

The Invitational Week 62: Hi, Anxiety!

Tell us some funny ways to stress yourself out. Plus winning diary entries by historical figures.

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AND

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Before he became Vlad the Impaler, Mr. Tepes knew he had to change his less impressive sobriquet. See today's Invitational results for historical "diary entries."

Hello. This is Invitational Thursday, and a fine Invitational it will be, but first we must alert our audience to the vice-like grip of evil and stupidity under which we have fallen, and urge all of you with the influence and standing to make a change make it, before it is too late.

Look at that paragraph above. Do you see anything wrong with it? You should. It is awful if you don't. You must atone.

The expression is "a *vise*-like grip." The simile is to a vise, a metal bench tool with one movable jaw and one stationary jaw. It clamps things tightly. A "vice" — pronounced identically — is a wickedness or moral depravity. The only connection between the two words is that it would be fitting and proper to define as wicked or morally depraved the editors of American dictionaries who have recently decided that since this word has been ludicrously misspelled by ignorant Americans for the last 20 years, they had to shrug and meekly surrender. According to Google, the expression "vice-like" is out there on the Web in significantly greater numbers than "vise-like." So, ipso facto, dictionaries are now accepting that patent misspelling.

These editors have fallen under the evil thrall of Usage Autocrats, who insist that language is a living breathing thing — which it is — but also that it is a thing that must be robotically altered and broadened whenever a word can be proved to have been abused in the same doltish way enough times — which it is not.

Dictionary editors make a big show of requiring a statistically high number of usage examples by prominent, influential people in order to consider adjusting a spelling or definition. It's the way the Roman Catholic Church insists on "authenticating" miracles before they confer sainthood. Both are processes of disingenuous sanctification.

Let's starve the editors of their phony pretext. Let's blacklist "vice-like" foreverafter. Thank you!

This is stressing me out.

—

OUR NEW INVITATIONAL CONTEST: Stress Yourself Out by Inducing Anxiety

This week's contest, suggested by reader Joan Witte, is based on a little gem of 1960s humor, the book *How to Make Yourself Miserable*, by the late [Dan Greenburg](#) (himself a regular winner of the late New York Magazine Competition, the template from which The Invitational was modeled stolen).

Adapted from the original book's section on dinner parties:

If you're at someone else's house, alternate between (a) worrying that they're wishing you'd leave already and (b) worrying that they'd be terribly hurt if you left so soon.

If you're the *host* of the party and the person says he guesses he'd better get going, be sure to (a) worry that he's actually hoping you'll ask him to stay, but also (b) worry that he's trying to get out of your house.

Adapted from the book's "Exercise in Anxiety":

You have an important business trip out of town. The night before the morning you have to leave, you drive your car around and around until it has juuust enough gas left to get to the airport. In the morning, leave your house in juuust enough time to catch your plane so long as there are no unexpected delays such as bad traffic *or* having to stop for gas.

And an example we just now made up: **Bring your two-year old to your audience with the Archbishop of Canterbury. To make the lad seem all grown up and precocious, put him in his big-boy pants, which cannot accommodate diapers, on the theory that he can't *possibly* have to go dooky *twice* in three hours.**

For Invitational Week 62: Tell us a funny strategy for *increasing* your anxiety, like those above. Don't make it any longer than those unless they're immensely readable; much shorter entries would be perfectly fine as well. (As in many Invite contests, they might be "signed" by some famous person, fictional character, etc.)

[Click here for this week's entry form](#), or go to tinyURL.com/inv-form-62. As usual, you may submit up to 25 entries for this week's contest, preferably all on the same form. Also as usual, please submit each individual entry as one single paragraph; i.e., don't push Enter until you're starting the next entry.

Deadline is Saturday, March 16, at 9 p.m. ET. Results will run here in The Gene Pool on Thursday, March 21.

The winner gets **a copy of *How to Make Yourself Miserable***. We actually have two! So you have your choice between a [well-used 1966 first-edition hardcover](#), donated by Richard Franklin (who's both a 32-time Loser and a commercial airline pilot, so who better to know about miserable people?) or a [good-condition 1987 paperback update](#), called *How to Make Yourself Miserable for the Rest of the Century*, given us by Joan Witte along with her contest suggestion.

Runners-up get autographed fake money featuring the Czar or Empress, in one of [eight nifty designs](#). Honorable mentions get bupkis, except for a personal email from the E, plus the [Fir Stink for First Ink](#) for First Offenders.

Make (Up) My Day: The 'diary entries' of Week 60

In [Invitational Week 60](#) we asked you to write up diary entries of famous people throughout history. (There were allowances. Yes, we know that the Chinese emperor didn't date his journal with "B.C.") Meanwhile, we're thrilled to welcome two First Offenders this week into Loserdom — one of them in the top four — breaking a sixteen-week FirStinkless prize drought.

