, because satire makes facts up. The key is to make it clear you are not claiming what you say is in fact true. This is again why context is so crucial.

10. Finally, do not expect to get rich writing satire. There is virtually no market for paid satirical writing. The joy in writing satire comes from not only the reaction of readers who enjoy it, the real high comes when the target of satire reacts to your piece.

Those who need to be satirized take themselves way too seriously. Puncturing their pomposity and certainty that they are the fount of all good and right and knowledge brings them down to earth. And with surprising frequency, those who need to be brought back among us mortals will provide the second act to your satirical barb and give it vastly more attention than it would otherwise have gotten. Just hope they aren't the director of the FBI.