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When Carrie joined the school's debating team, she hadn't considered the fact that she would have to speak confidently and clearly in front of an audience of strangers. She'd merely gone down the list of possible Thursday afternoon activities, crossing off first the ones which she liked the least. When there was one activity left on the list – the Debating Club – she thought to herself, "Well, at least it's indoors." She put a tick next to it and thought no more about it.

The reality of what membership actually involved sunk in the following Thursday. "This year, we'll be competing with schools in the local area," said Miss Forbes. "The first debate is next Saturday evening at Daversham College. We'll need two speakers, and the topic is capital punishment. We have to argue in favour of it. Any volunteers?"

There was silence in the room. "Nobody?" said Miss Forbes. "Well, in that case I'll decide who's going to speak. Alison, will you do the main, five-minute speech, and Carrie, can you do the two-minute summing up at the end?"

Although Miss Forbes had phrased it as a question, it was not the kind of school where you could say no to a teacher. "Yes, Miss Forbes," said Carrie weakly.

Miss Forbes explained to Carrie exactly what she would have to do. "The actual summing up of our main arguments should be the last

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thirty seconds or so of your speech. That bit's easy, and can be written in advance. Discuss with Alison what the main points she's making are. For the first minute and a half, though, you have to respond to the points made by the opposition, and explain why they're wrong. I won't lie to you, it's not easy. You have to listen very, very carefully to what they say in their main speech, make notes as you listen, and come up with reasons why those points are wrong."

Carrie was terrified. She'd never done anything like this before in her life, and was sure she would make a fool of herself. What if she couldn't think of anything to say? A minute and a half is a lifetime when you're standing in front of a microphone and everyone's looking at you. Still, at least none of her friends would be there to see her mess up. "Thank goodness it's not at our school," she thought.

The debate at Daversham College was held in the Main Hall. The whole school was present. The rows of unknown faces seemed to Carrie to be waiting for her to fail. Her heart had never beaten so fast, and as she walked across the room with Alison and Miss Forbes, her hands were shaking so much she could hardly hold the pen and paper she was carrying.

Alison opened the debate. Although she had written her speech out in full, she rarely glanced at the papers in front of her. "She must have learnt it by heart," thought Carrie admiringly. Alison made some forceful arguments, her points were clear, her timing was excellent, and there was thunderous applause as she sat down. Carrie just had time to whisper, "Well done, Ali. Great job!" before the main speaker of the opposing team stood up. "Come on, Clare Dalton of Daversham College," thought Carrie. "Say something ridiculous that I can easily argue against."

For the first thirty seconds of Clare's speech, Carrie couldn't find any points to disagree with. She stared at her blank piece of paper, and dreaded what would happen if it remained blank for the whole five minutes. Suddenly she found herself thinking, "Wait a minute. What she's just said doesn't make sense. Does it? No, it doesn't!" As quickly as she could, she wrote down Clare's exact words, and made a note next to them as to why her point was illogical. "One or two more like that," thought Carrie, "and I'll be able to make a speech after all."

1. Carrie had chosen to join the Debating Club because it was _____
- A. at the bottom of the list of possible activities.
 - B. the only activity which didn't take place outdoors.
 - C. the activity on the list she disliked least of all.
 - D. a chance to give speeches in front of strangers.

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2. The following Thursday, Carrie realised for the first time that _____.
 - A. she would actually have to speak in public.
 - B. she didn't believe in capital punishment at all.
 - C. Miss Forbes would always decide the speakers.
 - D. she was allowed to volunteer to be a speaker.
3. Miss Forbes told Carrie that Carrie's main responsibility would be to _____.
 - A. help Alison come up with a list of points to make.
 - B. write Alison's speech for her before the debate.
 - C. answer the opposition's questions during the debate.
 - D. disagree with arguments made by the opposing team.
4. Carrie was glad the debate had been arranged at another school because _____.
 - A. she would be able to use a microphone there.
 - B. her friends wouldn't be able to see her fail.
 - C. the atmosphere would help her succeed.
 - D. she had never taken part in a debate there.
5. In the Main Hall before the debate, Carrie felt that everyone in the room _____.
 - A. could hear her heart beating.
 - B. was looking at her hands shaking.
 - C. expected her to do badly.
 - D. knew she would drop her things.
6. Carrie was particularly impressed that Alison _____.
 - A. had written her speech on several pieces of paper.
 - B. had made so many clear, forceful arguments.
 - C. didn't look at the papers in front of her at all.
 - D. had memorised her speech before the debate.
7. During Clare's speech, Carrie was surprised that she _____.
 - A. had found a point to make in her own speech.
 - B. was able to remember Clare's exact words.
 - C. had time to make a note next to Clare's words.
 - D. could make notes on the piece of paper so quickly.



