

# The Style Invitational

Week 504: Life Is Snort

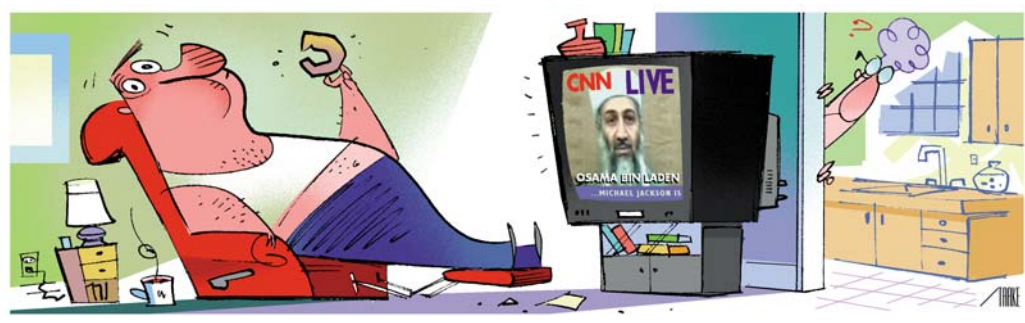


ILLUSTRATION BY BOB STAKER FOR THE WASHINGTON POST

... And then, sitting there eating my bagel, I realized that "error" is terrorism's middle name.  
 ... And that's why my beagle is my best friend.  
 ... Maybe tomorrow I'll have that cup of coffee my dad always wanted to share with me.  
 ... Bowling, I realized, is not just about strikes.

**This week's contest** was proposed by Jean Sorensen of Herndon. Jean points out that the excellent reader-written feature "Life Is Short" on the front of Sunday Style sometimes gets a little, well... schmaltzy. Jean is a particular fan of the final line of the items, where the schmaltz often resides. Your challenge is to write a last line, as in the examples above. First-prize winner gets Volume 1 of the (mostly) picture book "Morbid Curiosity: Celebrity Tombstones Across America," plus the accompanying calendar.

First runner-up wins the tacky but estimable Style Invitational Loser Pen. Other runners-up win the coveted Style Invitational Loser T-shirt. Honorable mentions get the mildly sought-after Style Invitational bumper sticker. Send your entries via fax to 202-334-4312, or by e-mail to [losers@washpost.com](mailto:losers@washpost.com). Deadline is Monday, May 12. All entries must include the week number of the contest and your name, postal address and telephone number. E-mail entries must include the week number in the subject field. Contests will be

judged on the basis of humor and originality. All entries become the property of The Washington Post. Entries may be edited for taste or content. Results will be published in four weeks. No purchase required for entry. Employees of The Washington Post, and their immediate relatives, are not eligible for prizes. Pseudonymous entries will be disqualified. The revised title for next week's contest is by Chris Doyle of Forsyth, Mo.

## Report from Week 500,

in which we asked you to come up with flawed syllogisms. It was a very hard contest. The ones who did well did very well. The ones who didn't... really, really didn't.

◆ Second Runner-Up:  
**Only one entry will win The Style Invitational. I submitted only one entry. Ergo, I will win The Style Invitational.**  
 (Russell Beland, Springfield)

