

Health

Welcome to the section about tricky living!

You can't enjoy tricky living if you're dead. So the first secret of tricky living is: stay alive! To do so, keep healthy. Here's how.

Let's start with the part of health that's most enjoyable: food!

Different kinds of molecules, in food and drinks, give your body different benefits. To get *all* the benefits and be totally healthy, **eat a wide variety** of food. Don't binge on any single kind of food. If you binge, you won't have enough appetite left to eat the other kinds of foods that give you other kinds of benefits.

Even the healthiest kinds of molecules will become **toxic** (annoy your body) if you overload on them. For each kind of molecule, you must eat *enough* to give you the benefit, but not *too much* (so you don't get toxins or overweight or feel so full that you have no room left for the other molecules you should eat). Nutritionists try to discover, for each kind of molecule, how much is *enough* and how much is *too much*.

The typical food consists mainly of **water** molecules but also includes big quantities of 3 kinds of **macronutrients**:

fats
proteins
carbohydrates

The typical food also includes tiny quantities of 2 kinds of **micronutrients**:

vitamins
minerals

Each month, nutritionists finish new experiments and must modify opinions about what the minimum and maximum dosage of each molecule should be. Here's a summary of their conclusions when this book went to press.

Water

You must consume water, to create blood and replace the water that you excrete (through piss and sweat). Water also helps your body keep an even temperature, so no part of your body gets too hot or too cold.

How much water you need

An old myth says you should drink 8 glasses of water per day, but that myth isn't true. Actually, **you need to consume about 12 cups of water per day, but those 12 cups don't have to be drunk**: they can be consumed as part of watery foods. For example, in most fruits and vegetables, 90% of the molecules are water. (Meat, fish, and grains contain somewhat less water.) If you eat lots of fruits and vegetables, drinking just a *few* glasses of water will get your total water intake up to 12 cups.

When to drink

The human body can pretty accurately determine how much water to consume. You can typically follow this simple rule:

Drink if you're thirsty. If you're not thirsty, don't bother drinking.

But here are 3 exceptions to that rule:

If you're exercising for a long time, you should sip a little water while you're exercising and drink a lot of water afterwards. That's especially true in cold weather, because cold weather decreases your thirst, even though your body still needs the water (to replenish what you lose by sweating).

Elderly people should drink slightly more water than their thirst dictates, because elderly people have an impaired sense of thirst.

When you get up in the morning, your body is dehydrated (since you didn't drink while sleeping), so make sure to drink something before going to work.

Water's effect on your weight

Water has this nice property: it contains no calories, so it won't make you permanently fat. (If you drink lots of water, your stomach will be full of water temporarily, but you'll piss most of it out, so the extra water has no long-term effect on your weight.)

Nutritionists have discovered this trick to losing weight: **eat food containing lots of water**. That's because water contains no calories but makes you feel full. So to lose weight, eat watery food such as fruits, vegetables, and soup. Avoid dry things, such as crackers, chips, nuts, and dried fruit.

For example, to lose weight, it's okay to eat grapes but not dried grapes (raisins). That's because, if you eat 30 grapes, you'll say "wow, that looks huge," and you'll feel full; but if you eat 30 raisins, you'll say "wow, that looks tiny," and after eating them you'll still feel hungry, even though they have the same nutrients and calories as 30 grapes.

Your hunger's affected by the volume of what you eat, not by what you drink. Just your *thirst* is affected by the volume of what you drink.

For example, nutritionists have discovered that **if you feed a person a chicken dunked in water (so it looks like a big chicken soup), the person will feel more full than if you serve the water separately from the chicken**, by putting the water in a glass. Drinking water in a glass doesn't help a person feel full, but "eating" water as part of a food (soup) *does* make a person feel full. So to feel full without consuming many calories, dine on low-calorie wet foods, such as:

soup
food topped with a wet low-calorie sauce
food having fruit or vegetables sprinkled on top or mixed in

For example, if your kid insists on having a hamburger, put lots of tomatoes and lettuce on top of it, because they contain lots of water molecules, so your kid will feel full and not ask for *more* hamburgers!

