Roasting the Joker

Big Tobacco thinks they can fool our generation into addiction, but we're calling these jokers out. Check out our toolkit with tips & tricks for writing the best jokes.

8 Joke-Writing Tips

1. Research is Your Friend: There's a ton of stuff Big Tobacco has done and continues
2. Economy of Words: A more succinct joke gets to the punchline faster.
3. State Your Premise: Make sure you provide all necessary context in your joke's setup.
4. Escalate: When your punchline has a list, go from grounded to wild examples.
5. Be Specific: “The parking lot of a Target” is a lot funnier than “in front of a store.”
6. Stick Your Landing: End your joke with the funniest or most revealing words.
7. Punch Up: Make fun of the bad guys and people in power, not their victims.
8. Trust Your Gut: It's hard to go wrong if you explore ideas you find genuinely funny.

Joke Format and Examples

Rule of Threes / Bait & Switch

Start a list of traits, then surprise the audience with the third item.
*Juul is simple: no buttons, no switches, and no moral compass.*

If This is True, Then What Else is True?

Take an unusual fact about Big Tobacco, and then draw it to a comical extreme.
*Juul is a sleek e-cigarette that looks like a USB flash drive ... complete with a heightened risk of downloading a virus.*

Drawing Comparisons

Find the parallels and differences between Big Tobacco and another exploitative group.
*Big Tobacco is nothing like the Mafia. ... The Mafia tends to spare women and children.*
Unexpected Connections

Make a connection between Big Tobacco and another relevant news story.
Everyone who’s been victimized by Big Tobacco should get to sit down with Oprah and tell their story.

“That’s Like…”

Use an analogy to point out the ridiculousness of something Big Tobacco has done.
Juul saying they want to offer a great alternative to cigarettes is like Lex Luthor offering Superman “Diet Kryptonite.”

Unintended Consequences

Point out the ironic results of Big Tobacco’s efforts to position themselves positively.
Big Tobacco claims they want to save mom-and-pop smoke shops. But there’ll be a lot more moms and pops out there if we sell fewer cigarettes (or stop selling cigarettes).

Mapping

Take a fact about Big Tobacco and apply the logic to another situation.
It’s never a good sign when you log onto a website and see that a company has been mandated by a federal court to offer a long list of disclaimers. If you saw a dating profile that began with the phrase “the U.S. government has ordered me to tell you…” you’d pretty much want to swipe left.

Wordplay

Play with the double meaning of smoking-related terms.
Where there’s smoke, there’s fire. Where there’s secondhand smoke, you can still get burned.

Personification

Imagine what Big Tobacco would be like if it were a person.
Big Tobacco isn’t the giant it used to be. It’s going through a bit of a mid-life crisis. Reinventing itself, changing its name, trying desperately to seem cool — and not fooling anyone.

Tried and True

Use standard roast joke formulations of old.
Tobacco is still the No. 1 preventable cause of death in the U.S. So today some 1,400 people died of tobacco ... or as Big Tobacco calls it ... Thursday.