

The Style Invitational »

REPORT FROM WEEK 816

in which we asked you to send original sentences or phrases that, when submitted to the Google search engine, would generate at least 1 million hits: Well, we learned a few things pretty quickly — but not quickly enough — about Googling.

We'd known from the start that, even if the phrase is submitted without quotation marks, the same set of words in a different order would generate varying numbers of hits: "John, Paul, George and Ringo" (but not in quotes) got 367,000, while, oddly, "George, John, Paul and Ringo" brought forth 522,000 (within quotes the numbers were 58,000 and 363). So far, so good. Part of the game.

What we didn't know was that the exact set of words, submitted at different times, would get wildly varying numbers of hits. The example for this contest, "Susan Boyle, the latest Pussycat Doll," got 4,910,000 hits when we checked it on May 5; on May 11, Loser Jeff Contompasis reported on The Style Conversational that it had coughed up a mere 206,000. On June 4 it's up to 2,230,000. So we're using the honor system for some of the phrases below. The Google inconsistency was only one reason that numerous Losers reported hating this contest. They also found it hard to produce much funny stuff. Hence the short list of results and the nice big chunk of Dave Barry.

THE WINNER OF THE INKER

The world welcomes Twitter Palin. (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

2 the winner of the fairly wholesome joke book with the mildly off-color title: Trump has the same hair on his behind. (J. Larry Schott, Gainesville, Fla.)

3 It's our biggest sale ever since last week's sale. (Dave Zarrow, Reston)

4 Put me on the Call Me at Dinner list. (David Kleinbard, Jersey City)

MILLION-TO-1 SHOTS: HONORABLE MENTIONS

Have you had your autopsy yet? (Beverly Sharp, Washington)

Does a girlfriend in Second Life still count? (Jacob Aldridge, Gaythorne, Australia)

This is NOT why I invented the Internet. — Al Gore (Craig Dykstra, Centreville)

I know meh when I see it. (Mike Turniansky, Pikesville, Md.)

My stimulus package came with, you know, no stimulus thing. (John O'Byrne, Dublin)

Some men have one extra, others one too few. (Rick Haynes, Potomac)

The Benefits of Tooth Decay (Rick Haynes)

You can lower your own IQ. (Dudley Thompson, Cary, N.C.)

Obama Administration Bails Out Obama Administration (Jeff Brechlin, Eagan, Minn.)

And we loved with a love that was more than a love, I and my Robert E. Lee. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

We really need more sarcasm in our lives. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

It's Talk Like a Somali Pirate Day! (Kevin Dopart)

Post Points helped me find true love: 1,070,000 hits (Jon Grantham, University Park)

The day after today is the next day of the rest of your life. (Chris Doyle)