Third runner-up:

Dec. 20, 1898 : We are so close! I truly believe we are on the precipice of achieving our goal: a watch you can read in the dark. — Marie Curie (*Sam Mertens, Silver Spring, Md.*)

Second runner-up:

29 December, 1924: Still need a last line for this novel. I could go with “So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past,” though I’m still partial to “That’s all, folks!” — F. Scott F. (*Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.*)

First runner-up:

April 6, A.D. 33: Must remind J that we need thirty pieces of silver by Friday or they'll repossess the donkey. — Myrtle Iscariot (*Ann Fisher, Marquette, Mich., a First Offender*)

And the winner of [the jointed wooden hand](#):

March 30, 1946: After Mrs. Braddock chided me at last night’s party, “Winston, you’re drunk!” I threw up in her lap. Must hire a publicist to spin this into a [devastatingly witty anecdote](#). — Churchill (*Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.*)

In Diarist Straits: Honorable mentions

Aug. 15, 1962: Can’t help but feel like we’re just missing one critical piece that’s keeping us from making it big. I wonder if the other lads feel the same way. — Pete Best (*Malcolm Fleschner, Palo Alto, Calif.*)

December 26, 1776: We successfully took Trenton, though the attack was almost too late! My fault for slowing us down crossing the river—I never should’ve let that guy persuade me to pose for an oil painting en route.— G.W. (*Duncan Stevens*)

October 10, 1838: - . . . - .. -. --. --- / - . . . - .. -. --. .-. - / .. / - ...- . / - -. . . / - . . . --. .-. ---. / .-. -. / .. ----. -- / ... --. / .- / --. .-. .-. - / - ...- .-. - / -. --- / --- -. / -- .. .-. .-. /-. / -... . / -... .-. / - --

- / .- . . - - . / - - . - . - _ —Samuel F.B. Morse (*to read the message, [click on this link](#) to a Morse Code translator, then copy the code into it, beginning with that first dash*) (Leif Picoult, Rockville, Md.)

April 2, Year 1: Baby J took his first steps on water today! — M. (Rob Cohen, Potomac, Md.)

April 1, 1814: It's bad enough that the British fake news says I wear lifts and look funny in white boots. Now Josephine compares my imperial truncheon to *un petit champignon*! — N. Bonaparte (Frank Osen)

220 B.C.: I'm going to build a big, beautiful wall and the Mongols are going to pay for it. — Emperor Qin Shi Huang (Kevin Dopart, Washington, D.C.)

December 17, 1903: Can't believe we invented flight! Two high school dropouts! Next project: putting peanuts in little bags—Wilbur Wright (Leif Picoult, Rockville, Md.)

April 28, 1945: Oh happy days! He's finally putting a ring on it! — Eva Braun (Sam Mertens)

July 15, 2013: Driving me nuts to be losing the publicity battle to Zuckerberg. PR flacks say we need a plan to get my name in the paper every day. — J. Bezos (Steve Smith, Potomac, Md.)

January 14, 2009, LaGuardia Airport Marriott: Arrived to clear skies this evening and saw a flock of several hundred Canada geese. Beautiful. Should be good weather to fly to Charlotte tomorrow. — Sully (Kenneth Enright, Setúbal, Portugal, a First Offender)

Sept. 13, 1996: Big audition today for the movie remake. Director said I'm perfect for the part, but studio wants Jeremy Irons to play Humbert. — Woody (Steve Smith)

1026 B.C.: The Amazons won't deliver my new helmet until next week because I didn't pay for fortnight shipping. It won't matter, whoever the Israelites send

out won't get close enough to touch a hair on my head. — Goliath (*Jeff Hazle, San Antonio*)

1-11-67: Recording session was far out, but the uptight suits were a downer. Apparently Middle America isn't ready to hear a man sing “ 'Scuse me while I kiss this guy.” — Jimi (*Steve Smith*)

2/25/1922: Took a long trip into the forest today in the sleigh. Whose woods they were I did not know. I wrote my name there in his snow. — Robert Frost (*Roy Ashley, Washington, D.C.*)

2-27-2024: So busy today! Asked [Tyler](#) to grab a few things on his way home. — L. Boebert (*Steve Smith*)

Long Ago: I always knew my husband was handy with his tools, but wow, Noah's been really banging out that boat! Shouldn't surprise me, though — after all, 600 is the new 450! (*Judy Freed, Deerfield Beach, Fla.*)

March 19, 1942: I need to cap my speech with a zinger. “I'll be back” sounds too Austrian. — Gen. Douglas MacArthur (*Sam Mertens*)

5/14/1987: Doctor tomorrow, gotta pee in a jar. Also behind on [my next commission](#), so I may be multitasking.... — Andres Serrano (*Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.*)

April 4, 1590: That Sam-I-Am! That Sam-I-Am! I do not like.... Argh. It's no good. I need to write something a tad weightier. — William Shakespeare (*Leif Picoult*)

