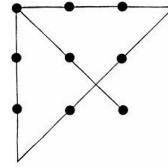


Outside of the Box.



By Carl Brown

Pay attention please. There are two numbered sentences below - don't look! Don't read ahead. Not yet. But when I say "go", read each numbered sentence slowly. Let the first sentence sink in before moving on to the second. Pay attention to what happens in your brain.

Ready?

Go.

First:

1. Time flies like an arrow.

Let that sink in. Pause. Now read this:

2. Fruit flies like a banana.

I hope you laughed. I've heard this joke a hundred times and I still laugh.

What happened in your brain? Let's look at that. You read, "Time flies like an arrow" and internally you say, "Yes. Time does indeed fly. Like an arrow."

And meanwhile your brain is cataloguing the sentence parts. This is why you took English in high school. So your brain could file words in their proper places. "Time" = noun, "flies" = verb, "like" = preposition, etc.

But then you read the second statement and your brain stops. The structure looks similar but it has in fact changed. You aren't expecting this. You are expecting another flying object. If time

flies like an arrow then fruit must fly like something, but a banana? You are momentarily confused, until you realize that “fruit *flies*” is the noun, “like” is now a *verb* instead of a preposition, and there is no preposition.

And then you laugh.

But why did you laugh?

Because you learned something new. And learning something new makes you laugh.

There is often an alternative way of arranging available information. This means that there can be a switch over to another arrangement. Usually this switch over is sudden. If the switch over is temporary it gives rise to humour. If the switch over is permanent it gives rise to insight. It is interesting that the reaction to an insight solution is often laughter even when there is nothing funny about the solution itself.¹

Now as you chuckle, congratulate yourself: you are two thirds of the way through 2020, the year of the apocalypse. Remember that Sarah laughed when someone told her she was going to get pregnant. She didn’t see that coming. If ever there was a year to be challenged to think outside of the box, to expect the unexpected, to see the available information in a new arrangement, either humorously or, more permanently, with insight, this is it.

¹ Bono, Edward de. Lateral Thinking: A Textbook of Creativity (p. 26). Penguin Books Ltd. Kindle Edition.