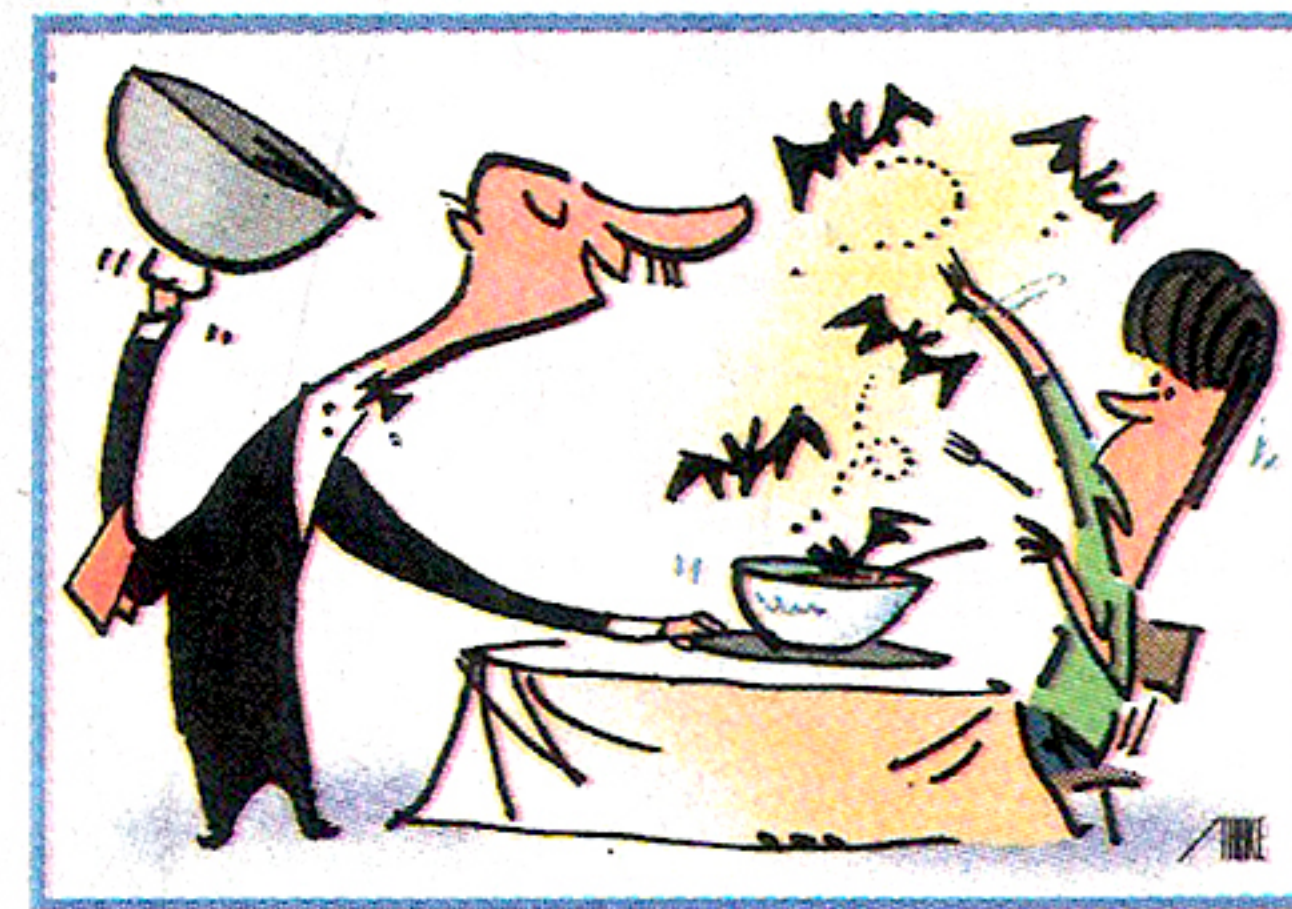
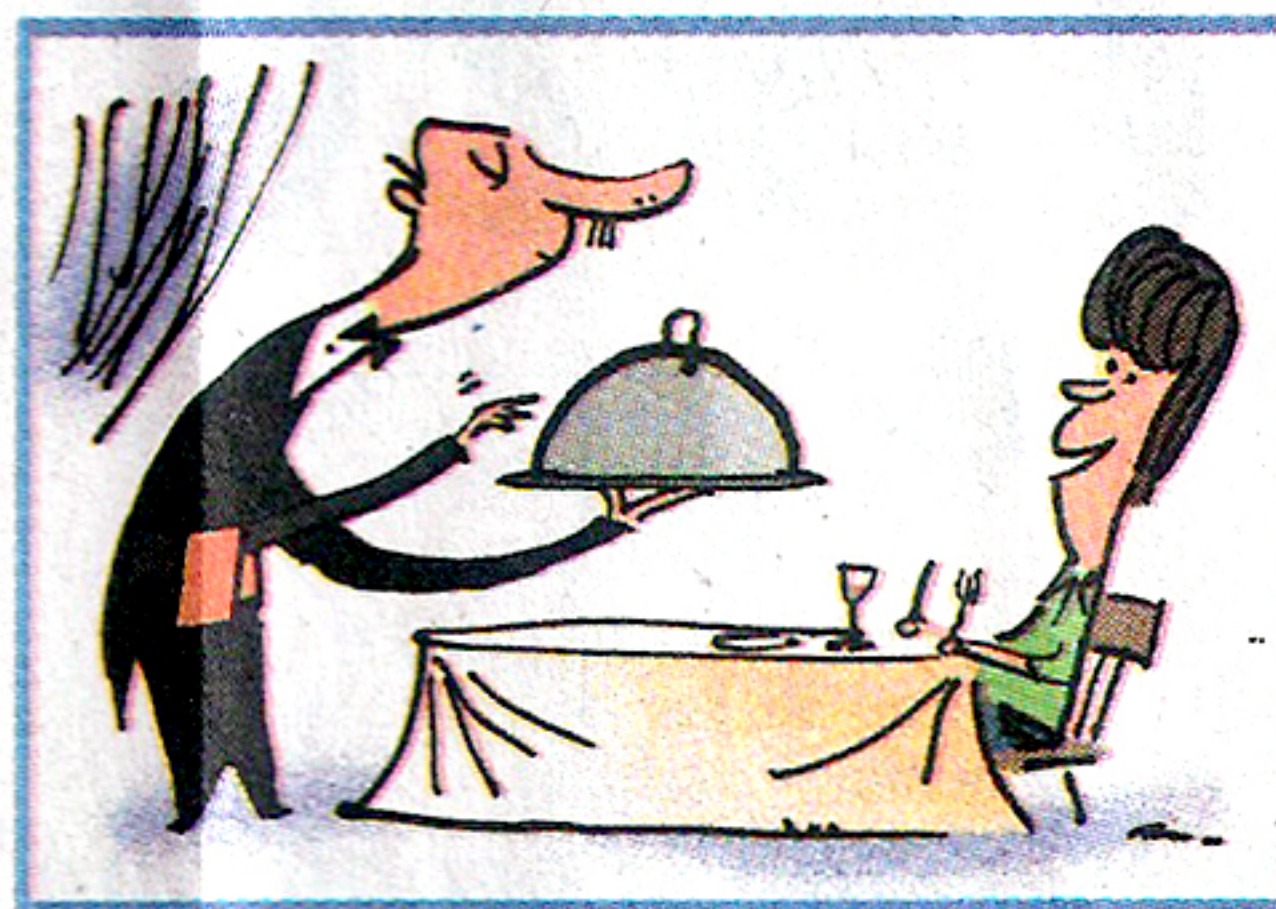
Almost Last: The only Google I like is Barney. (Phyllis Reinhard, East Fallowfield, Pa.)