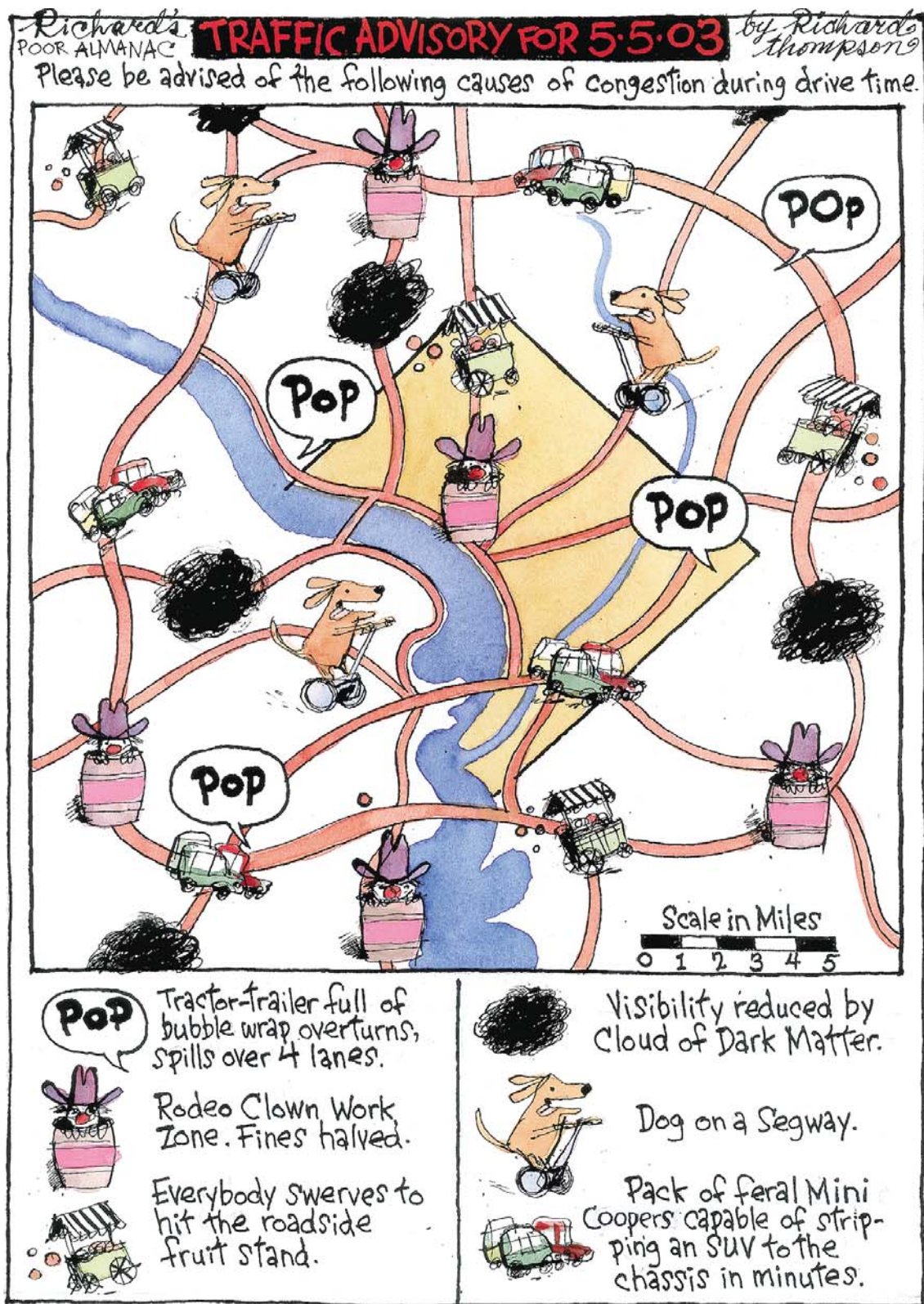
◆ First Runner-Up:  
**A lawyer is taught to be precise. A precise person uses clear, concise language. Ergo, lawyers possess the training to express complicated concepts in a self-evident manner, employing the rhetoric version of the doctrine of *res ipsa loquitur*, whether coincident with the action at hand or rendered analytically after the fact, i.e., *nunc pro tunc*, in a manner that eschews verbosity and is, therefore, comprehensible *inter alia* by the average person, the extraordinary person, those with or without *mens rea*, ballerinas, Methodists...**  
 (Marc Liebert, New York)

◆ And the winner of the milk chocolate movie-opening invitation:  
**Emanuel Ax is an extraordinary talent. Kathleen Battle is an extraordinary talent. The word "old" means "of long standing." Ergo, regardless of how your mother took it, I was only referring to her long-standing status as an extraordinary person when I...**  
 (Dan Dunn, Bethel, Conn.)

