

Invitational Week 64: You're Workin' on a Chain, Gang

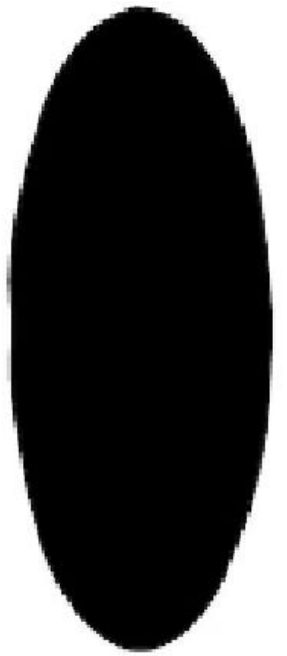
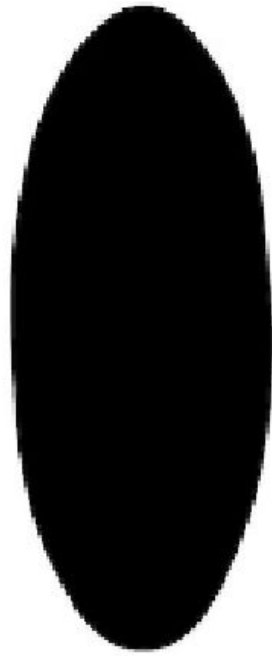
A classic connection game. Plus winning ways to stress yourself out.

[PAT MYERS](#)

AND

[GENE WEINGARTEN](#)

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Hello. Welcome to the new Invitational Gene Pool, which is new but also old.

It is the oldest Gene Pool Invitational ever, in fact, so old that it dates from a time when the Gene Pool was not yet even a gene or a zygote or a gamete or a pool or anything, though it might have been recognized as a human life by the state of Alabama. It was, at the time, a contest in New York Magazine, run by a very smart woman named Mary Ann Madden, and she had pioneered a type of contest requiring readers to link names, in a maddeningly brilliant sequence, starting with one name and ending with the same name. At the tender and sullen age of 21 or so, Gene entered this contest, one entry only, which included “U.S. Grant” linked to “Ford Foundation.” This link was published in New York Magazine, in the famed New York Magazine Competition, but attributed to someone else. Gene was outraged and pledged to spend the remainder of his miserable life avenging this terrible slight, and he did, starting The Invitational as The Style Invitational, in 1993, vengefully determined to destroy the New York Magazine Competition.

He succeeded, and here we are today. No one alive remembers the New York Magazine Competition, except us, with a little guilt. We have perpetrated several knockoffs of the name-chain contest, including the two versions we’ll use today. The first is identical — start with a name and end with the same name — and the second is a variation: Start with a name and end with a very, very different name, but one that has some sort of (probably negative) connection with the first:

Colin Kaepernick; “QB VII”; Leon Uris; Leon Panetta; Caspar Weinberger; Casper the Friendly Ghost; the Holy Ghost; God; Pope Francis; Francis Scott Key; “The Star-Spangled Banner”; **Colin Kaepernick** (*Chris Doyle*)

Kim Kardashian; Lil Kim; Little Richard; “Good Golly Miss Molly”; Molly Shannon; Shannon, Ireland; Kathy Ireland; Christie Brinkley; Billy Joel; “Allentown”; Steve Allen; Merv Griffin; Eva Gabor; Eddie Albert; **Albert Einstein.** (*Hildy Zampella*)

NY Mag called its name chain contest the Game of Dan Greenburg — the same humorist whose book coincidentally inspired this week's (unrelated) Invitational results below. Here's how we'll do it this time.

For Invitational Week 64: Create a chain of **no more than 15 proper nouns** — names of people (real or fictional), products, places, etc. — in which each name relates somehow to the previous one, as in the examples above from our 2006 name chain contest ([results here](#)). What we're looking for is, duh, clever and funny. **You may bookend the list either with the same name, as in the first example, or with contrasting ones, as in the second.**

We're asking you to **briefly explain the less obvious links** — but only at the end of your entry. That way we can judge your entry *without* seeing the explanation, but be able to peek if we don't get it.

[Click here for this week's entry form](#), or go to tinyURL.com/inv-form-64. 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 — *including any explanations in parentheses* — as one single paragraph; i.e., don't push Enter until you're starting the next entry.

Deadline is Saturday, March 30, at 9 p.m. ET. Results will run here in The Gene Pool on Thursday, April 4.

The winner gets a handsome pair of socks that appear to be alligator heads eating your ankles. Highly recommended for wearing to your IRS audit.



Wear them with Crocs? This week's prize. (Temu.com)

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.

Meanwhile, send us questions or suggestions, which we hope to deal with in real time. You do this, as always, by sending them to this here button:

[this here button](#)

Say Yes to the Stress: The anxiety-producers of Week 62

In **Week 62**, inspired by Dan Greenburg's 1960s humor classic *How to Make Yourself Miserable*, we asked for strategies on how to increase anxiety.