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Terry stood on deck as the ferry slowly arrived at the island. He watched the sailors throw ropes to their colleagues on shore and then looked up at the villages of small white houses that dotted the mountainside above the small town. He was planning a six-month stay, much longer than the few days or weeks that the noisy crowds of tourists around him were planning. He had given himself that long to write a novel and he was determined to succeed, whatever the temptations to enjoy himself might be. Leaving his life behind was just the thing he needed, he thought, and the island seemed to him to be the ideal place for it. He collected his things and made his way onto the concrete quay.

He was immediately surrounded by local people, all rudely pushing each other out of the way to offer him a room that was guaranteed to be "the cheapest in town", although he knew that they couldn't all be the cheapest. Terry politely shook his head and peered around for the Paradise Hotel and one "Mrs Magda". She had sounded quite intimidating on the phone, so when a young woman approached him and quietly asked in perfect English if he was Terry Snow, he wasn't sure how to respond. The woman smiled and said: "Perhaps you were expecting my mother? I hope you are not disappointed."

"N ... No, no. Not at all," stammered Terry. She picked up one of his bags and they set off into the small town. She asked him about his stay and he told her that his plan was to stay a week at the hotel while he found more permanent accommodation.

"Six months is a long time to be on the island," she said. "You'll find it different in winter. Once, there was farming and fishing on the island but they've practically disappeared. Tourism is the only source of income and so few of the locals fancy sitting and watching winter come when the tourists leave. Almost all of them have second jobs on the mainland and the heart has been ripped out of the place." "And you?" Terry asked.

"I went away to the mainland for my education. Since I came back, I stay here all year round." They stopped outside a hotel. It reminded Terry of an old woman who still managed to keep a certain air of dignity. It could do with a bit of paint and one of the letters in the name was missing, but it must have once been one of the most impressive

buildings on the island. Terry began to wonder about its decline and what caused it but realised that the young woman was waiting for him to say something.

"I'm sorry," he said. "What did you say?"

"I asked you what you thought of the hotel." She looked at it. "Since Dad died, it hasn't been the same. Mum gets a few of the local men in to help out every now and then, but you never do as good a job when you're being paid as when it's an act of love, do you? And Dad loved that hotel. It was his gift to his grandchildren, he used to say. Terry looked at the hotel again. He felt that he had come somewhere where buildings were much more than shelter. Each brick held a story ready to be unlocked and he felt inspired just by touching them. If he felt like that after such a short time, imagine what he might achieve in six months.

"Well, maybe I could help out a bit, while I'm here," he said, excitedly. The young woman nodded and said, "Maybe," before leading the way into the cool interior of the hotel.

1. Terry thinks the island looks _____.
 - A. like it will be too noisy for him.
 - B. suitable for what he wants to do.
 - C. too far from the mainland for him.
 - D. so relaxing that he will never do any work.
2. Terry rejects the offers of rooms because _____.
 - A. he has heard that it is easy to be cheated.
 - B. no one asks him politely to look at a room.
 - C. he has already booked somewhere.
 - D. he would rather find a hotel himself.
3. Terry is surprised when the young woman speaks to him because _____.
 - A. she was much less attractive than he had hoped.
 - B. her English is better in real life than on the phone.
 - C. he was expecting to meet someone different.
 - D. he thought he would have to find the hotel on his own.
4. The young woman tells Terry that _____.
 - A. traditional sources of money have become less important.
 - B. most local people are relieved when the tourists finally go.
 - C. people complain about the effects of tourism on local industry.
 - D. sometimes tourists find work and decide to stay longer.
5. It seems to Terry that the hotel _____.
 - A. has never been an attractive building.
 - B. has had work done on it recently.

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- C. makes an impression on everyone who sees it.
D. used to be nicer than it is now.
6. The young woman says that one problem is that _____.
A. her mother can no longer afford to pay people to work on the hotel.
B. nobody in the area is willing to do this sort of work.
C. workmen are less careful when they don't own the building.
D. some people pretend to enjoy the work and then do it badly.
7. Terry is excited by the idea of _____.
A. finally doing some physical work instead of just writing.
B. getting ideas for his work from the things around him.
C. spending six months researching the history of the island.
D. building a house of his own on the island one day.



