

Style Invitational Week 1516: Questionable Journalism

Find a sentence and write a funny question to go with it. Plus 26-word writing – and each word begins with a different letter.



By [Pat Myers](#)

November 23, 2022 at 9:45 a.m. EST



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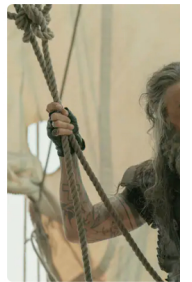
A. “I hadn’t seen that kind of positivity in a while. It was really cool.” (*Quote in a Washington Post article*)

Q. Why were you rubbing balloons all over the cat? (*Frank Osen*)

A. “We’re working our way happily and steadily through the process of production.” (*Post article*)

Q. What did the mechanical engineer reply when his mother-in-law said, “We hope you’ll soon make us proud grandparents”? (*Cathy Lamaze*)

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A. It's very rare to find a continuous curved plane like that.

(Quote about the round Hirshhorn Museum)

Q. Why is there so much excitement about Boeing's new Frisbee-shaped aircraft? *(Mae Scanlan)*

We've had lots of fun with this contest over the years: It's in our venerable "Jeopardy!"-style answer/question format, plus it lets you willfully misinterpret the news media! This week: **Choose any sentence (or the major part of a sentence) from any publication dated Nov. 23-Dec. 5 and invent a question it could answer**, as in the examples above from previous Questionable Journalism contests. It can be in an article or ad, but it should read like a sentence, not a headline. Tell us the name of the publication and the date and (if in print) the page number; for online publications, please include a link to the webpage. (Hmm, the "positivity" example is *two* sentences — well, that's okay, too, as long as it's short.)

Submit up to 25 entries at wapo.st/enter-invite-1516 (no capitals in the web address). **Deadline is Monday night, Dec. 5**; results appear Dec. 25 in print (delivered right down your chimney), Dec. 22 online.

Winner gets the [Clowning](#)

[Achievement](#), our Style

Invitational trophy. Second place receives — almost in time for Christmas — a **Douglas fir "tree in a box"** — and that box is a 2½-inch cardboard cube. Inside the cube are a few seeds, a starter peat pot and a mini-booklet of instructions and lore. If all goes right, you could grow a

Christmas tree in just 7 to 10 years. Donated by Loser Daphne Steinberg.



Fir in the future: This week's 2 1/2-inch second prize. (Myers, Pat/Treeinabox.com)

Other runners-up win their choice of our ["For Best Results, Pour Into Top End" Loser Mug](#) or our ["Whole Fools"](#) Grossery Bag. Honorable mentions get one of our [lusted-after Loser magnets](#), "A Small Jester of Appreciation" or "Close, but Ceci N'est Pas un Cigare." First Offenders receive only a smelly tree-shaped air "freshener" ([FirStink](#) for their first ink). See general contest rules and guidelines at wapo.st/inviteFAQ. The headline "Lettery Winners" is by Jon Gearhart; Jesse Frankovich wrote the honorable-mentions subhead. Join the lively Style Invitational Devotees group on Facebook at on.fb.me/invdev; follow Style Invitational Ink of the Day on Facebook at bit.ly/inkofday; follow

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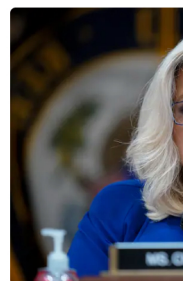
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The Style Conversational: The Empress's weekly online column discusses the week's new contest and results. See classic Questionable Journalism winners this week (published late Wednesday, Nov. 23) at wapo.st/conv1516.

[And from The Style Invitational four weeks ago ...](#)

Lettery winners: Alphabetical writing

In [Week 1512](#) the Empress asked the Losers to write something 26 words long in which every word started with a different letter. The one permitted exception: So we wouldn't have a whole page of X-rays and xylophones, you had the option to make your X-word one in which the X was in the middle, but pronounced like "ex." (Also, hyphenated compounds could count as either one or two words.) The results of this tough challenge: way more readable than we expected.

An inordinate number of the better entries referred to the Invite itself; see more of the "And Last" types in this week's Style Conversational.

4th place:

[An A-to-Z passage] A boastful cad dated every female, going, "Honey, I just know lots! Mansplaining? Not on point — quite ridiculous!" such that, unfailingly, vexed women eXclaimed, "You zero!" (*Karen Lambert, Chevy Chase, Md.*)

3rd place:

An ominous movie nauseated weekend viewers, inducing projectile retching everywhere. Grown-ups: flashback — eXuding queasiness, upchucking zealously, yelling deliriously, kneeling lamely. Title? "Junior High Cafeteria: Beef Surprise." (*Leif Picoult, Rockville, Md.*)

2nd place

and the ["spider skeleton"](#):

Conductor in rehearsal: "Violins, you're scratchy and flat! Trombones — don't bray like mating zebras! Kettledrums, what extraordinarily horrendous noise! Xylophone: unbelievably grotesque — just quit!