Third runner-up: When giving a public speech, imagine that *you* are naked. (*Michael Stein, Arlington, Va.*)

Second runner-up: Start to say something, then notice that the word on the tip of your tongue is staying right there on the tip, but not coming out of your mouth. Immediately assume you have early-onset Alzheimer's. Google "What is the word for when you can't think of the word you want to say" and freak out even more because you knew it was called aphasia but couldn't think of it. (*Judy Freed, Deerfield Beach, Fla.*)

First runner-up: If you have financial worries, just stop spending money on your anti-anxiety medication. (*Jesse Frankovich, Laingsburg, Mich.*)

And the winner of a copy of "How to Make Yourself Miserable": Tell the tattoo artist to "surprise me." (*Sam Mertens, Silver Spring, Md.*)

Nervous Nearlies: Honorable mentions

Ask Elon Musk to name your newborn, promising to use whatever name he chooses. (*Leif Picoult, Rockville, Md.*)

Regularly worry that the recurring dream I have about being in school naked is my real life and that my dreams are actually the boring crap I thought was real. (*Jon Gearhart, Des Moines*)

You worry that your recently published paper on "impostor syndrome" will expose you for the incompetent hack you are. (*Steve Smith, Potomac, Md.*)

Do incriminating internet searches like “undetectable poisons” and “how to hide a human body” and hope nothing bad happens to anybody you know for a few years. (*Sam Mertens*)

My date ordered a roasted garlic appetizer and an entree with garlic sauce. I worry: Is she trying to tell me she doesn’t want to kiss me later? Warding me off like I’m a vampire? Or maybe she just likes garlic? Should I go heavy on the garlic, too, signaling that we have something in common? Or will she interpret that as a sign that I don’t want to kiss her? But I do want to kiss her. So I guess I should indicate that by *not* ordering anything with garlic? Maybe I should get something with a mint sauce? (*Tom Witte, Montgomery Village, Md.*)

Before embarking on a long drive in risky road conditions, don a pair of tattered, pee-stained underwear. (*Jeff Contompasis, Ashburn, Va.*)

When you’ve climbed halfway up to your second-story roof, the ladder’s right leg suddenly sinks two inches. You figure that if you keep your weight toward the left leg, you’ll probably be okay. (*Dave Prevar, Annapolis, Md.*)

Write “DEFUND THE POLICE” on your driver’s license with a Sharpie, then remove a taillight bulb. (*Gary Crockett, Chevy Chase, Md.*)

Call your mother. (*Jesse Frankovich*)

Go to a cemetery. Note all the headstones of people born after you. (*Roy Ashley, Washington, D.C.*)

I worry that my toenails will stop growing before I reach my goal: flipping the light switch without getting out of bed. (*Jon Gearhart*)

You worry that if cigar is just a cigar, then your life’s work is meaningless, but if it’s not, then why do you always have one in your mouth? — S. Freud (*Steve Smith*)

If I wanted to make myself really nervous, I'd rearrange the pencils on my desk so that they are no longer in order of length. (*Luther Jett, Washington Grove, Md.*)

Program a speaker to occasionally play Bach's [Toccata and Fugue in D Minor](#) when you open your basement door. (*Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.*)

Ride all night on the New York City subway with only a "Bang!" flag pistol in your pocket to protect you. (*Chris Doyle, Denton, Tex.*)

Volunteer as a judge in a fugu chef competition. (*Kevin Dopart, Washington*)

Volunteer to bring cupcakes to the office for the boss's birthday, then carry them in on a plate, riding your unicycle. (*Duncan Stevens*)

Send an OK Cupid message to someone you really like. Immediately realize that you sounded like a total dork. Obsess over whether to send a follow-up message. Doubt that someone like him would even read another message from someone as dorky as you. Consider permanently deleting your profile. Worry that if you do, you will most likely die single, alone, and mysteriously bloated. (*Judy Freed*)

At your wedding, unconditionally trust a fart. (*Kevin Dopart*)

Summer is almost here and it's time to bring out your swimsuit from the back of your dresser. To calm your nerves, you polish off a sleeve of Oreos. (*Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.*)

Take a knee during the National Anthem at a Klan meeting. (*Jon Ketzner, Cumberland, Md.*)

Save a few bucks and cancel the home insurance. (*Sam Mertens*)

Instead of picturing the audience in their underwear, when I give a speech I picture them in *my* underwear. Not only is this just as ineffective at decreasing

anxiety, but then you also face that alarming question: “How did all these people get my underwear?” (*Josh Feldblyum, Springfield, Pa.*)

When shopping for a Valentine’s Day present for your wife, buy her some chocolates, but also buy a lacy bra and put it under the bed. (*Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.*)

When sitting next to Travis Kelce at a Taylor Swift concert, call for “Free Bird.” (*Jon Ketzner*)

When the toilet’s clogged, try your luck that an extra flush will clear things and not make them overflow. (*Sam Mertens*)

You alternately worry that your daughter won’t get into an Ivy League school and, if she does, that voters will find out she’s attending an Ivy League school. — T. Cruz (*Steve Smith*)

You secretly fear there’s more to fear than fear itself. — FDR (*Steve Smith*)

Take a little blue pill or two before giving your presentation to the League of Women Voters. (*Chris Doyle*)

And Last: Complain to Pat and Gene that you don’t get enough ink. Then, when you still don’t get ink, wonder if that’s because you complained, or if it’s because your entries still suck. (*Leif Picoult*)

And Even Laster: Should I quit doing this silly contest? If I do, I’ll have a little more spare time. I could start a new hobby, maybe pick up a new skill. But after I quit people might THINK I’m still entering, and that I never get ink because all my stuff just sucks. Damn it, am I stuck doing this forever? (*Tom Witte, Invitational entrant virtually every week since 1993*)

The headline “Say Yes to the Stress” is by Kevin Dopart; Chris Doyle wrote the honorable-mentions subhead.

Still running — deadline 9 p.m. ET Saturday, March 23: Our Week 63 contest for writing funny things by stringing together random words from President Biden's State of the Union address. Click on the link below.