◆ Honorable Mentions  
**The best things in life are free. Freedom comes at the price of eternal vigilance. Freedom, therefore, isn't free. Freedom, therefore, isn't one of the best things in life. Tyranny is the complete opposite of freedom. The complete opposite of something is everything that the first thing is not. Tyranny, therefore, is one of the best things in life. Ergo, tyranny is better than freedom.**  
 (Marty McCullen, Gettysburg, Pa.)  
**Farts are funny. Audiences like funny things. People in an elevator are a captive audience. Ergo, people will like it if you fart in an elevator.**  
 (Maxine Sudol, Richmond, Australia)  
**Rock beats scissors. Scissors beat paper. Ergo, rock does not beat paper! What, paper beats rock because it can wrap around the rock? What kind of stupid logic is that? Paper can wrap around scissors, too. Rock rules. Thank you.**  
 (Jonathan Kaye, Washington)  
**Came home this morning and all her clothes were gone. The account is empty, a stain on the bed, the dog is dead. Ergo, my baby done left me, she's done chucked me and flown.**  
 (Cecil J. Clark, Arlington)  
**If you tax an activity, you discourage it. The death tax imposes a tax on dying. Ergo, repealing the death tax will cause people to die earlier.**  
**(Sen. Tom Daschle, Washington)**  
 (Sara Ulyanova, San Pedro Sula, Honduras)

**A circular argument assumes what it is trying to prove. Assuming what one is trying to prove is logically invalid. Ergo, a circular argument is invalid because it is circular.**  
 (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)  
**All fish have scales. The Justice Department has scales. Ergo, there is something fishy about Ashcroft.**  
 (Mike Genz, La Plata)  
**Socrates is a man. All men are jerks. Ergo, Socrates is your ex-husband.**  
 (Jeff Brechlin, Potomac Falls)  
**God helps those who help themselves. Kleptomaniacs help themselves. Ergo, God is an accessory to petty theft.**  
 (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)  
**Death involves going toward the light. When you walk into your kitchen at 3 a.m., cockroaches run from the light. Ergo, cockroaches never die.**  
 (Jennifer Hart, Arlington)  
**Blue, red and yellow are primary colors. If you combine two primary colors, you get a secondary color. The primary color that is not a component of a secondary color is called its complementary color. Complementary things are things that go well together. Ergo, you should wear blue pants and an orange shirt to your next sales presentation.**  
 (Dan Steinberg, Falls Church)  
**No man has two penises. One man has one more penis than no man. Ergo, one man has three penises.**  
 (Chris Doyle, Forsyth, Mo.)

Next Week: Pre-Sentencing Questions



## MISS MANNERS

Judith Martin

### Living in Sin

**A**t the behest of a French gastronomic consortium, the Vatican was rumored to be considering removing gluttony from the list of the Seven (formerly Deadly, now Venial) Sins.

That's the good news, said a gentleman of Miss Manners's acquaintance. "The bad news," he said, "is that cheese is going on."

Quite apart from the context of church doctrine, strange things have long been happening to the entire list for some time, Miss Manners has noticed. The popular moral tab rates all seven on a scale from respectable to admirable.

Avarice is the national sport, with its competition for how much money people can make and how many things they can buy, and Envy keeps score and urges people on.

Sloth had a triumph when technology enabled workers to play games and exchange gossip while appearing to be hard at work on their computers.

Pride scored an even bigger victory when it was put on the school curriculum, self-esteem having come to be identified as a prerequisite for achievement rather than a result of it.

Wrath defeated civility itself, so that concern for humanity could be invoked as an excuse for treating people badly.

And as for lust... In comparison, overeating seems harmless enough. It is possible to chomp away quietly, without taunting or cheating others, presuming one does not empty the platter before it has been passed all the way around the table.

The etiquette danger, at any rate, is more likely to come nowadays from those who pay careful attention to what they eat and also to what everybody else eats. (See Wrath, above.)

If Gluttony is excessive attention to food and drink, negative attention should qualify, too. In a society where everyone is either overweight or a picky eater, maintaining gluttony as a sin would require locking everyone up in their own dining rooms.