Since your hunger's affected by the volume of what you eat but not what you drink, avoid drinking fruit juices (such as grape juice), since they add calories but have no effect on your hunger. Here's the rule:

Eating grapes is fine (because they're food containing lots of water).

Eating raisins is bad (because they contain the same calories as grapes but less volume, so you feel less full).

Drinking grape juice is bad (because drinking grape juice gives you the same calories as eating grapes but doesn't reduce your hunger, since juice is a drink, not a food).

Fats in your blood

To live long, study Dracula's favorite topic: blood. 40% of all American deaths are caused by blood problems: heart disease, heart attacks, and strokes. Yes, the chance is 2 out of 5 you'll be killed by a blood problem, if you're a typical American. You're more likely to be killed by a blood problem than by any other deadly category (such as cancer, disease, accidents, murders, or war). If you're a woman, your chance of dying from a blood problem is 8 times greater than dying from breast cancer.

Journalists pay less attention to "blood problems" than exciting topics such as "breast cancer," "flu," "seat belts," "terrorists," and "military operations," since "blood" discussions can get technical. Here's a lesson in blood chemistry, so you'll live longer...

Cholesterol

Most blood problems are caused by a huge molecule called **cholesterol**, containing 74 atoms (C₂₇H₄₆O).

Cholesterol is a **lipid** (fatty substance) that your body uses to create & repair cells walls and create sex hormones (estrogen and testosterone), but here's the problem:

If an artery gets blocked, so blood can't flow, you'll have a **heart attack** (if the artery goes to the heart) or an **ischemic stroke** (if the artery goes to the brain). An artery can get blocked by having too much cholesterol in your blood, since the excess cholesterol forms plaque in your artery walls. That plaque can build up, and a piece of that plaque can break off, float downstream, get stuck somewhere, and form a dam, blocking the artery.

Typical American blood contains way too much cholesterol.

The ideal blood contains under 100 milligrams of cholesterol per deciliter of blood (100 mg/dl). Any cholesterol over 100 increases your chance of heart disease.

Most doctors try to keep their patients' cholesterol under 200, since anything over 200 is super-dangerous.

In the US, the average person's cholesterol is unfortunately 220. Some Americans even have cholesterol above 300, making them prime candidates for sudden heart attacks, strokes, and death.

Triglycerides

Most fats in foods are **triglycerides** (3 fatty acids attached to a glycerol molecule).

Lipoproteins

Since cholesterol is a fatty substance (lipid), cholesterol doesn't mix with water. Therefore, cholesterol doesn't mix with blood (which is mostly water).

To let your blood transport cholesterol, your liver creates a package called a **lipoprotein**, which contains lipids (cholesterol, triglycerides, and phospholipids) attached to proteins. The lipoprotein package *does* mix with water; it *does* mix with blood.

If a lipoprotein contains *more* proteins than lipids, it's called a **high-density lipoprotein (HDL)**.

If a lipoprotein contains *less* protein than lipids, it's called a **low-density lipoprotein (LDL)**.

LDL is bad, because if it contains more cholesterol than your body needs, it deposits the excess cholesterol onto artery walls. HDL is good, because it carries excess cholesterol away from your body tissues and returns it to your liver for reprocessing or excreting.

So LDL is called **bad lipoprotein** or, in looser jargon for idiots, **bad cholesterol**. HDL is called **good lipoprotein** or, in looser jargon, **good cholesterol**.

LDL is lousy.
HDL is healthy, heavenly.

Standards

The government recommends you follow these standards:

Keep your **total cholesterol below 200**.

Keep your **LDL below 130**. If you have other risk factors for heart disease, compensate by getting your LDL down to 100.

Keep your **HDL above 40 if male, 50 if female**.
(The old standard was 35, but the new standard is higher.)

Keep your **triglycerides below 150** (when measured after fasting 12 hours).