Otherwise — perfect.” (*Jonathan Jensen, a bassist in the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra*)

And the winner of the Clowning Achievement:

“I’d like to follow Xiao Qi Ji virtually on National Zoo’s giant panda cam.” “Uh, why? You do know he merely eats bamboo and sleeps, right?” (*Chris Doyle, Denton, Tex.*)

Alphagetaaboutit! Honorable mentions

Quintessential humiliation: Observing triathletes wilting, Jack, eXhibiting graciousness (and pretentiousness), loudly yelled “Courgette!” until realizing: “Knucklehead! Damn my French! I’ve been shouting ‘zucchini’ — not encouraging ‘valor.’ ” (*Ellen Raphaeli, Falls Church, Va.*)

I have this very large zit on my nose, coffee’s quite bitter, rain keeps falling. You eXclaim, “What a great day, everybody!” Just shut up, Pollyanna! (*Hildy Zampella, Vienna, Va.*)

Some Oddly Trivial Presidential Information

Assassinated: Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, Kennedy

Questionable election: Bush

Watergate: Nixon

Union head: Reagan

Famous Virginian/Declaration creator: Jefferson

Yemeni eXtraction: Zero

(*Louise Dodenhoff Hauser, Sarasota, Fla.*)

Quick! Get ready — the holidays are coming! Expect buyfests, limited parking, very eXcited kids, many invitations, zealous overindulgence, no sleep. (Forget dieting; just undo your waistband!) (*Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.*)

For Thanksgiving, I might go all-out with ribs, sauteed zucchini, wagyu kebabs, quail loins, eggplant parmesan, jellied yams, eXtra uni, veal Nicoise. Or Chef Boyardee. Decisions! (*Leif Picoult*)

First we’ll quaff some hearty, undiscovered California zinfandels. Next, a vat of eXpertly blended reds: juicy malbec, earthy pinot, young Grenache. Last: Italian dolcetto. Then ... klunk! (*Jonathan Jensen*)

Rules for Public Speaking: Arise, be direct; maintain eye contact

with group, host, individuals; just keep letting natural openness quicken. Then (unless vain), eXamine your zipper. (*Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.*)

[A limerick]

“Caesar's” dead, likewise “Tsar,” also “Kaiser”;
“Humankind’s just zoomed past ‘em, grown wiser,”
Yammer eXperts. But news
Makes idyllic, quaint views
Smell of ultra-robust fertilizer.
(*Coleman Glenn, Huntingdon Valley, Pa.*)

Boomers judged Xers “lazy slackers,” who deemed the following youth cohort “quintessentially entitled kids needing unceasing praise.” Okay, Millennials, have at it — vilify Generation Z’s reputation! (*Karen Lambert*)

Everyone residing in Who-ville felt zealous concerning Xmas quite a lot ... but the Grinch, you know, up on his snowy mountain perch, did NOT! Jerk! (*Jesse Frankovich, Lansing, Mich.*)

Stop using XamfirPM if you experience: headaches, joint pain, flaming discharge, wilted ribs, night quacking, glowing, cloven toes, kaleidoscopic vision, lycanthropy, Bea Arthur mimicking, or zombification. (*Jon Carter, Fredericksburg, Va.*)

Latest, greatest Star Wars offering by Disney Plus is “Jabba the Hutt’s Uncle’s Cousin’s EXcellent Quest: Visiting Yavin and Naboo, Zapping Kylo Ren, Flogging Ewok Merchandise.” (*Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.*)

Exciting hot quickies on weathered pine bleachers
Can give new romance eXtra zing.
Just know (very fast!) you’ll discover, undoubtedly:
Love is a many splintered thing.
(*Jeff Shirley, Richmond, Va.*)

Elon Musk owns Twitter! Now you downtrodden racists, xenophobes, gun zealots, QAnon wackos, Putin vindicators, incels and Klansmen can join up. Let free (hate) speech bloom! (*Chris Doyle*)

Discerning blurry outlines in Himalayan mountain zones, gullible visitors uttered: “Just look! We’ve finally espied proof! The abominable snowman eXists!” Knowledgeable citizens responded: “Not quite yeti.” (*Karen Lambert*)

Deep scars left by your vulgar, malevolent eX-president have not faded. Gross, unruly QAnon zealots jabber kooky, offensive propaganda. I won't even consume a ["Right Twix."](#) (*Bill Dorner, Indianapolis*)

When Donny hurls zingers at Ronny, great fun!

There's nothing quite like it — showtime's begun!

Unruly young children, just playing king,

Vast mountains of ego — eXhilarating!

(*Judy Freed, Deerfield Beach, Fla.*)

[*Retelling a Greek myth*] **Athena's birth cracked Dad's enormous forehead**, giving him immense jarring karma. Lovely Métis, now obviously pregnant, quaked reflexively. Swallowed, the undigested victim wailed excitedly, "Yours, Zeus!" (*Frank Mann, Washington*)

January: Yow, GOP unleashed! Looming excitement: required AR-15 ownership; Election Ninja hearings; QAnon Committee; Dark Brandon impeachment; zero tolerance — prison! — for "wokeness." Speaker: Marjorie? Kanye? Vladimir? (*Duncan Stevens*)

And Last: God knows regular quipping's not very challenging, but making you use eXactly twenty-six words, each one having a different first letter, is just plain zany. (*Jesse Frankovich*)

And Even Laster: Before entering the Invitational, always first question yourself honestly: Does my joke responsibly eXhibit wisdom, underscore legitimate knowledge or zealously promote virtue? No? Great — click submit! (*Karen Lambert*)

More honorable mentions in the online Invite at wapo.st/invite1516; more "And Lasts" in The Style Conversational at wapo.st/conv1516.

Still running — deadline Monday night, Nov. 28: Our contest to join two or more European town names in a "joint venture." See wapo.st/invite1515.

DON'T MISS AN INVITE! [Sign up here](#) to receive a once-a-week email from the Empress as soon as The Style Invitational and Style Conversational go online every Thursday, complete with links to the columns.

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Gift Article



By [Pat Myers](#)

Pat Myers is the "Empress" of The Style Invitational, The Washington Post's famed contest for clever, edgy, wacky humor and wordplay. In the role since 2003 – 900-plus contests ago – she writes the column and is its only judge. She also writes the weekly Style Conversational column

and runs the Style Invitational Devotees page on Facebook.  [Twitter](#)