

The Invitational Week 112: Be Mister Language Person

Dave Barry is back with his own Substack, and here's a chance to remind him how to do his English-advice bit. Plus winning snark-verse about celebs.

[Pat Myers](#)

and

[Gene Weingarten](#)

Feb 20, 2025



Hello.

Q: What is the purpose of the apostrophe?

A: The apostrophe is used mainly in hand-lettered signs to alert the reader that an "S" is coming up at the end of the word, as in WE DO NOT ACCEPT PERSONAL CHECK'S. Another important grammar concept to bear in mind when creating hand-lettered signs is that you should put quotes around random words for decoration, as in "TRY" OUR HOT DOG'S, or even TRY "OUR" HOT DOG'S.

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The question and answer above are from a long-ago column by Dave Barry using his occasional nom de plume of "Mister Language Person." Dave ended his column in 2004, so that was the official death of MLP. Dave is of course now back with an [excellent Substack](#), and he says he is considering reinstating the trope. Let's help him.

Q: What does “penultimate” mean?

A: This word is commonly misused, so let me clarify it with an example:

“The penultimate word in this sentence is is.” (*Chuck Smith*)

Q. What is “hyperbole”?

A. It’s what takes place for two solid weeks leading up to the Superbole. (*Beverley Sharp*)

And:

Q. What is a non sequitur?

A. I’ll say! (*Jonathan Paul*)

For Invitational Week 112: Write a question and answer in the style of Mister Language Person, as in the examples above from both Dave Himself and from our 2009 contest to imitate him ([full results here](#)). As he did last time, Dave has agreed to weigh in with his faves among the finalists. Asked to describe his oeuvre for us exclusively for this column, Dave said:

Mister Language Person is literally a literal giant in the “field” of grammar.

Formatting this week: Please [see this week’s entry form](#) for directions.

Deadline is Saturday, March 1, 2025, at 9 p.m. ET. Results will run here in The Gene Pool on Thursday, March 6. As usual, you may submit up to 25 entries for this week’s contest, preferably all on the same entry form.

[Click here for this week’s entry form](#), or go to tinyurl.com/inv-form-112.

This week’s winner gets these itsy-bitsy drop earrings depicting heads of garlic; despite their size, they have proven 100 percent effective against vampire encroachment through the external auditory meatus. We do advise you, however, not to eat them, even with those cutesy microgreens.



A token of clove: This week's prize.

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.

Dingdingding! We have an announcement! With his *five* blots of ink in [last week's contest](#) to play with the words from the current president's inaugural address, Kevin Dopart has become the second Loser (after Chris Doyle) to be published 2,000 times in The Invitational — 41 of them winning the week's contest, with 126 runners-up. Since Kevin made his Invite debut almost exactly 1,000 weeks ago, in 2005, that means he's averaged two inks per week for twenty years.

But lest you think we think he's all that, we also feel obliged to note that by a conservative estimate, Kevin has submitted some 37,400 entries to the Invite (in the early years, there was no 25-entry limit). And that means that we have blithely tossed 35,400 painstakingly crafted efforts of Mr. Dopart into the trash.

(No, we don't keep count of the Losers' every blot of ink. They do that themselves. See the Loser Stats and so much more at their website, NRARS.org.)

Wag the Doggerel: The Balliol rhymes of Week 110

In [Invitational Week 110](#) we invited you to update the "Balliol rhyme" — a Victorian-era equivalent of first-person snark — with four-line poems about today's targets of mockery.

Third runner-up:

Rep. Anna Paulina Luna

I'm Luna, and my latest bill
In Congress, if it passes, will
Put Trump by Lincoln up on Rushmore
So his MAGA fans can gush more.

(Chris Doyle, Denton, Tex.)

Second runner-up:

I'm **Stephen Miller**. Douse the lamp
Of Liberty! I'll build my camp
In Cuba; we'll be hotsy-totsy.
Just call me the AshkeNazi.

(David Smith, Pleasanton, Calif.)

First runner-up:

I'm **Donald Trump!** I'm cracking down
On every lazy slacker clown
Who wants to work remotely, but
Excuse me, it's my turn to putt.

(Jesse Frankovich, Laingsburg, Mich.)

And the winner of the [calendar featuring comically phallic nature photos](#):

I'm New York Mayor **Eric Adams**,
With scruples less than any madam's,
For I will go beyond the pale
To keep m'damn ass out of jail.

(Frank Osen, Pasadena, Calif.)

Mocked Down: Honorable mentions

I, the hustler **Elon Musk**,
Bestie of the orange husk,
Poisoned and devalued Twitter,
Flushing billions down the Xitter.

(John Conti, Norfolk, Mass.)

I'm **Donald Trump**, with plans that I'll
Rebuild this rubble Vegas-style,
And once I've finished with the flip,
We'll truly have a Gaza Strip.

(Jesse Frankovich)

Director of National Intelligence Tulsi Gabbard

Some say it's bad that I, Ms. Gabbard,

With Bashar al-Assad once blabbered!
At Intelligence, I'll do my bit
To make sure there's much less of it.

(Duncan Stevens, Vienna, Va.)

As **POTUS**, I can steal and kill—

So says SCOTUS—at my will.

Coming to my crime portfolio:
Greenland, Gaza, flu, and polio.