4 goals

You have 4 goals so far:

Reduce the total amount of cholesterol in your blood.
Reduce the amount of LDL (bad lipoprotein).
Increase the amount of HDL (good lipoprotein).
Reduce the triglycerides.

Here's how to start accomplishing them...

To reduce total cholesterol, eat less cholesterol. Cholesterol is just in animal products, not plants. The foods that are highest in cholesterol are shrimp, egg yolks, and organ meats (such as liver and kidneys). Some cholesterol is also in other meat, fish, and dairy products.

Also eat less fat in general, since they are triglycerides, and since your liver turns much of the fat into cholesterol. Eating less fat is more important than eating less cholesterol, since most of your blood's cholesterol comes from the fat you eat. Eating less fat in general also reduces your LDL.

To increase your HDL, get more exercise. The more exercise you get, the higher your HDL count will get.

Kinds of fatty acids

I said that the most common food fats are triglycerides, which contain three fatty acids attached to a glycerol molecule. Those fatty acids can come in two forms: **saturated** or **unsaturated**.

Saturated=bad Saturated fatty acids already contain all the hydrogen atoms they can hold. Those fatty acids are bad, since they dramatically increase your cholesterol and increase your LDL.

They're found **in meat and fatty milk products** (such as cheese and butter, though also in the solid parts hiding in whole milk, cream, ice cream, and yogurt). They're also found in **tropical oils** (vegetable oils that come from tropical plants, specifically coconut oil and palm oil; such oils are nicknamed **jungle grease**).

At ordinary room temperature, saturated fats are **solid**, though they melt when heated. (The fat in meat & cheese melt on your stove. Tropical oils melt in the jungle.)

Unsaturated=better Unsaturated fatty acids are missing some hydrogen atoms, are **liquid** at room temperature, and are **healthier than saturated** fatty acids.

A fatty acid is called **monounsaturated** if just one pair of hydrogen atoms is missing. Monounsaturated fatty acids are found in olive oil, peanut oil, and canola oils and **resist oxidation** (prevent the LDL from sticking to your artery walls).

A fatty acid is called **polyunsaturated** if at least two pairs of hydrogen atoms are missing. One kind of polyunsaturated fatty acid, called **omega-3**, is found in fish (especially salmon); it resists oxidation, helps lower your blood's triglycerides, and also helps keep your heartbeat regular and reduce rheumatoid arthritis. **Highly polyunsaturated** fatty acids (missing several pairs of hydrogen atoms) are in soybean oil, sunflower oil, and safflower oil; they actually *lower* your LDL (though they don't resist oxidation, don't help heartbeats, and don't help arthritis).

Unfortunately, foods containing unsaturated fatty acids also contain some saturated fatty acids too.

Summary

Eating saturated fat is stupid.
Eating polyunsaturated (or highly polyunsaturated) fat is preferred.
Eating monounsaturated fat is middling.

How to reduce saturated fat

Although shrimp and egg yolks are extremely high in cholesterol, they're low in fat (since they contain mainly protein instead). Shrimp and egg yolks are therefore "not so bad," better for you than meat and fatty milk products. But stay away from liver — which is high in cholesterol and also high in toxins.

Eat chicken and turkey Although chicken and turkey are "meat" (and therefore contain saturated fatty acid), they contain less saturated fatty acid than most beef. Chicken and turkey are therefore healthier.

Here are 3 more rules about chicken and turkey:

Turkey contains less fat than chicken.
White meat (such as breast) contains less fat than dark meat (such as leg).
Inner meat contains less fat than skin.

So the healthiest common poultry is skinless turkey breast; the unhealthiest is "chicken leg with the skin on."

Be cautious about chicken that's fried (such as Kentucky Fried Chicken and Chicken McNuggets), since what it's fried and battered in can be junky.

Avoid hamburger If you insist on eating beef instead of poultry, try this: instead of eating hamburger (which is extremely high in saturated fat), eat leaner meats.

