

# HOW TO MESS UP PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING – TEN MINUTE VERSION

By Bradley Walton

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# HOW TO MESS UP PRETTY MUCH ANYTHING – TEN MINUTE VERSION

*A Ten Minute Comedy Duet*

**By Bradley Walton**

**SYNOPSIS:** Any worthwhile school production needs to teach some kind of lesson, right? When the performers take the stage, they proudly announce that the lesson of this show is right there in the title: *How to Mess Up Pretty Much Anything*. But when the principal phones in and demands a more socially uplifting theme, neither one has any ideas. So the actors plunge ahead with their original plan, frantically exploring random and outlandish scenarios as they try to figure out a way they can hold on to their original lesson and win the principal's approval before they get kicked off the stage!

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

*(2 either; gender flexible)*

- 1 (m/f) ..... Bold and adventurous; a risk-taker who doesn't like defeat. *(86 lines)*
- 2 (m/f) ..... Follows 1's lead, but isn't as bold; the more pragmatic of the two. *(85 lines)*

## PROPERTIES

- 1 has a cell phone (can be mimed for forensics competition.)

**AUTHOR NOTES**

My daughter liked the original one-act version of this script a lot. She thought I should make a forensics version. This struck me as a very good idea. So, a big thank you to her for the suggestion.

Believe it or not, it's probably harder to condense an existing script into a shorter version than to create something new from scratch. It's tough to figure out what to cut, and inevitably, you have to take out things that you really like. The new version needs to find its own rhythm and become its own script, rather than just an abbreviated copy, and in order for that to happen, the author has to be willing to let go of the original. That can be a tough thing to do with your own work.

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**AT RISE:** 1 and 2 on a bare stage. THEY may be dressed in street clothes, matching outfits, or however the director sees fit.

- 1: Good morning (Or afternoon, etc.) and thank you for joining us for *How to Mess Up Pretty Much Anything*.
- 2: It's a fact—many dramatic performances, especially in educational settings, strive to teach a lesson.
- 1: In the interest of efficiency, this performance puts its lesson right in the title.
- 2: *How to Mess Up Pretty Much Anything!*
- 1: I said the title, already.
- 2: Oh...sorry. I messed up.
- 1: No, that's great—it's our theme!
- 2: So it's good that I messed up!
- 1: It's like an all-beef onion ring.
- 2: Onion rings don't have beef in them. And they definitely can't be all beef.
- 1: They can if you mess them up badly enough.
- 2: I'm kind of wondering, though, is "how to mess up pretty much anything" really a good lesson?
- 1: Would you rather demonstrate good manners?
- 2: That sounds boring.
- 1: How to survive jumping out of a runaway shopping cart at a high elevation while being manicured by a Viking?
- 2: We don't have a shopping cart.
- 1: Cell phone etiquette?
- 2: Now you're just being stupid.
- 1: Then "how to mess up pretty much anything" is a great lesson. (*Reaches to pocket.*) Excuse me, my phone is vibrating.
- 2: You're performing and you forgot turn it off? What's the matter with you?
- 1: I messed up.
- 2: Oh, well, that's okay then.
- 1: (*Speaking into phone.*) This really isn't a good time. Could you—oh. Sorry. We will. Bye. (*Puts phone away.*)
- 2: Who was that?

- 1: The principal. (*If the principal is present in the audience, substitute "the superintendent" or "the school board chairman," "the mayor," etc.*) He says it's not a good lesson.
- 2: But he's not here. How does he know what we're doing?
- 1: He's the principal. It's his job to know.

*BOTH quietly look upwards and around in awe.*

**1 AND 2:** Oooo.

- 1: He says the performance needs to teach people how to better themselves.
- 2: It does! We're showing people how to be successful. Because if you expect to mess up and always do, then you've got a perfect record.
- 1: Except that then you've messed up at messing up.
- 2: Huh?
- 1: Don't think about it too hard.
- 2: What are we gonna do?
- 1: The only thing we can do is press on with the original plan.
- 2: But the principal doesn't like it.
- 1: If we stick with it, we're bound to come up with some kind of excuse to justify the lesson.
- 2: Or we could stop the performance.
- 1: We'd be humiliated.
- 2: Yeah...we would.
- 1: Let's get on with this, then. What's another way to mess something up?
- 2: Be irresponsible!
- 1: Don't bathe for a month!
- 2: Pretend you're a horse!
- 1: You're on to something there. Responsibility and bathing are common sense. Not pretending you're a horse, though, you don't get that kind of advice every day. That's really thinking outside the box—innovative problem-solving that's not bound by so-called conventional wisdom. I think stuff like that is what we need to explore.
- 2: Okay.

*THEY immediately begin play-acting.*

- 1: So, what makes you think you're qualified to be the new manager of Big Burger?
- 2: Neigh!
- 1: Did you just neigh?
- 2: Neigh!
- 1: I don't need anyone right now who can neigh. What I could really use is somebody who can quack like a duck. Do you speak quack?
- 2: Neigh!
- 1: I'm sorry, but I don't think we'll be able to hire you.

*THEY cease play-acting and return to their normal selves.*

- 2: That was...interesting.
- 1: You could really mess up a job interview by acting like a horse.
- 2: Could that actually happen?
- 1: There are billions of people in the world. At least one of them is bound to act like a horse.
- 2: Point taken.
- 1: Oh! I got another one!
- 2: What?
- 1: Sticking your head in a paint bucket!
- 2: With or without paint in it?
- 1: Either. Here, pretend my whole head is covered with paint.
- 2: Okay.

*THEY begin play-acting again.*

You look different.

- 1: I stuck my head in a bucket of paint!
- 2: What color is it?
- 1: It's triple cobalt midnight serene. The back of the color sample said that this is the color of royalty.
- 2: I thought that was purple.
- 1: On Earth, sure. This is the color of royalty on the planet Zoramath.

- 2: Oh, right. My Uncle Marv's from there.
- 1: Liar! I've met your uncle and he was obviously born on Pluto.
- 2: You've never been to Pluto! How can you say that?
- 1: Because it's cold on Pluto and that's the only way to explain your uncle's huge, bushy mustache.
- 2: That's not a mustache, that's his nose hair!
- 1: I didn't say it wasn't his nose hair.
- 2: There's a difference between nose hair and a mustache.
- 1: Depends on the nose hair. Your uncle clearly has Plutonian nose hair.
- 2: You take that back! He has Zuramathian nose hair!
- 1: You wouldn't know Zuramathian nose hair if you found it in your ears.
- 2: Then it wouldn't be nose hair!
- 1: You'd make that assumption just because of where you found it?
- 2: Nose hair grows in your nose.
- 1: Unless someone transplanted your nose hair into your ears while you were asleep. Did you ever think about that?
- 2: People don't do cross-body-part hair transplants!
- 1: Oh, come on, don't tell me you've never been bored.
- 2: Is that why you stuck your head in a bucket of paint? Because you were bored?
- 1: No, I did it because I wanted to look special.
- 2: Oh, you look special, all right.
- 1: You know what? I'm not putting up with your abuse. Our friendship is over.

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