(John Conti)

Pete Hegseth: I won't prey or cheat,
Or down my triple vodkas neat.

So please confirm, and (in the main)

I pinky-swear that I'll refrain.

(Frank Osen)

I'm **Donald Trump**; I don't see any
Reason to produce the penny.

I'm cutting out this dumb expense,

'Cause I'm not one for making cents.

(Jesse Frankovich)

I'm quite annoyed. It grates my cheese
To see Trump fire those IGs.

I'll grumble that he's acting crassly,

And then do nothing. I'm **Chuck Grassley**.

(Duncan Stevens)

Here come I. I'm **Kristi Noem**;

I wreak my duties close to hoem.

Call me attack dog for the Don!

(When I attack a dog, it's gone.)

(Julia Griffin, Statesboro, Ga., a First Offender)

I'm Trump's right arm, I'm **JD Vance**,

The poster child for sycophants.

I get the honor that I'm due:

The whole world calls me Number Two.

(Jonathan Jensen, Baltimore)

Ludwig van Beethoven

I wrote quartets, sonatas, too;

I wrote nine symphonies--it's true!

My "Ode to Joy"? They loved each word!

Applause was deafening! (So I've heard...)

(Beverley Sharp, Montgomery, Ala.)

Sen. Susan Collins

Sen. Susie here. You say you've burned

All D.C. down? Well, I'm concerned!

My consternation's deep and thorough:
I'm giving you a good brow-furrow.

(Duncan Stevens)

I'm **RFK Jr.** — RFK 2.0,

There's a whole world of facts that I simply don't know.
So if you hate needles, there's no doubt I'm your fella —
Hope you relish your measles and mumps and rubella.

(Diana Oertel, San Francisco)

I'm **Eve** and I know better than
Some God what food to feed my man.
I doubt that that "all-knowing" sap'll
Notice *one* small missing apple.

(Jon Gearhart, Des Moines)

I'm **Travis Kelce**, and my team
Did not fulfill our latest dream.
Our Super Bowl was such manure
It should be called the Errors Tour.

(Jesse Frankovich)

I'm **JFK**. It burns my rump —
My Center's just been seized by Trump.
The crowds there soon will be so sparse
That every show becomes a farce.

(Duncan Stevens)

Hi, I'm **John F. Kennedy**,
An arts complex is named for me
Where soon you'll get to see all day
Lee Greenwood and "Y.M.C.A."

(Mark Raffman, Reston, Va.)

I'm **Donald Trump**, and I proclaim
These waters have a brand-new name:
The "Mexico" will be no more
Once I have won my own Gulf War.

(Jesse Frankovich)

I'm **Donald Trump**, and things are dire!
From soaring costs to wildfire
To airplanes falling from the sky,
I blame it all on DEI.

(Jesse Frankovich)

I'm **RFK (well, make that "Junior")**,
And (some would say) I couldn't be loonier.
For eons no respect I earned,
But could it be the worm has turned?

(Beverley Sharp)

I'm **RFK**. I've grasped the grail —
This spot I've got's been my white whale!
You've probably guessed, then, how I'll treat it:
I'll drag it home and then I'll eat it.

(Duncan Stevens)

I'm **Mitch McConnell**, Trump's great foe,
The only R to tell him no.
You Democrats should celebrate!
So what if I'm four years too late?

(Jonathan Jensen)

The Other, Less Scary Steve Miller

A cowboy up in space above?
Or am I love the gangster of?
The names they call me never cease:
Some people even use Maurice.

(Jesse Frankovich)

I'm **Elon**. Like my cars, I'm quirky,
And frequently, inaptly jerky;
When Trump said, "Be my red-tape curer,"
I jumped and shouted, "*Ja, mein Führer!*"

(Frank Osen)

My name is **Gwyneth Paltrow** and
I sell a rather wacky brand
Of wellness products, like designer
Candles scented like vagina.

(Jesse Frankovich)

J.K. Rowling

I wrote the books of Harry Potter;
Rave reviews I gotta lotta.
Yet now I've lost a bunch of fans
Because of what I said on trans.

(Jon Cannon, Potomac, Md., a First Offender)

I'm the Eagles' **Sirianni**,
Coaching talent most uncanny.
Here in Philly, fans adore me.
Lose next year, then they'll abhor me.

(Mark Raffman)

I'm **Clarence T**. Please keep on gifting —
I won't disclose your graft and grifting!
Reveal my trips with brothers Koch?
Ha ha! My friend, you surely joch.

(Duncan Stevens)

Profiles in Courage: Sen. Thom Tillis

Last month I said, with steely nerve,

That Hegseth was unfit to serve.
But when Trump turned his evil eye on,
That hill I'm not gonna die on.

(Jonathan Jensen)

I'm **Donald Trump!** Let freedom ring!
The founders said, "We'll have no king!"
I wear no crown, but here's the trick:
In "dictator," I am the dic.

(Mark Raffman)

The headline "Wag the Doggerel" is by Jeff Contompasis; both Kevin Dopart and Jesse Frankovich submitted the honorable-mentions subhead.

Still running — deadline 9 p.m. ET Saturday, Feb. 22: It's our recurring Ask Backwards contest, in which we provide the "answers" (this week including "About 29" and "The Philadelphia Beagles") and you tell us the question. Click on the link below.