

The Style Invitational

Week CXVI: Cut and Pastiche



BY BOB STAMKE FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

This week we reprise one of our favorite contests from yesteryear—1994, to be exact. Create a new, funny headline from the words of any headlines appearing anywhere in today's Post (or on washingtonpost.com). You may use words from as many headlines as you wish, and may combine them in whatever order you wish, but you cannot subdivide words—i.e., the smallest usable unit is an entire word. You must specify which headlines you use, and give us the page numbers, for verification. First-prize winner gets a second Hubert Humphrey bottle from the 1968 campaign, still in its box. This is a value of \$40.

First runner-up wins the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312, or by e-mail to losers@washpost.com. U.S. mail entries are no longer accepted due to rabid, spit-flying fanaticism. Deadline is Monday, April 22. All entries must include the week number of the contest and your name, postal address and telephone number. E-mail entries must include the

week number in the subject field. Contests will be 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 in four weeks. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Seth Brown of Williamstown, Mass., who thought of it before Chris Doyle of Burke.*

Report from Week CXII:

In our contest seeking cynical definitions à la Ambrose Bierce, we were looking for jaded drolleries, and not simple puns—though we got plenty of the latter, the niftiest of which were these from Chris Doyle of Burke: "Bushism: The syntax of the father visited on the son," and "Female: The sex that believes sighs matter." We also cite our colleague Tom Shroder of Vienna, who suggested "Terrorist: A car-bomb based life form."

- ◆ Fifth Runner-Up: **Lottery: A tax on poor math skills.** (Id Rooney, Arlington)
- ◆ Fourth Runner-Up: **Leader: One who follows loudly.** (Tom Rogers, Oakton)
- ◆ Third Runner-Up: **Potential: The measure of a person's lack of achievement.** (Eva Moore, Ithaca, N.Y.)
- ◆ Second Runner-Up: **Role Model: A professional athlete whose conduct rises to the level expected of everyone else.** (Chris Doyle, Burke)
- ◆ First Runner-Up: **Aging: Paced dying.** (Barry Blyveis, Columbia)
- ◆ And the winner of the genuine Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey clown mask and nose: **Peacetime: When there are no wars anywhere you care about.** (Mike Genz, La Plata)

Honorable Mentions:

- ◆ **E-mail: An urban legend delivery system.** (Morgan Malino, Fremont, Calif.)
- ◆ **Deadline: A predetermined time by which an excuse must be fabricated as to why something was not completed.** (Ken Advent, Parma, Ohio)
- ◆ **Reform: The attempt to restructure inequities to your advantage.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)
- ◆ **Reform: Periodic replacement of one unworkable political system by another.** (Ken Advent, Parma, Ohio)
- ◆ **Telemarketer: A Caller ID salesman.** (John Griessmayer, Roanoke)
- ◆ **Righteous: What self-righteous people think they are.** (John Griessmayer, Roanoke)
- ◆ **Social Security: The world's largest pyramid scheme.** (Elliott Schiff, Orefield, Pa.)
- ◆ **Religion: A singular form of gambling in which one may never be sure of which game one is playing, the rules of the game, the value of one's chips, whether the casino will honor those chips, or if indeed there is a casino at all.** (Id Rooney, Arlington)
- ◆ **Foreign: Not yet American.** (Marc Hirsh, Somerville, Mass.)
- ◆ **Celebrity: One who suffers from an odd mental condition, defined by the desire for solitude and the pursuit of recognition.** (Mark Young, Washington)
- ◆ **Sophistry: Reasoning used by your opponent.** (Mike Genz, La Plata)
- ◆ **Taxes: Money you complain about giving the government to pay for services whose absence you would complain about.** (John O'Hanlon, Germantown)
- ◆ **Cleavage: The part of the anatomy that a woman exposes for the purpose of having men not stare at it.** (John O'Hanlon, Germantown)
- ◆ **Fanatic: Someone devoted to a cause in which you do not believe.** (Seth Brown, Williamstown, Mass.)
- ◆ **Manager: Someone who doesn't know what you do but knows what it is worth.** (Mary Claire Salander, Arlington)
- ◆ **Lawyer: One to whom you give money to prevent another from taking it.** (Seth Brown, Williamstown, Mass.)

- ◆ **Child Support: The percentage of your income you are willing to sacrifice in exchange for parental responsibility.** (Mary Claire Salander, Arlington)
- ◆ **Prayer: A form of begging that leaves one's pride intact.** (Tom Witte, Gaithersburg)
- ◆ **Ecumenism: Warm embrace of other religions whose adherents are eternally damned to roast in Hell.** (Mike Genz, La Plata)
- ◆ **Strict constructionist: One who interprets the Constitution as he believes the document's slaveholding, misogynistic, elitist authors would have.** (Chris Doyle, Burke)
- ◆ **CIA: A clandestine organization created to ensure their cheating doesn't conflict with our cheating.** (Id Rooney, Arlington)
- ◆ **Singer-songwriter: Anyone who owns a guitar.** (Frank Mullen III, Heathsville, Va.)
- ◆ **Morality: Principles to follow for good conduct, inspired by the feeling that others are watching.** (William Bradford, Washington)
- ◆ **Ethics: Conspicuous compunction.** (Phil Frankenfeld, Washington)
- ◆ **Principle: The noble thing that, in pursuit of, one will do anything, to anyone, at any time.** (Roger and Pam Dalrymple, Gettysburg, Pa.)
- ◆ **Multimedia: Employing images and sound in educational tools so as to allow those who cannot write to communicate with those who cannot read.** (Frank Mullen III, Heathsville, Va.)
- ◆ **Deregulation: A political movement to replace the abuses of big government with the abuses of big business.** (Fred Dawson, Beltsville)
- ◆ **Tramp: A woman who is sleeping with everyone but you.** (Bill Flavin, Alexandria)
- ◆ **Relativism: The absolute belief that there are no absolutes.** (Joe Harsel, Falls Church)
- ◆ **Middle-aged: An age bracket beginning with persons three or four years older than you.** (Russell Beland, Springfield)
- ◆ **And Last: Cynicism: A compensatory tool used by those lacking in wit.** (Bill Chang, New York)

