

THE MISSING HOMEWORK

A Three-Person Comedy Scene

Suggested Ages: 11–16

Approx. Time: 7-9 minutes

Difficulty: Intermediate

Characters: 3, gender-flexible

Genre: Comedy/Verbal Comedy/School Scene

Setting: A classroom before class

Props: Teacher's desk or table, student desks or chairs, folders or notebooks, backpack, clipboard or grade sheet.

Skills Practiced: Comic timing, listening and reacting, characterization, verbal comedy, escalation, maintaining character, purposeful pauses, pacing, callbacks, shifting objectives, playing logical arguments, sharing focus, and ensemble rhythm.

Characters

MORGAN - The teacher's student assistant. Responsible, organized, and trying to collect everyone's homework before class begins. Morgan starts reasonably patient but gradually discovers that collecting one missing assignment has somehow become a philosophical debate.

ALEX - Did the homework and knows exactly where it is. Alex cannot understand why Morgan keeps describing something with a known location as "missing." Alex's reasoning is questionable but internally consistent, and Alex should argue every point sincerely rather than deliberately trying to be difficult.

JAMIE - Arrives with an actual problem: Jamie completed the homework, brought it to school, and has since lost it. Jamie initially seems likely to prove Morgan's point but instead introduces an entirely new question about whether homework that successfully reached school deserves more credit than homework that stayed safely at home.

Performance Note

The comedy works best when all three characters take the argument seriously. Alex should not be played as unintelligent; Alex listens carefully and repeatedly notices weaknesses in Morgan's terminology. Morgan's frustration should build gradually, and Jamie should enter as a seemingly reasonable third person before becoming increasingly persuaded by parts of Alex's logic.

Skills Practiced

Comic timing & verbal comedy. Listening & reacting. Characterization & contrasting objectives. Escalation & callbacks. Purposeful pauses & pacing. Maintaining sincerity in absurd argument. Sharing focus & ensemble rhythm. Reacting to exact wording rather than anticipating punchline.

The Scene

MORGAN stands beside the teacher's desk with a clipboard or stack of papers. ALEX approaches.

MORGAN: Homework?

ALEX: Yes.

MORGAN: Can I have it?

ALEX: No.

MORGAN: Why not?

ALEX: It's at home.

MORGAN: So you don't have your homework.

ALEX: I have homework.

MORGAN: You just said it's at home.

ALEX: That's where I have it.

MORGAN: You don't have it here.

ALEX: I never said I had it here.

MORGAN: Alex, I'm collecting the homework.

ALEX: I know.

MORGAN: And yours is missing.

ALEX: No, it isn't.

MORGAN: It's not here.

ALEX: That doesn't make it missing.

MORGAN: Where is it?

ALEX: On my desk at home.

MORGAN: Exactly.

ALEX: Thank you.

MORGAN: That wasn't agreement.

ALEX: It sounded like agreement.

MORGAN: If your homework is at home when it's supposed to be at school, then your homework is missing.

ALEX: How can it be missing if I know exactly where it is?

MORGAN: Because it's missing from here.

ALEX: That's different.

MORGAN: How?

ALEX: You said my homework is missing. It isn't. You're missing my homework.

MORGAN stares at ALEX.

MORGAN: I am not missing your homework.

ALEX: You just said you were.

MORGAN: I said your homework is missing from here.

ALEX: Right. You want it, and you don't have it.

MORGAN: Correct.

ALEX: So you're missing it.

MORGAN: No.

ALEX: I'm not.

MORGAN: You are the person who was supposed to bring it.

ALEX: I know where it is.

MORGAN: That does not help me.

ALEX: I can give you directions.

MORGAN: I don't want directions to your homework.

ALEX: Then I don't know how I'm supposed to help you find it.

MORGAN: I am not trying to find it!

ALEX: Then why do you keep saying it's missing?

MORGAN takes a moment.

MORGAN: Let's start over.

ALEX: Okay.

MORGAN: Did you complete your homework?

ALEX: Yes.

MORGAN: Do you have your homework with you?

ALEX: No.

MORGAN: Why?

ALEX: Because it's at home.