The leanest cuts of beef are called **round** (such as top round, eye of round, and round tip) and **loin** (such as top loin, sirloin, or tenderloin). **London broil** can be lean, especially if it's made from top round beef.

Instead of beef tenderloin, you can try **pork tenderloin**, whose fat content is similar. It's the leanest cut of pork.

For hot fast food at lunch, choose a **roast beef** sandwich (instead of hamburger).

Too bad all those suggestions cost more than hamburger! Those lean cuts of meat contain just slightly more fat than skinless chicken breast — and way less fat than dark chicken meat!

Taste Fat has a lot of taste. Protein has no taste. When you eat beef, the "taste" you enjoy comes from the hidden fat, not the protein.

The more fat, the more taste. The lowest-fat common meat (skinless turkey breast) is also the least tasty. Shrimp and eggs, which are high in cholesterol and protein but low in fat, are also rather tasteless — unless you fry them in butter or some other fat.

Use spices To eat healthily with taste, reduce the fat but add taste back in by using spices. The easiest spice for American kids to accept is black pepper; as you grow up, graduate to red peppers and other spices.

If you accidentally eat too much hot, spicy pepper and want to clear the spice from your mouth, drink milk, because **casein** (milk's main protein) binds to the **capsaicin** (the burning spice in peppers) and draws it away from your tongue. Milk removes spice; water does not.

Another popular "spice," to wake up tasteless food, is lemon. It's the secret ingredient in many packaged foods. If you can't afford real lemons, try bottled lemon juice or orange concentrate or vinegar.

Switch fats If you want to eat fat safely, switch to unsaturated fats (fish and liquid vegetable oils).

Among fish, nutritionists give salmon the highest praise, because it's very high in omega-3.

Switch milk Whole milk contains 3½ % fat. Although "3½" sounds small, it isn't: milk is mostly water; of the non-water part of the milk, fat plays a big role.

Use powdered milk I've gotten used to skim milk and like it. If you haven't adjusted to skim milk yet and still think that skim milk tastes too thin, thicken it by stirring in some powdered milk (which is dried skim milk). If you stir in *lots* of powdered milk, you can make the concoction taste as thick as a milkshake!

The dairy industry tried selling that concoction (which tastes better than skim milk and also contains more calcium & protein) but had to stop when Dan Rather made a poor news judgment: he ran a story complaining that the dairy industry had "altered" the milk. Dan, you ass, it was altered to make it healthier, and it was labeled as such, so why did you have to whine? Maybe you just wanted the labeling to be clearer?

Trans fat

Another kind of fat is called **trans fat**. It's a man-made unhealthy menace, created artificially when manufacturers **hydrogenate** (add hydrogen to liquid oils, to make them more solid and stable, to produce packaged food that has a longer shelf life without turning rancid). Such food is called **partially hydrogenated**, since it's never hydrogenated fully.

Trans fat is in partially hydrogenated food such as margarine, pudding, crackers, cookies, potato chips, and fast-food restaurant's deep fryers (to produce French fries and fried fish). Hydrogenating makes the fat become more saturated and undergo other changes, making the fat less healthy.

Recently, researchers have discovered that trans fat (such as margarine) is even worse for you than fully saturated fat (such as butter). Fully saturated fat does two bad things: it increases your cholesterol and LDL. Trans fat is even worse because it does those two bad things plus a third: it lowers your HDL. Because of that research, the federal government now requires all packaged food to have labels showing the trans-fat content, New York City has passed a law preventing restaurants from using trans fat after July 2008, and most restaurant chains are in the process of abolishing trans fat from their food (so they can keep outlets in New York City). Unfortunately, many restaurants are replacing trans fat with saturated fat, which is just *slightly* healthier.

Lipitor

Lipitor is a pill you can buy. It's great: it reduces cholesterol, reduces LDL, and raises HDL.

It's manufactured by **Pfizer** (a drug company). "Lipitor" is the brand name; its technical chemical name is **atorvastatin**. Other "**statin**" pills made by competitors work similarly.

