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[Back to previous page](#)

Style Invitational Week 1046: Derive us crazy with a bogus etymology of an expression

By [Pat Myers](#), Published: November 7

With the invention of sushi, the craze for eating raw fish swept through ancient Japan, and the fresher the better. Excitedly, people began holding worms or beetles in their teeth and dunking their heads into the sea, hoping to attract a live fish and consume it instantly. This was called “waiting with baited breath.” (*Sue Lin Chong, 1997*)

No, that’s not really the origin of the expression — for one thing, it’s really “bated breath,” as in “abated,” or lessened; in other words, holding your breath. Sue Lin’s fractured etymology was actually the winning entry in Week 235, a contest that the Czar repeated in 2001 but we hadn’t done since. So let’s give it another go. **This week: Offer a bogus but funny explanation of how a particular expression originated.** Though the above example confuses two words that are pronounced the same, we’d like you to stay mostly to the actual words in the expression, rather than pun on them (e.g., “you slurper to the throne”); those are shaggy-dog stories, and perhaps they’re a future contest. There’s no strict word limit, but it shouldn’t be much longer than the example; don’t write a whole story, and always, remember that you’re basically telling a joke that should build to a punch line.

Winner gets the [Inkin’ Memorial](#), the Lincoln statue bobblehead that is the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives, perfectly apropos to this contest, the book [“I’m Not Hanging Noodles on Your Ears, and Other Intriguing Idioms From Around the World,”](#) by Jag Bhalla, who happens to be a friend of Uber-Loser Kevin Dopart, who donated it to us years and years ago after suggesting we do this very contest. (See, I get around to things eventually.) The title refers to a Russian expression equivalent to the just as odd “I’m not pulling your leg.”

Other runners-up win their choice of a yearned-for [Loser Mug](#) or the ardently desired [Grossery Bag](#). Honorable mentions get a lusted-after [Loser magnet](#). First Offenders receive a smelly tree-shaped air “freshener” ([FirStink](#) for their first ink). E-mail entries to losers@washpost.com or fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Nov. 18; results published Dec. 8 (online Dec. 5). No more than 25 entries per entrant per week. Include “Week 1046” in your e-mail subject line or it might be ignored as spam. Include your real name, postal address and phone number with your entry. See contest rules and guidelines at wapo.st/inviterules. The subhead for this week’s honorable mentions was submitted by both Nan Reiner and Roy Ashley; the alternative headline in the “Next week’s results line is by Jeff Contompasis. Join the lively Style Invitational Devotees group on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev, and click “like” on Style Invitational Ink of the Day at bit.ly/inkofday.

Report from Week 1042

our 10th annual Tour de Fours contest, in which we supply a four-letter block — this year it was S-A-N-E — and ask you to make up a new word or term containing this block of letters, in any order, but with no other letters between them.

The winner of the Inkin’ Memorial:

Senatorpedo: Cruz missile. “The tea party’s vaunted senatorpedo self-destructed shortly after its launch.”

(Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

2. Winner of the book [“The Big Bento Box of Unuseless Japanese Inventions”](#): **Snyder sneak: A football play in which the team owner dives backward while everyone else continues to move forward. Usually used only for short gains. *(Chris Damm, Charles Town, W.Va., a First Offender)***

3. Condé Nasty: A guide to the places you definitely *don't* want to go on vacation. *(Christopher Lamora, Los Angeles)*

4. Stanes: An unsuccessful brand of underwear. *(Rob Huffman, Fredericksburg, Va.)*

The NAES:

honorable mentions

Twears: Moves beyond a youthful fan base: “Miley hopes her foam finger will finally twean her off the kiddie market.” *(Jim Stiles, Rockville, Md.)*

Seasnot: Raw oysters. *(Larry Gray, Union Bridge, Md.)*

Buyenas: Vicious creatures that attack big-box stores in feeding frenzies the day after Thanksgiving. *(Ben Aronin, Arlington, Va.)*

Phone-sax: My extremely effective answer to unwanted calls. *(Mae Scanlan, Washington)*

Dan's-end: Hindquarters. “He's got less sense than the Dan's-end of a mule.” *(Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.)*

Prattlesnake: A person who spends half an hour encouraging you to let it all out, then turns around and tells everyone what you said. *(Kyle Hendrickson, Urbana, Md.; Danielle Nowlin, Woodbridge, Va.)*

Bellybeans: Outies. *(Tom Witte, Montgomery Village, Md.)*

Smarmesan: A waiter's unctuous smile: “They really lay on the smarmesan at Luigi's when they push the specials.” *(Kyle Hendrickson)*