MORGAN: Then you forgot your homework.

ALEX: No.

MORGAN: Alex-

ALEX: I didn't forget it.

MORGAN: You left it at home.

ALEX: Correct.

MORGAN: That's forgetting it.

ALEX: No, forgetting it would mean I didn't remember it.

MORGAN: You didn't remember to bring it.

ALEX: That's different.

MORGAN: How is that different?

ALEX: I remembered it this morning.

MORGAN: And then what happened?

ALEX: I left it on my desk.

MORGAN: Because you forgot to put it in your backpack.

ALEX: I remembered that too.

MORGAN: Then why didn't you put it in your backpack?

ALEX: I was eating breakfast.

MORGAN: What does breakfast have to do with your homework?

ALEX: Nothing. That's probably the problem.

MORGAN: So you forgot it.

ALEX: No. I was aware of it the entire time.

MORGAN: You were aware of your homework while you left the house without it?

ALEX: Yes.

MORGAN: You knew it was sitting on your desk?

ALEX: Yes.

MORGAN: You knew you needed it for school?

ALEX: Yes.

MORGAN: And you came to school anyway?

ALEX: I would have been late.

MORGAN: You deliberately left your homework at home?

ALEX: I wouldn't say deliberately.

MORGAN: What would you say?

ALEX: Knowingly.

MORGAN: That's worse!

ALEX: At least it's honest.

MORGAN: Alex, your homework is missing because you forgot to bring it.

ALEX: You're combining two separate accusations.

MORGAN: They are not accusations!

ALEX: First you accused it of being missing. Now you're accusing me of forgetting it.

MORGAN: I'm writing "No homework."

ALEX: That's definitely not true.

MORGAN: Why?

ALEX: I did the homework.

MORGAN: But you don't have it.

ALEX: We've established that I have it.

MORGAN: At home!

ALEX: You keep leaving that part out.

MORGAN closes their eyes briefly.

JAMIE enters, searching through a backpack.

JAMIE: Morgan, have you seen my homework?

MORGAN slowly looks at ALEX.

MORGAN: No.

JAMIE: I can't find it anywhere.

ALEX immediately becomes interested.

ALEX: Now that's missing.

MORGAN: Don't.

JAMIE: What's missing?

ALEX: Your homework.

JAMIE: I know.

ALEX: See?

MORGAN: See what?

ALEX: Jamie doesn't know where the homework is.

JAMIE: I had it this morning.

ALEX: Where?

JAMIE: In my backpack.

ALEX: And now?

JAMIE: I don't know.

ALEX: Missing.

MORGAN: Both of your assignments are missing.

ALEX: No. Mine's at home.

JAMIE: Then yours isn't missing.

ALEX gestures triumphantly toward JAMIE.

ALEX: Thank you.

MORGAN: No! Do not encourage this.

JAMIE: Encourage what?

MORGAN: Alex is claiming the homework isn't missing because Alex knows where it is.

JAMIE: That makes sense.

MORGAN: It does not make sense!

JAMIE: If you know where something is, it's not missing.

MORGAN: It is missing from school.

JAMIE: Oh.

ALEX: That's Morgan's problem.

MORGAN: It is your problem!

ALEX: I know where mine is.

JAMIE: I wish I knew where mine was.

ALEX: Exactly.

MORGAN: Nobody is getting credit for knowing where their homework is!

ALEX: That's unfair.

MORGAN: Why?

ALEX: Because apparently knowing where it is isn't as important as bringing it here and losing it.

JAMIE: I didn't mean to lose it.

ALEX: I'm not blaming you.

JAMIE: It sounds a little like you're blaming me.

ALEX: I'm saying your homework made more progress than mine.

MORGAN: What?

ALEX: Mine made it as far as my desk.

JAMIE: Mine made it to school.

ALEX: Exactly. Yours got farther.

JAMIE: So mine did better?

ALEX: Technically.

MORGAN: Homework does not get graded on distance traveled.

ALEX: Maybe it should.

MORGAN: Why?

ALEX: Effort.

MORGAN: The paper did not make an effort!

ALEX: Jamie's made more of one than mine.