August 20, 1889: Went for a walk with little Adolf. Such a sweet baby! But once again, such a strange incident: An oddly dressed man pulled something from his pocket, but an identical twin appeared and wrestled him to the ground, shouting, “No, it creates a paradox!” Then they both disappeared. I don't understand why this keeps happening. — Klara Hitler (*Tim Livengood, Columbia, Md.*)

Feb 21, 1582: My wretched brother's family has announced his intentions to visit this fall from [October 5 to October 14](#). There *has* to be a way to keep this from happening. — Pope Gregory XIII (*Sam Mertens*)

From the recovered log of Captain Billy Tyne of the Andrea Gail, Oct. 28, 1991: 44N, 56.4W. Possibly my last entry. Weather has worsened badly. Seas at 30 ft. Wind gusts to 80 kn. I wish there were a term I could use to describe such a perfect storm. (*Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Va.*)

July 17, 1969: Those two overgrown brats keep whining about who has the middle seat and who gets the window. I swear I'm going to turn this thing around if it gets any worse. — Michael Collins (*Diana Oertel, San Francisco*)

July 20, 1969: Today's film shoot with the guys in spacesuits wasn't perfect but it'll do. Armstrong flubbed his big line a little; not too noticeable, though. — Hollywood set designer (*Lee Graham, Reston, Va.*)

June 5, 1770: Won my 15th consecutive poker tournament tonight! Surely the name Sandwich will forever be synonymous with "champion." (*Scott Ableman, McLean, Va.*)

June 1, 1987: Wrote a new single, but it's not my best work. Maybe I should just record over it? Should probably just give it up. — R. Astley (*Duncan Stevens*)

June 10, 1994: I was juking my way through Bloomingdale's today when I spotted a nice pair of brown Aris Isotoner gloves. They just barely fit, but they'll do. — Orenthal (*Jeff Hazle*)

June 26, 1997: My trainer says I should fight hungry. I think I'll try that against Holyfield. — Mike Tyson (*Sam Mertens*)

November 29, 2004: Day 52: Today, I shared my favorite recipe for toilet wine with the girls in Cellblock D. Note to self: Destroy this diary. — Martha Stewart (*Lee Graham*)

May 17, 1935, April 10, 1942, April 2, 1949, November 5, 1962, March 9, 1966, January 21, 1975, August 27, 1976, April 13, 1983, August 14, 1986: Dear diary: Today I married the most wonderful man in the world. Our love will endure forever! Zsa Zsa Gabor (*Jonathan Jensen, Baltimore*)

May 22, 1927: The crowd in Paris took some “souvenirs” from my airplane, including a full beer bottle. I can only hope that they didn’t know what was actually in that bottle after a 33-hour flight, and took a healthy swig. — C. Lindbergh (*Pam Shermeyer, Lathrup Village, Mich.*)

November 18, 1863: I was reading tomorrow’s speech to Mary and she thought starting with “87” sounded “too common.” Her edit seems way too pretentious to me, but if I don’t use it, I’ll never hear the end of it. (*Jon Gearhart, Des Moines*)

2 November, 1914: Cousin Grete told me about a pleasant dream of being transformed into a cuddly bunny and thought it would make a sweet story. I promised I’d consider it. — F. Kafka (*Frank Osen*)

October 12, 1960: I was finally able to bang that loose shoe nail into place during the U.N. meeting today. Sheesh, that was really bothering me for a while. — Nikita (*Duncan Stevens*)

October 2, Long Ago: I think we’ve got all the animals on the boat, including Terry and Pat the unicorns. I hope Shem and Ham remembered to do all the gender checks.—N. (*Duncan Stevens*)

October 7, 1871: Had an amusing time in the barn today. I discovered that Bessie has a ticklish spot, and if you touch it she kicks like the dickens! — Catherine O’Leary (*Sam Mertens*)

September 10, 1465: I gotta raise my game. The Turks aren’t at all intimidated by “Vlad the Wedgie-Giver.” I’ll think of something. — Vlad Tepes (*Duncan Stevens*)

September 30, 1935: Finally finished my novel. My editor thinks it still needs some tweaks, but fiddle-de-dee, what does he know — readers are gonna love Chartreuse O'Hara!—M. Mitchell (*Duncan Stevens*)

Thor Heyerdahl, Kon-Tiki Trial Journal, April 2, 1947, Callao, Peru: Outboard motor now repainted — blends perfectly with raft under the banana-leaf canopy. (*Stu Segal, Southeast U.S.*)

And Last: Sept 24, 2006: It might be fun to enter this Style Invitational thing in the paper. What the heck—it's not like it's going to take much of my time. —Me (*58-time Loser Terri Berg Smith, Rockville, Md.*)

The headline "Make (Up) My Day" is by Stu Segal; Tom Witte wrote the honorable-mentions subhead.

Still running — deadline 9 p.m. ET Saturday, March 9: Our Week 61 photo caption contest. Click on the link below.