

# The Comedic Ladder

## Comedy of Ideas

The highest level of comedy in which characters argue ideas or represent people who hold those ideas. The action is an embodiment of these ideas in conflict. The characters are more a representation of personalities, capable of change, pitting their wits (or lack thereof) against those who view reality differently.

Example: *Pygmalion*

## Comedy of Manners

This type of comedy deals with the amorous adventures of the aristocratic class. It emphasizes language, and the drama is found in the verbal wit. All types of satire are used, often at the characters' expense: puns, paradoxes, epigrams, and witticisms.

Example: *The Importance of Being Earnest*

## Farce

This level of comedy is driven by plot: mistaken identities, coincidences, and mistimings. The characters become the puppets to fate. The plot is predictably improbable: twins separated at birth, unhappy matches by overbearing parents, alliances complicated by money or birth, and happy endings.

Example: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

## Low Comedy

At the bottom of the comedy ladder, man is almost indistinguishable from animal. The laughter is loudest over the dirty joke or gesture. This rung is for "bathroom humor" about body functions. This is very physical comedy with mishaps, loud collisions, and slapstick as well as physical exaggerations such as hairy warts, long noses, and humped backs.

Example: "The Miller's Tale" from *The Canterbury Tales*