JAMIE: Mine was in my backpack.

ALEX: Transportation still counts.

MORGAN: No, it doesn't!

JAMIE: Wait. If mine made it to school, shouldn't that count for something?

MORGAN: You have to turn it in.

JAMIE: I would if I knew where it was.

ALEX: Which is why yours is missing.

JAMIE: Right.

MORGAN: And Alex's is also missing.

ALEX: Mine is stationary.

MORGAN: That has nothing to do with this!

ALEX: It has a location.

JAMIE: Mine had a location.

ALEX: Past tense. That's the difference.

MORGAN: The difference is that neither of you can hand me your homework.

ALEX considers this.

ALEX: That's true.

MORGAN: Finally.

ALEX: So from your perspective, they're the same.

MORGAN: Yes.

ALEX: But from our perspective, they're completely different.

MORGAN: No.

JAMIE: Mine's worse.

MORGAN: Jamie!

JAMIE: Alex can go home and get the homework.

ALEX: Exactly.

JAMIE: I can't go anywhere and get mine because I don't know where it is.

ALEX: Exactly.

JAMIE: So Alex's homework is unavailable.

ALEX: And yours is missing.

MORGAN: They are both unavailable!

ALEX: But for different reasons.

JAMIE: That's important.

MORGAN: Why is that important?

Neither ALEX nor JAMIE immediately has an answer.

ALEX: Because they're different reasons.

MORGAN: I am writing "Missing homework" next to both of your names.

ALEX: That's inaccurate recordkeeping.

JAMIE: I think mine is accurate.

ALEX: Yours is completely accurate.

JAMIE: Thank you.

MORGAN: This is not an award!

ALEX: Jamie deserves recognition.

JAMIE: For losing my homework?

ALEX: For correctly qualifying as missing.

JAMIE: I don't know how I feel about that.

MORGAN: Nobody is being recognized for missing homework!

ALEX: Then why are you writing it down?

MORGAN stops.

JAMIE: He's got a point.

MORGAN: No, he doesn't.

ALEX: You're creating a permanent record.

MORGAN: For the teacher!

ALEX: Of our accomplishments.

MORGAN: These are not accomplishments!

JAMIE: Mine did make it to school.

ALEX: That's an accomplishment.

MORGAN: Stop congratulating each other!

JAMIE: I'm not happy about losing it.

ALEX: You shouldn't be. You were so close.

JAMIE: I know.

ALEX: Mine never had a chance.

MORGAN: Your homework had every chance! You left it at home!

ALEX: Which is why it's safe.

JAMIE: That's true.

MORGAN: Safe?

ALEX: Mine isn't lost. It isn't damaged. Nobody took it. Nobody threw it away. It's sitting safely on my desk.

JAMIE: Yours is actually doing pretty well.

ALEX: Thank you.

MORGAN: It is homework! It doesn't have a quality of life!

ALEX: Mine does.

MORGAN: No, it doesn't.

ALEX: Better than Jamie's.

JAMIE: Definitely.

MORGAN: Can we please stop comparing the welfare of your homework assignments?

JAMIE: Mine may be in danger.

MORGAN: Jamie-

JAMIE: Somebody could step on it.

ALEX: Or throw it away.

JAMIE: Or copy it.

ALEX: That's identity theft.

MORGAN: IT IS NOT IDENTITY THEFT!

Beat.

ALEX: Academic identity theft.

JAMIE: That's worse.

MORGAN: How is that worse?!

JAMIE: I don't know. It sounded worse.

MORGAN puts down the clipboard.

MORGAN: Fine. Let's solve this.

ALEX: Good.

MORGAN: Alex, your homework is at home.

ALEX: Correct.

MORGAN: Jamie, your homework is somewhere in this school.

JAMIE: Probably.

MORGAN: Neither assignment is currently in my hand.

ALEX: Correct.

JAMIE: Correct.

MORGAN: Therefore, for purposes of collecting homework, both assignments are missing.

ALEX: No.

MORGAN stares.

MORGAN: Why?

ALEX: You just said neither assignment is in your hand.

MORGAN: Correct.

