

# The Washington Post

Entertainment

## Style Invitational Week 1095: The best/worst of the good ideas/bad ideas

Plus a new contest for a new poetry form: the TankaWanka



Good idea: Give her a bowl of irises. Bad idea: Give her Ebola viruses. This week's winning entry, by Frank Osen.

(Illustration by Bob Staake for The Washington Post)

By Pat Myers October 23 at 2:34 PM □ [Follow @PatMyersTWP](#)

(Click [here to skip down](#) to the announcement of our new “TankaWanka” poetry contest, Week 1095)

**In Week 1091**, we repeated a contest from way back in 1995, in which we asked you to cite a “good idea” and turn it into a “bad idea” with a small wording change. The Empress was utterly shocked to find that a large number of entries concerned the reproductive and excretory systems. What sort of operation do you think we run here?

The winner of the Inkin’ Memorial:

**Good idea:** Give a bowl of irises to your wife.

**Bad idea:** Give Ebola viruses to your wife. (Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.)

2nd place and the genuine 1990s Loser T-shirt:

**Good idea:** Groom nails before your best friend’s wedding.

**Bad idea:** Nail groom before your best friend’s wedding. (Jan Forman, Great Falls, Va.)

3rd place

**Good idea:** Use power tools to keep your car functioning properly.

**Bad idea:** Use power tools to keep your ear functioning properly. (Larry Carnahan, Arlington, Va.)

4th place

**Good idea:** Reply to all sensitive e-mails.

**Bad idea:** Reply All to sensitive e-mails. (Eric Yttri, Arlington, Va., a First Offender)



This week's second prize: Farmer standing on turtles standing on another turtle — sure, we get that. But who ever heard of turtles wearing glasses? How would you even test their vision? (Pat Myers)

Almost good/bad enough: honorable mentions

**Good idea:** Celibate before marriage.

**Bad idea:** Sell a bit before marriage. (Chris Doyle, Ponder, Tex.)

**Good idea:** Snowed in with your date.

**Bad idea:** Snowden with your data. (Mike Gips, Bethesda, Md.)

**Good idea:** Hiking the Appalachian Trail.

**Bad idea:** "Hiking the Appalachian Trail." (Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase, Md.)

**Good idea:** Conscious uncoupling.

**Bad idea:** Unconscious coupling. (Kathleen DeBold, Burtonsville, Md.)

**Good idea:** Wiping out poison ivy.

**Bad idea:** Wiping with poison ivy. (David Patch, Toledo)

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**Good idea:** 3 square meals a day.

**Bad idea:** 3<sup>2</sup> meals a day. (Brendan Beary, Great Mills, Md.)

**Good idea:** Doing things to help when the wife is away.

**Bad idea:** Doing the help when the wife is away. — Arnold S., formerly of Sacramento (Brendan Beary)

**Good idea:** Eating some beef with a side of potatoes.

**Bad idea:** Eating some potatoes with a side of beef. (Larry Gray, Union Bridge, Md.)

**Good idea:** Cutting out your junk food.

**Bad idea:** Cutting out your junk. (Tom Witte, Montgomery Village, Md.)

**Good idea:** Add “in bed” or “dressed as Elvis” to a cookie fortune.

**Bad idea:** Add “in bed” or “dressed as Elvis” to the Oath of Office. (Kevin Dopart, Washington)

**Good idea:** Taking the position of associate deputy assistant undersecretary.

**Bad idea:** Taking the position of deputy assistant associate undersecretary. Duh! (Todd DeLap, Fairfax, Va.)

**Good idea:** To fertilize your plants.

**Bad idea:** To fertilize your pants. (Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.)

**Good idea:** Trying to hit a home run into Section 141 of Nationals Park.

**Bad idea:** Trying to get to second base in Section 141 of Nationals Park. (Frank Mann, Washington)

**Good idea:** Reusing plastic grocery bags as dog poop bags.

**Bad idea:** Reusing plastic dog poop bags as grocery bags. (Dinah Tabbah, Annandale, Va., a First Offender)

**Good idea:** Keeping a supply of Head & Shoulders in the bathroom.

**Bad idea:** Keeping a supply of heads and shoulders in the freezer. (P. Diane Schneider, Clinton, Wash., a First Offender)

**Good idea:** A letter to the editor about Iraq.

**Bad idea:** A letter to the editor about her rack. (Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.)

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**Good idea:** Show girls you're a fun guy.

**Bad idea:** Show girls your fungi. (John McCooey, Rehoboth Beach, Del.)

**Good idea:** Overtipping a good waitress.

**Bad idea:** Tipping over a good waitress. (Lori Petterson, College Park, Md.)

**Good idea:** A sightseeing tour to see a jungle refuge for gorillas.

**Bad idea:** A sightseeing tour to see a jungle refuge for guerrillas. (Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Va.)