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Ask a hundred comedians what the secret of good comedy is, and you're guaranteed that at least ninety-nine of them will come up with the same response: timing. Although this is undoubtedly true, it is not the complete answer, as what exactly good comedy is should, surely, involve the concept of making people laugh. Successful politicians also have to have good timing, but most of them would soon face an empty audience if they ever chose to perform at a comedy club.

So what is the secret of good comedy? There clearly isn't one straight answer, but there's no doubt that much of modern British humour relies on comedy through language, comedians like Charlie Chaplin and Benny Hill and present-day characters like Mr Bean being part of a different tradition of "slapstick" comedy that relies on the physical rather than the verbal.

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The joke is the most obvious example of language comedy. With language comedy, how you phrase what you're saying – particularly the "punchline", the final line of a joke that draws the laugh – is more important than what you're saying. Take this traditional double-act joke:

First man: I say, I say, I say. My wife's gone to the Caribbean.

Second man: Jamaica?

First man: No, she went of her own accord.

Ignoring the fact that it's not particularly funny to modern ears (if it ever was funny), at first sight it appears that the humour rests in the fact that "Jamaica" is confused for "D'you make her?", i.e. "Did you make her go to the Caribbean?". Try putting a different final line on the joke, though. "No, she chose to go." contains exactly the same meaning but, well, it's just not as funny, is it? It's all in the phrasing.

This may be one of the reasons why British humour doesn't translate into other languages very well. When one translates, one keeps the meaning but the phrasing changes, losing the basis of the humour.

The second secret of comedy to my mind is characterisation. By this, I mean the creation of a character, or characters, by the comedian through which the jokes or stories are told. Comedy is acting and, like any play, a great script in the wrong hands can be a disaster and a terrible script in an expert's hands can be made into something quite special.

I remember as a child watching the comedian Peter Sellers being interviewed on the Parkinson show. Michael Parkinson, the studio audience, and my parents watching with me at home were crying with laughter at everything that Sellers did or said. I sat there thinking: "He's just waving a handkerchief around. Nobody laughs when I do that. Why are they laughing at him?" I now know what I didn't know then – that he was a comic genius, and I'm not. And by that, I mean that he had the ability to create characters that people found genuinely funny, whatever they did. He could have sat there in silence and people would still have been laughing. And – let's be clear – even though Sellers was appearing on a chat show supposedly as himself, he was in character. As anyone who's read the biography of Peter Sellers by Roger Lewis knows, Sellers off-stage was an incredibly violent and difficult man.

So is it possible to learn to be a comedian, or is it just a natural talent? There may well be people who will never, ever succeed at being professional comedians however hard they try. Very few of us will ever be an Einstein, Mozart or Shakespeare in our respective fields. However, all comedians will tell you that the more experience you get, the more experienced, and therefore the better, you become. And they're not joking.

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1. In the first paragraph, the writer suggests that politicians _____
 - A. often attempt humour in their speeches.
 - B. are only successful if they are funny.
 - C. are used to facing empty audiences.
 - D. are no good at making people laugh.
2. According to the text, "slapstick" comedy _____
 - A. does not make use of language to be funny.
 - B. is different to the comedy of Benny Hill.
 - C. is only found in modern British humour.
 - D. does not exist in Britain anymore.
3. The writer tells the joke about Jamaica to _____
 - A. demonstrate how many old jokes are not funny today.
 - B. explain why many jokes need two people to tell them.
 - C. show how the actual words used in a joke are important.
 - D. point out that some jokes contain confusing phrases.
4. Whether a comedy act is "a disaster" or "something quite special" depends on _____
 - A. the quality of the script being performed.
 - B. the ability of the performer to perform.
 - C. how much the act is like a play.
 - D. which character tells which joke.
5. Watching the Parkinson show, the writer did not understand why _____
 - A. Peter Sellers was doing the things he was doing.
 - B. nobody was laughing at him at that moment.
 - C. Peter Sellers was a comic genius and he wasn't.
 - D. everyone laughed at Sellers doing ordinary things.
6. The writer mentions a book by Roger Lewis to _____
 - A. enable people to find out more information about Peter Sellers.
 - B. prove that he hadn't made up the story about Peter Sellers.
 - C. make it clear that Peter Sellers often played unpleasant characters.
 - D. emphasize that Peter Sellers was acting during the chat show.
7. In the final paragraph, the writer makes the point that _____
 - A. none of us can learn to be good comedians.
 - B. all comedians' skills improve through practice.
 - C. it's not worth trying to become a professional comedian.
 - D. Einstein, Mozart and Shakespeare weren't comedians.