ALEX: That means every homework assignment you haven't collected yet is missing.

MORGAN looks at the rest of the room.

JAMIE: That's a lot of missing homework.

ALEX: We may have a bigger problem than we thought.

MORGAN: No, we don't.

ALEX: How many students are in this class?

MORGAN: Twenty-four.

ALEX: How many assignments have you collected?

MORGAN looks at the stack.

MORGAN: Seven.

ALEX looks at JAMIE.

ALEX: Seventeen missing.

JAMIE: Wow.

MORGAN: They're not missing! The other students haven't turned them in yet!

Beat.

ALEX slowly smiles.

ALEX: Exactly.

MORGAN realizes what just happened.

MORGAN: No.

ALEX: That's what I've been saying.

MORGAN: No, it isn't.

ALEX: If their homework isn't missing just because you don't have it yet-

JAMIE: Then Alex's homework isn't missing either.

ALEX: Thank you.

MORGAN: Their homework is presumably here!

ALEX: Presumably?

JAMIE: You don't know where it is?

MORGAN: I-

ALEX: Morgan.

Beat.

ALEX: Are you missing their homework?

MORGAN picks up the clipboard.

MORGAN: I'm writing "Did not turn in homework."

ALEX: That's accurate.

JAMIE: What about mine?

MORGAN: "Lost homework."

JAMIE: Also accurate.

ALEX: See? Now we have a system.

MORGAN: And Alex-

MORGAN writes.

MORGAN: "Left homework at home."

ALEX: Perfect.

MORGAN exhales, finally satisfied.

JAMIE: Wait.

MORGAN: What?

JAMIE: I think I know where my homework is.

MORGAN: Where?

JAMIE: I gave it to you this morning.

Silence.

MORGAN slowly looks at the stack of seven assignments.

ALEX looks at MORGAN.

ALEX: So it wasn't missing.

JAMIE looks at MORGAN.

JAMIE: You had it.

ALEX nods thoughtfully.

ALEX: Morgan was missing it.

MORGAN: Don't.

ALEX: I'm just saying-

MORGAN: Don't.

Beat.

JAMIE: Does this mean mine gets credit?

MORGAN finds JAMIE'S homework in the stack and hands it back.

MORGAN: Here.

JAMIE: Why are you giving it back?

MORGAN: I don't know anymore.

ALEX points toward the homework.

ALEX: Careful.

JAMIE: Why?

ALEX: Now you have to get it to school again.

Blackout.

Teacher Notes & Performance Guidance

The Central Comic Argument

The scene begins with a simple disagreement: Morgan believes Alex's homework is missing because it is not at school, while Alex believes it cannot be missing because its exact location is known. Neither character should treat this as a silly argument. Morgan needs the assignment; Alex believes the word "missing" is being used incorrectly. Once both characters commit to those positions, nearly every attempt to clarify the situation creates another problem.

Alex Should Not Be Played as the Dumb Character

Alex's reasoning is questionable, but Alex is frequently observant. Alex notices the difference between forgetting an assignment exists and failing to bring it, distinguishes an unavailable assignment from one whose location is unknown, and eventually applies Morgan's own definition of "missing" to every uncollected assignment in the classroom. Play Alex as confident and sincere, not confused.

Morgan Needs a Gradual Frustration Build

Morgan begins with an ordinary task and should initially respond with patience. The frustration can progress through confusion, correction, disbelief, irritation, temporary confidence, and exhaustion. Each time Morgan believes the argument has finally been settled, Alex or Jamie finds another problem. Beginning at maximum frustration leaves the actor nowhere to go.

Jamie Changes the Balance

Jamie's entrance initially seems as though it will settle the argument because Jamie's homework genuinely cannot be located. Instead, Jamie immediately agrees that Alex's homework is not missing because Alex knows where it is. Jamie should not simply become another Alex; Jamie has a real problem and gradually becomes persuaded by parts of Alex's reasoning.

Listen for the Exact Words

Small differences in wording drive the scene. "I forgot my homework," "I left my homework at home," "my homework is missing," "I don't have my homework," and "you don't have my homework" become different statements to these characters. Encourage students to react to the exact words they hear instead of anticipating the next punchline.