**Good idea:** Uncle Sam wants you.

**Bad idea:** Your uncle Sam wants you. (Rob Huffman, Fredericksburg, Va.)

**Good idea:** Teaching natural selection in science class.

**Bad idea:** Teaching natural selection in gym class. (Josh Feldblyum, Louisville)

**Good idea:** Speed reading.

**Bad idea:** Read, speeding. (G.T. Bowman, Falls Church, Va.)

**Good idea:** Time-share condominiums.

**Bad idea:** Time-share condoms. (Ray Gallucci, Frederick, Md.)

**Good idea:** Teaching your toddler colors.

**Bad idea:** Teaching your toddler "Fifty Shades of Grey." (Mark Hagenau, Derry, N.H.)

**Good idea:** When in D.C., stand to the right.

**Bad idea:** When in D.C., grandstand to the right. (Nan Reiner, Alexandria, Va.)

**Good idea:** Making s'mores at the neighborhood potluck.

**Bad idea:** Making some whores at the neighborhood potluck. (Chris Doyle)

**Good idea:** Eat every carrot and pea on your plate.

**Bad idea:** Eat every carrot and pee on your plate. (Kathleen DeBold; Mike Dailey, Ocean Isle Beach, N.C.)

**Good idea:** Using a hoe throughout your garden.

**Bad idea:** Using a ho without your guard on. (Brad Alexander, Wanneroo, Australia)

**Good idea:** Taking Polish Folk Dancing.

**Bad idea:** Taking your folks pole dancing. (Bird Waring, Larchmont, N.Y.)

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**Good idea:** Continuing oversight of the Secret Service.

**Bad idea:** Continuing oversights of the Secret Service. (John Glenn, Tyler, Tex.)

**Good idea:** Posting a picture of you hanging out with your member of Congress.

**Bad idea:** Posting a picture of you in Congress with your member hanging out. (Rick Haynes, Ocean City, Md.)

**Good idea:**Dress-Down Fridays.

**Bad idea:** Upskirt Tuesdays. (Brendan Beary)

And this week, a brand-new poetry contest:

NEW CONTEST FOR WEEK 1095: TankaWanka!

**Just memorize this:**

**SAT is B-A-D.**

**ACT? PU!**

**Learn-by-rote is not the best.**

**(Later, there will be a test.)**

Cretinous oafs that we are, in several contests over the years The Style Invitational has desecrated the exquisite poetic form of haiku, utterly disregarding the classic focus on nature, the distilling of a single moment into a few perfectly chosen words, and instead awarding actual prizes for pun-filled jokes about Martians, tourists, Donald Trump, etc. — as long as the “poems” had three lines of five, seven and five syllables.

This week we set ourselves upon an even more venerable Japanese form: the tanka. Dating back to the 8th century and revived about a century ago, the form consists of 31 of what, in Japanese, are sort of like English syllables, arranged 5-7-5 like a haiku but with two seven-syllable lines added. Tankas in English by serious poets don’t tend to hew too strictly to the syllable count, and, as Wikipedia notes, “traditionally tanka had no concept of rhyme,” and in fact some rhymes “were considered dire faults.”

Well, this here is a humor contest, and we like rhyme, and so instead of being accused of misusing the term “tanka,” we’ll just say we created a new genre. So for the first-ever TankaWanka anthology, to appear here in four weeks: **Write a TankaWanka about something that’s been in the news lately. The poem must consist of five lines of 5, 7, 5, 7 and 7 syllables in that order. And it must include at least one rhyme**, as in the

example above by the great man of letters (indeed, often the letters P and U) Gene Weingarten.

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Winner gets the [Inkin' Memorial](#), the Lincoln statue bobblehead that is the official Style Invitational trophy. Second place receives an almost indescribable piece of sculpture of the Weird Things Made of Glued-Together Shells genre: This intricate work, no more than four inches high, contains *twenty* little shells and depicts — as far as we can figure — a smiling/grimacing farmer, wearing a beard of red thread and wearing a straw hat, riding astride two turtles that each have not only a bobble-head but wire eyeglasses. But that's not all! The two shell-turtles are astride yet another shell-turtle bobblehead, this one wearing an itty-bitty straw hat. And oh, yeah, the man also has a straw basket of doll-size produce. This ultra-fabulous prize was obtained for us by Ultra-Fabulous-Prize-Obtainer Cheryl Davis in St. Augustine, Fla.

**Other runners-up** win their choice of a yearned-for [Loser Mug](#) or the ardently desired “Whole Fools” [Grossery Bag](#). Honorable mentions get a lusted-after Loser magnet in one of our two new Bob Staake designs: either [“The Wit Hit the Fan”](#) or [“Hardly Har-Har.”](#) First Offenders receive a smelly tree-shaped air “freshener” ([FirStink](#) for their first ink). E-mail entries to [losers@washpost.com](mailto:losers@washpost.com) or, if you were born in the 19th century, fax to 202-334-4312. Deadline is Monday, Nov. 3; results published Nov. 23 (online Nov. 20). No more than 25 entries per entrant per contest. Include “Week 1095” 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/InvRules](#). This week’s honorable-mentions subhead is by Kevin Dopart. 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](#).

<sup>^</sup> **The Style Conversational:** The Empress’s weekly online column discusses each new contest and set of results. Especially if you plan to enter, check it out at [wapo.st/styleconv](#).

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**Still running — deadline Monday night: Our contest for new words including the**

## letter block T-A-X-I. See [bit.ly/invite1094](http://bit.ly/invite1094).

Next week's results: **Are We Having Funds Yet?** or **A Call to Alms**, our contest for comical fundraising ideas inspired by the ALS Ice Bucket Challenge. See [bit.ly/invite1092](http://bit.ly/invite1092). (alternative headline by Stephen Dudzik)

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