Also Almost Last: I need that Inker ... for a friend. (Dave Zarrow)

And Last-Last: This may be the worst contest ever if you need to use this. (Russell Beland, Fairfax)

Next Week: Floppies, or Split Definitives

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



BY BOB STAAKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

Week 820: Be Mister Language Person

Dear Mister Language Person: At restaurants, I often order the soup du jour. My question is, what is "jour"?

A. It is a French word meaning "bat spleens."

Q. Please explain the correct usage of the phrase "real good success."

A. It is used in sports broadcasting to connote that somebody has had an unusual amount of good success, and it should always be followed by the phrase "Boy, I'll say." For example:

Announcer: This Gomez has had real good success hitting the ball.

Color Person: Boy, I'll say.

Q. What is the function of parentheses?

A. Parentheses are used to include information that helps the reader understand the sentence better:

Confusing: "Former president Nixon says he feels 'no bitterness' toward his former political enemies."

Clearer: "Former president Nixon says he feels 'no bitterness' toward his former political enemies. (What a liar!)"

Q. Like many people, I am troubled by the part of "Humpty Dumpty" that goes: "All the king's horses and all the king's men couldn't put Humpty together again." Why does it mention horses? Does anybody seriously believe that if a bunch of horses saw a giant egg broken into pieces, their response would be: "Hey! Let's try to reassemble this!"?

A. You have given this a lot of thought.

This week we pay homage to (i.e., fill space by stealing at length from) some guy named Dave Barry, who used to write funny things for newspapers every week, and still might subscribe to one (he remains a dog owner, after all).

Dave also did a valuable service for many years by edifying the semiliterate public with his "Ask Mister Language Person" columns, whose Q's and A's are excerpted above. **This week: Supply a Mister Language Person-type question and answer. Mister Dave Barry himself will choose the winners from among the finalists.** Note that sometimes there's a straight question with the joke entirely in the answer; sometimes the joke's almost entirely in the question; and sometimes both ends are funny, like a baboon's. We'll consider all types.

Winner gets (besides the Approbation of Dave) the Inker, the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives a high-fashion off-the-shoulder jersey-style dress, right, handmade with great care and detail from two Loser T-shirts by 40-time Loser Barbara Turner of Takoma Park, who models it here. Barbara has also added some Chinese lettering that labels the wearer as "game-losing people."

Dress to Lose: Barbara Turner with the prize she created.



Other runners-up win a coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt or Loser Mug. Honorable Mentions get one of the lusted-after Style Invitational Magnets. First Offenders get a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" (Fir Stink for their First Ink). One prize per entrant per week. Send your entries by e-mail to losers@washpost.com or by fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, June 15. Put "Week 820" in the subject line of your e-mail or it risks being ignored as spam. Include your name, postal address and phone number with your entry. Contests are judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published July 4. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. This week's contest was suggested in the Style Conversational discussion group by Jeff Contompasis (who also penned this week's Honorable Mentions name) and by the anonymous "katmandu1"; the revised title for next week's contest is by Russell Beland.

BY LOSER PETER METRINKO FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

ONLINE DISCUSSION Have a question for the Empress or want to talk to some real Losers? Join the Style Conversational discussion at washingtont.com/styleconversational.