Next Week: **Headline Muse**



Hello Stargazers! Well, this week the night sky is a mess, an incoherent mishmash of mostly second-rate constellations. Frankly, I've done dot-to-dots on the Kids Menu at Bennigans that were more compelling.



Also, the planets are all clumped up in one corner, including some that don't even belong in our solar system. This seems unnecessary, wasteful even, and is best ignored.



Finally, the annual 'Inspid' Meteor Shower promises fitful glimpses of random flaming space lint. Why bother? Go watch TV, or work on your novel, or both.

MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

Do Unto Others' Houses . . .

Here is a vacation bargain: You get free accommodations that are more or less as comfy as what you have at home, only set in a refreshingly different location. Plus you get a trustworthy house-sitter for the time that you are away.

Here is the catch: People will notice little telltale things about your habits and tastes, much beyond the impression your visitors usually have of your quarters. Instead of going about murmuring, "Oh, how lovely," Miss Manners is afraid that (lovely as your place really is, she hastens to assure you) they will be going about enjoying an occasional snicker, and calling out "Hey, come look at this!" to one another.

But here is the saving grace: You won't have to hear them. You will hear nothing but compliments from them in the way of commentary about the way you live.

And here is the guarantee: You know as much about their telltale habits and tastes as they know about yours.

This is the basic deal in a vacation house exchange. Whether between friends or acquaintances who made the arrangements themselves, or strangers who were matched by a third party or agency, the relationship is a peculiar mixture, and therefore so are the manners.

The situation is not that of host and houseguest, because the hosts are not there to provide those small attentions that please their guests and prevent them from poking around. Yet neither is it exactly that of landlord and tenant, where each righteously registers the shortcomings of the other, untroubled by misgivings about oneself.

The usual niceties and precautions of both situations apply, and Miss Manners trusts that everyone leaves everything clean for the other party, waters the plants and replaces them in kind when they die, provides instructions on how to operate the appliances and whom to call to fix them after you figure you don't need the instructions, takes messages, leaves extra pillows, checks in, and issues warnings about the toilet that is tricky to flush.

In a house exchange, the feeling of closeness you get from living in someone else's house ought to inspire a few extras:

Yes, the owners were supposed to clear out or lock up anything that they didn't want you to see, but don't read the diary and examine the mail anyway, and after you have finished, don't use the information, let alone tell anyone you did. It's a betrayal of people who would be too honorable to do this to you, and they now know an awful lot about you. It is a bad idea to share your amusement at the decor with your new friends in the neighborhood.

Take out all the trash before you go, even though leaving it in the wastebaskets ought to count. One's own trash is revealing, and other people's trash is disgusting.

Finally, when you break something, it is a good idea to confess, if possible before you return to your respective homes. That way, you are less likely to find something of yours set up delicately so that it falls over with the first breath you take.

Dear Miss Manners:

I was informed that engagements should not last longer than six months, ideally, or a year at the most, due to the strain it might cause.

Has this ever been a rule of etiquette? My fiancé and I will not be married until after I get my doctorate, which may take four more years, and I don't think this will be more stressful than simply dating for that time.

What about the strain on your relatives and friends? Do you think they can bear four years of listening to you talk about your wedding color scheme and which band you should hire? (That's a rule Miss Manners just made up, but she is happy to grant you an exception if you promise to show some exceptional bridal restraint.)

There have been times that society has encouraged short engagements, so that the couple would not have to exercise a different sort of restraint for a prolonged time, and other times in which it has encouraged long engagements so the couple could get to know each other better. We no longer presume either problem, and therefore leave the length of your engagement for you and your fiancé to decide.

Dear Miss Manners:

I was eating lunch in a mall restaurant a few days ago, when a woman who was eating alone a couple of tables to my right paused in her eating/reading, reached into her purse, and pulled out a cell phone. She looked at the screen, put down her fork, and, as she raised her phone to her right ear, she raised her left hand to her mouth and cupped the phone.

The resultant conversation was only barely distinguishable from the restaurant background noise and much quieter than the live conversations around us.

As I was leaving, I thanked her for her courtesy and said I would pass her practice on. She thanked me.

But did you get her telephone number? Miss Manners only asks because she would be happy to thank the lady, too, if only she knew how to reach her.

Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at MissManners@unitedmedia.com. Judith Martin is the author of "Miss Manners: A Citizen's Guide to Civility" (Crown, 1999).

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Are you a Mary Worth-Boondocks-Baldo or a Sally Forth-Zits-Zippy the Pinhead?



Take the comics survey Sunday, April 28!

COMICS SURVEY
Sunday, April 28, in Comics
The Washington Post