Blood test If you take Lipitor (or a similar statin pill), you must get a blood test every few months, to make sure the drug isn't damaging your liver and muscles. To make sure you get that test, the government requires you to get a doctor's prescription to buy the drug.

Cut in half Lipitor is expensive. Since a 20-milligram pill costs just *slightly* more than a 10-milligram pill, you can save money by having your doctor prescribe 20-milligram pills and cut them in half. (Warning: though that trick works fine with simple pills, such as Lipitor, never use that trick on time-release pills, since cutting a time-release pill would wreck the timing. If you want to use that trick, buy a **pill cutter**, to cut the pill in half accurately and easily.)

Grapefruit juice If you take grapefruit juice at the same time as Lipitor, the Lipitor will work more strongly. How much more strongly? That depends on the particular grapefruit, the Lipitor dosage, and the timing between them. Since grapefruit stays in your digestive system for 24 hours, the interaction can be big even if you eat the grapefruit many hours before taking the Lipitor. Since the amount of interaction is unpredictable and dangerous (you don't want to overdose), doctors recommend you avoid grapefruit juice during weeks you're taking Lipitor. Lipitor is finally shipping with warning labels saying "no grapefruit juice!"

Canada Lipitor costs much less in Canada than in the US, but Lipitor's manufacturer (Pfizer) has been refusing to sell Lipitor to Canadian pharmacies that try to resell to the US.

How to measure protein

According to physics, heating a solid typically makes it melt. For example, if you heat ice, you get water; if you heat a chocolate bar, you get syrupy goo; if you heat the fat that's on meat, the fat melts.

But if you cook an egg, the egg does *not* get softer: it hardens! So does a chicken breast. That's because an egg and a chicken breast contain lots of protein. **When you heat protein, it hardens.**

That's how to tell how much protein food contains: cook the food and see if it gets harder.

Fiber

Fiber can come in two forms: **soluble** or **insoluble**.

Soluble fiber

Fiber that dissolves in water is called **soluble** fiber. It's good because reduces your blood's total cholesterol and LDL.

Here's how it accomplishes that:

When the soluble fiber you eat reaches your intestines, it binds with bile acids (which were produced by the liver) and makes you shit the bile acids out. Then the liver replenishes those bile acids by stealing cholesterol from the blood (and mainly from LDL) and converting all that cholesterol to bile.

So soluble fiber helps prevent heart disease. It also helps control blood sugar and diabetes.

Soluble fiber is in beans, chick-peas, lentils, oats, barley, brown rice, psyllium, apples, citrus fruits (especially grapefruit), berries (especially raspberries and blueberries), apricots, prunes, carrots, cabbage, potato skins, sweet potatoes, and Brussels sprouts. Though fiber's in the fruits I mentioned, it's not in their juices, so make sure you eat the whole fruits.

Insoluble fiber

Fiber that does not dissolve in water is called **insoluble** fiber. This kind of fiber is good because it helps prevent constipation and might also reduce **colorectal cancer** (cancer of the colon or rectum), though the connection to colorectal cancer hasn't been adequately proved yet.

Insoluble fiber is in wheat bran. It's also in "whole wheat," since whole wheat includes the bran. It's also in other whole grains.

Warning:

Though whole wheat looks brown, some brown wheat breads contain little or no *whole* wheat. Make sure the bread's nutrition label lists the first, main ingredient as being *whole* wheat (or wheat bran).

Feel full

Both types of fiber help make you "feel full," so you eat less food and consume fewer calories and fats. They help you lose weight.

Aspirin

When an artery wall gets damaged, your body tries to fix it. Unfortunately, the "fix" is often worse than the disease, since the "fix" consists of sending more blood platelets to the damaged wall. Those blood platelets can clump together, form a clot that blocks the artery, and create a heart attack.

Aspirin stops that process. Many doctors recommend this:

On the 1st and 15th day of the month, take an adult-size aspirin.