Esanem: Rapper also known as Slam Shady. *(Ellen Raphaeli, Falls Church, Va.)*

Maccabeans: Ideal side dish for this year's Thanksgiving Dinner. *(Nan Reiner, Alexandria, Va.)*

Hanes Point: The bottom edge of the underwear waistband, which should be the acceptable limit for pants-sag: “The school sent Tyler home after catching him with his pants below Hanes Point.” *(Ivars Kuskevics, Takoma Park, Md.)*

Nosenappy: A handkerchief. *(Brian Allgar, Paris)*

Sextrasensory perception: Innate ability to tell a creeper from a keeper. *(Kyle Hendrickson)*

Bellyjeans: What you need to change into after too much Easter candy. *(Randy Lee, Burke, Va.)*

Mensa-envy: What Mensa members — and only Mensa members — think other people have. *(Tom Witte)*

Mensahib: The smartest guy in the room. *(Pam Sweeney, Burlington, Mass.)*

Meansa: “Where smart does not always equal nice. Enjoy your rejection letter — we did.” *(Rachel Tuxford, Bedford, England, a First Offender)*

Congressmensa: Washington's most exclusive club — no one qualifies for it. *(John Bunyan, Cincinnati)*

Can-selfie: Modern version of the butt-Xerox. (*Jim Stiles*)

Tortoisean: A shade beyond "Vuitton" on the skin-tone color wheel for South Florida retirees. (*Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.*)

Men-salute: A grunt, if you're lucky to get that much. (*Dave Prevar, Annapolis, Md.*)

An-sewer: A filthy response to an innocent question. (*Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Va.*)

Sea Nerds: Fish who excel in schools, but are awkward in spawning situations. (*Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase, Md.*)

Les Nats: The closest thing to a baseball team that Montreal has. (*Mark Raffman*)

SNAE: Situation Normal, All [Expletive]. (*Brian Allgar*)

Chiensac: Fancy name for the plastic bag you take along when you walk the dog. (*Mae Scanlan*)

Can-esthesia: The numbness you get after sitting way too long on the throne. (*Jeff Shirley, Richmond, Va.*)

Manesthesia: Beer. (*Jeff Contompasis; Jeff Greenspan, Fairfax, Va., whose only previous Invite ink was from 12 years ago*)

Ginsane: What you are after six martinis. (*Tom Witte*)

Seananity: Silliness seen on Fox News. (*William C. Kennard, Arlington, Va.*)

Defenes-nation: Throwing the country out the window. (*J. Larry Schott, Gainesville, Fla.*)

Unseamly: A description of my eighth-grade sewing project. (*Diana Oertel, San Francisco*)

Mouse anus: Where one can easily fit every good justification for the government shutdown. (*Frank Mann, Washington*)

Hanes Point: Picturesque site featuring a wood sculpture called "[The Morning Awakening.](#)" (*Steve Honley, Washington*)

Cinéass: A spoiler of movie endings. "Some cinéass just told me Dil is a guy!" (*Chris Doyle*)

Anesthletic: The Golf Channel. (*David Garratt, Silver City, N.M.*)

And Last: **Inanesylum:** The Style Invitational. (*Frank Osen*)

And Even Laster: **Lose-and-Learn:** As if. (*Mark Raffman*)

Top of the Loser board

With his first-place win this week — his 47th! — along with his honorable mention, Chris Doyle finally passes longtime champ Russell Beland to become the highest-inking Style Invitational contestant ever, with 1,525 published entries and other mentions to his name.

Chris has the astonishing ability to work a clever pun into any form of joke, from anything from sophisticated song parodies to Yo Mama jabs, but most notably the thousands of limericks he's written over the years. Here's one from 2006:

At Oxford, Bill Clinton dug classes,
The campus, the culture, the lasses.

When he told us a tale
("Ah didn't inhale"),
He was looking through Rhodes-scholared glasses.

Still running — deadline Monday night — is our contest to cite a line of a song and make up a question it could answer. See bit.ly/invite1045.

See the Empress's online column [The Style Conversational](#) (published late Thursday), in which she discusses today's new contest and results along with news about the Loser Community — and you can vote for your favorite among the inking entries, since you no doubt figured the Empress chose the wrong winner. If you'd like an e-mail notification each week when the Invitational and Conversational are posted online, [sign up here](#) or write to the Empress at losers@washpost.com (note that in the subject line) and she'll add you to the mailing list. And on Facebook, join the far more lively group [Style Invitational Devotees](#) and chime in there.

Next week's results: [Celebrity vs. Reality](#), or [Art Imitating Imitated Life](#), our Week 1043 contest, which asked you to suggest a TV reality show that some famous person could host.

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