Play the Argument Seriously

Avoid exaggerated comic voices, mugging, or signaling that the conversation is ridiculous. Morgan wants the assignments collected. Alex wants the situation described accurately. Jamie wants to find the missing homework. Those objectives are enough to drive the comedy. The more seriously the characters try to solve the problem, the more ridiculous the problem becomes.

Callbacks & Reversals

The scene repeatedly returns to whether homework is missing, who is actually missing it, whether knowing a location changes anything, and whether getting an assignment to school counts as progress. The later exchange about all uncollected homework reverses Morgan's apparently airtight definition, and the final discovery that Jamie already gave Morgan the assignment brings the argument full circle.

Teacher Exercise: Define Missing

Ask each performer to write a one-sentence definition of the word missing from the perspective of the character. Compare the definitions, then rehearse while each performer defends that definition rather than concentrating on getting laughs.

- What makes something missing to Morgan?
- What makes something missing to Alex?
- Does Jamie's definition change during the scene?
- Can something be missing to one person but not another?

Teacher Exercise: Watch the Listeners

Perform part of the scene while the teacher watches only the actors who are not speaking. Look for genuine processing, gradual changes in allegiance, visible frustration before a response, and reactions that support rather than steal focus. Repeat the section with slightly more time to process important reversals.

Teacher Exercise: The Logic Chain

1. Alex's homework is at home.
2. Morgan calls it missing.
3. Alex argues that something cannot be missing when its location is known.
4. Morgan says Alex forgot the homework.
5. Alex distinguishes forgetting from knowingly leaving something behind.
6. Jamie arrives with homework that genuinely cannot be located.
7. Alex argues that Jamie's homework made more progress because it reached school.
8. Morgan tries to classify both assignments as missing.
9. Alex applies Morgan's definition to all uncollected homework.
10. Jamie remembers that Morgan already has the supposedly missing assignment.

Discuss why each step needs the previous one. This helps students understand comic escalation as a connected sequence rather than a collection of unrelated jokes.

Teacher Exercise: Play It Completely Straight

Challenge the cast to perform a section without intentionally trying to make anything funny. No comic voices, exaggerated reactions, waiting for laughter, or emphasizing punchlines. Each

character simply attempts to win the argument or solve the immediate problem. Discuss which moments became funnier because the performers treated the situation seriously.

Teacher Exercise: Find the Reversals

Identify moments when a character who appears to be winning suddenly loses the advantage. Experiment with a brief pause before and after each reversal so the audience has time to recognize what changed.

Discussion Questions

- Why does Alex believe the homework is not missing?
- Why does Morgan believe that it is?
- Is either character technically correct?
- What is the difference between forgetting homework and leaving homework at home?
- Why does Alex object to Morgan's wording?
- What does Morgan want throughout the scene?
- Why should Morgan's frustration build gradually?
- How does Jamie's entrance change the argument?
- Why does Jamie initially seem likely to support Morgan?
- At what point does Jamie begin accepting Alex's reasoning?
- Why does Alex believe Jamie's homework has made more progress?
- What makes the discussion about the welfare of the homework funny?
- Why is listening particularly important in this scene?
- Which lines depend on a character reacting to the exact wording of the previous line?
- Where might a purposeful pause make a reversal stronger?
- Why is the argument funnier when the characters take it seriously?
- How does Morgan accidentally create a definition that Alex can use against Morgan?
- Why is the discovery that Jamie already gave Morgan the homework an effective reversal?
- What does the final exchange about getting the homework to school again add to the ending?
- Which character do you think has the strongest argument by the end?

Staging the Scene in a Classroom

The Missing Homework requires very little staging. A teacher's desk or classroom table can serve as Morgan's collection area, while a backpack, clipboard, notebooks, folders, and several homework papers establish the setting. Keep movement relatively simple because the scene is driven primarily by dialogue, listening, reactions, and changing relationships.

The final discovery works best if Jamie's homework has been visibly present in Morgan's stack without attracting unnecessary attention. The audience does not need to know it is there in advance, but the reveal should feel completely plausible once Morgan finds it.

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