On the other days of the month, take a baby-size aspirin (which is ¼ the size of an adult aspirin).

Unfortunately, since aspirin prevents the body from healing itself, aspirin causes several problems:

Aspirin increases the chance that your stomach and intestines will bleed. **Enteric-coated aspirin** reduces that bleeding slightly but not enough.

Aspirin makes your stomach and intestines less effective at protecting you from bad things you ate.

Aspirin makes you more likely to have a **brain hemorrhage** (brain bleeding, a kind of stroke).

If you get cut (by nicking your finger or by shaving or by having surgery), aspirin will prevent the wound from clotting and healing quickly. In the case of surgery, you might even bleed to death. That's the fastest way to scare a surgeon: say "I just took some aspirin."

If you have the flu, aspirin will make you feel temporarily better (by lowering your temperature) but also prevent your body from fighting the flu.

Because of those problems, taking aspirin doesn't necessarily help you live longer: it just lets you die differently. As one doctor said, "It's weighting game."

Get thin

The main thing that average American can do to improve health is: get thin!

How fat are you?

The government recommends your waist be no more than 35 inches if female, 40 inches if male. (If you're very short, for example because you're very young, your waist should be a lot smaller than that.)

When measuring your waist, don't cheat! Measure straight around; don't dip to avoid the bulge.

Your waist size is more important than your weight, because fat in your belly is more destructive than fat in your legs. Fat in your legs tends to stay there and not bother the rest of your body, but fat in your belly area is more active, closer to your organs (especially your liver), and enters your bloodstream more easily.

Why does the average woman live longer than the average man? Probably because the average woman is thinner (and engages in fewer dangerous activities, such as the military and other "dare you" games & occupations).

Exercise

According to Einstein's $E=MC^2$, even an atomic-bomb-size blast consumes just a small amount of matter. So even the most vigorous exercise doesn't directly reduce weight.

To reduce weight, your body must excrete more matter than it consumes; so to lose weight, you must eat & drink less than you shit, piss, and sweat.

How exercise helps Although exercise doesn't make you lose weight directly, it makes you lose weight indirectly — because exercise makes you sweat, piss, and shit more without making you want to eat and drink much more.

Although exercise won't change your weight much, it will make your weight be better proportioned: you'll have a bigger percentage of muscle and a smaller percentage of fat. Your arms and legs will bulge with muscles and your belly will shrink. Moreover, exercise will raise your HDL (which is good). Better yet, exercise will burn off any excess sugar in your blood. By getting rid of that extra sugar, exercise helps you avoid or control diabetes.

Exercising removes water from your body (via sweat and piss), but “removing water” is not your goal: your goal is to remove belly fat. Sip a little water while exercising — and before and after — to avoid dehydrating, because a dehydrated body has trouble controlling its own temperature and accidentally wrecks itself.

Here are other ways that exercise helps you lose weight:

While you exercise you're not eating. Better to exercise than to sit on your couch watching TV and munching potato chips.

While you exercise, you tend to feel good about yourself; you're not depressed. Depressed people want to eat junk food.

Kinds of exercise Try walking (because it's easy, pleasant, and exercises your bottom half), push-ups (because they exercise your top half), and swimming (because it exercises your whole body and is fun).

You don't need to do a marathon. Three short walks per day help your health just as much as one long walk. Walking a mile helps your health nearly as much as running a mile, though running has the advantage of taking less time, so you can get on with the rest of your life. “A mile per day” is the minimum amount necessary to make a noticeable difference in your health; “a mile and a half” is even better.

Any kind of exercise is better than nothing. Some people find “gardening” a pleasant form of exercise. The dare-to-be-different crowd gets exercise by taking the stairs instead of “escalators and elevators” and by parking in the farthest parking spot instead of the closest — though “walking through parking lots” isn't the most scenic way to get exercise.

Modern society discourages exercise The percentage of Americans who are overweight has been increasing, because modern American society discourages exercise.