Those dining rooms are empty enough for the purpose, because they have become the last places that any such sins would be committed. Eat in the dining room? Isn't that what we have sidewalks, kitchens, offices, bedrooms, stores, media rooms, classes, movies and cars for?

Without presuming that we can abolish sin, either by refraining from practicing it or by declaring it a virtue, Miss Manners thinks we would be better off to return to the dining room for regular

meals. For one thing, gluttons and everyone else might learn how to eat properly, which is to say without revolting others. Nightly parental instruction helps, but the most effective method consists of the vivid impressions that siblings perform of one another's eating methods. The family dinner table is also where the art of conversation is learned, beginning with the pretense that you are just as interested in hearing what other people have been doing and thinking as you are in talking.

As a bonus, it is possible that if people got used to eating at given times in the company of others, they will become less anxiously focused on food.

They might even learn to enjoy it more. As Miss Manners recalls about another of the sins, nobody disapproved of its providing pleasure as long as it was done properly at home, and not in the streets.

**Dear Miss Manners:**  
**I am a college student, about to graduate and get out in the workforce. I have heard and seen that most people choose to dress conservatively at an interview. How conservative should I go? Am I allowed to wear a pantsuit or is the skirt suit the only choice for me?**

**I don't like conservatism in general and I like to be able to show a touch of my personality and style in the way I dress.**

**What would you mostly recommend for college females ready to get out into the real world? Is this the time when dressing conservatively is the ultimate best choice?**

Miss Manners hopes it doesn't disappoint you to hear that pantsuits are no longer considered cutting edge. Female senators wear them to work.

The rule about interviews is to dress for the job you want. Perhaps there are fields in which college students are sought for their personality and style, in which case you would do well to exhibit yours. For prospective employers who hire people for their skills or industry, however, this might be a sign that you are more interested in displaying yourself than in fitting in.

*Feeling incorrect? E-mail your etiquette questions to Miss Manners (who is distraught that she cannot reply personally) at [MissManners@unitedmedia.com](mailto:MissManners@unitedmedia.com) or mail to United Media, 200 Madison Ave., New York, N.Y. 10016.*

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## DEAR ABBY

**Dear Abby:**  
 My husband, "Gene," retired 10 years ago. During his long career, he wore a suit and tie every day. Although Gene was never a slave to fashion, he showered and shaved, used a deodorant and put on clean underwear every day.  
 Since Gene's retirement, his attention to personal hygiene has deteriorated. He showers, shaves and changes his clothes only once or twice a week. I have to constantly change our bedding and use room freshener on the pillows, sofa cushions, etc.  
 I have tried presenting myself as a "role model," telling my husband how good it makes me feel to be clean and start "fresh" every day, hoping he'll get the

message. But he thinks I'm being obsessive. Abby, what should I do?

*Wanting a Clean Gene in a Las Vegas Suburb*

It's time to talk to your husband's doctor. Changes in personal hygiene can be a symptom of serious depression. Your husband's whole identity may have been tied to his job—and now needs help. He needs a mental and physical evaluation by his doctor. Marriage and individual counseling could also benefit you both. Please don't wait.

**Dear Abby:**  
 I am a 47-year-old divorced mother of two boys. My

ex split four years ago, and for the past two years I've been dating a wonderful man I'll call Ron.

My 80-year-old mother met Ron early on and says she cannot stand him. She can't give me a reason, but insults him to his face, which is every bit as insulting to me. I love Ron and want to marry him, but Mother is making it impossible. She constantly makes demeaning remarks about him to my boys.

Ron is urging me to limit the amount of time the kids and I spend with Mother. However, I am an only child and she never lets me forget I'm "all she has." Abby, I love Ron — and so do my boys — but Mom is making all of us miserable. Help!

*Caught in the Middle in Texas*

Now is the time to be strong and nip this in the bud. Tell your mother that you and the boys are no longer all she has. She has Ron, too. She can accept him as the man you love and be part of your "one big happy family," or she can risk isolating herself by putting him down and trying to control you. The choice is hers.

*Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Write Dear Abby at [www.DearAbby.com](http://www.DearAbby.com) or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, Calif. 90069.*

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