In the old days, kids played sports in the neighborhood's yards, streets, and parks. Now kids play videogames instead, which exercise just the fingers.

In the old days, people visited the homes of friends. Now people communicate with friends by phone and e-mail instead — or watch pseudo-friends (such as Oprah) on TV.

In the old days, people walked from room to room in office buildings. Now people stay put and just e-mail or instant-message each other.

In the old days, moms prepared their meals from scratch by scurrying around the kitchen, finding ingredients to chop, combine, stir, cook, and stir again. Now people just shove a prepackaged meal into the microwave oven instead.

Where do you live? People who work on farms and ranches get *lots* of exercise.

People who live in big cities get *moderate* exercise. They walk several blocks to get to stores, bus stops, and occasionally subway stations.

But people who live in suburbs typically get *hardly any* exercise at all: they just walk to their cars, which are parked next to their houses and stores. When you're in a car, you have the illusion of being active (“Whee! Look how fast I'm going!”), but you're not moving your legs: you're sitting still, like a vegetable, and soon you'll look like one. If you try to “get healthy” by avoiding the car and walking instead, you discover that walking in the suburbs is unpleasant, for two reasons:

the stores are too far apart, and too far from your house, to reach reasonably most suburban towns have stopped creating sidewalks (since “hardly anybody walks on them anymore”), so you must walk in the street (and hope a car doesn't hit you) or walk on your neighbor's lawn (and hope your neighbor doesn't hit you)

That's why the average suburban resident is fatter than the average city resident.

Low-income people tend to buy cheap junk food (which is fattening), because fresh vegetables cost more (and take longer to prepare) and because low-income people are often inadequately educated about nutrition. The fattest Americans are the ones who live near these low-income cities: New Orleans and Detroit. The thinnest Americans are the ones who live near Denver (because Denverites like to enjoy their beautiful outdoor scenery by jumping into it: they like to ski, climb mountains, canoe, and ride bicycles).

Calories

To lose weight safely, consume fewer calories. Each gram of fat you eat provides 9 calories, whereas each gram of protein or carbohydrate provides just 4 calories; so the main way to consume fewer calories is to consume less fat.

Make sure you consume fewer saturated fats. But even the best fats, the “unsaturated fats,” still provide 9 calories per gram, so eat fewer unsaturated fats too!

Most nutritionists make these recommendations:

Get most of your calories from carbohydrates.

Get about 12% of your calories from protein.

Get less than 10% of your calories from saturated fat.

Get less than 30% of your calories from fat. (Make most of that fat be unsaturated. Eat little or no trans fat. Get less than 10% of your calories from saturated fat.)

Portion size

Modern society encourages you to overeat. If you buy a bigger bag of food — or Supersize your meal — or visit an all-you-can-eat buffet — you pay less per pound. Especially if your income is low, you'll be tempted to make use of those bargains, pig out, and become a blimp.

Food has gotten bigger. Today's hamburgers, pizzas, bagels, muffins, and soft drinks are many times bigger than the original versions that were invented years ago.

When you read a nutrition label, and it brags about how a “serving” contains not so many calories (and not so much fat or salt), notice how many “servings” are in the package. The government's definition of a “serving” seems to be “how much a little old lady would eat if she weren't hungry and didn't like the food”: it's typically just 3 or 4 ounces for food (6 or 8 ounces for a drink).

For example, the typical muffin is big enough to contain 2 “servings”; so if you eat the whole muffin, you’ll ingest twice as many calories, twice as much fat, and twice as much salt as the label says a “serving” contains. The typical small can of ready-to-cook food contains 2 servings; the typical medium-size can of ready-to-cook food contains 3½ servings; the typical small box of frozen food contains 2 servings.

So when you’re looking at a nutrition label, be sure to notice how many “servings” it says are in the entire product: multiply all the numbers by that factor, if you’re planning to eat the whole thing!

Fat-free

Many foods are advertised as being “fat-free,” but most of them still contain lots of sugar. Since plain sugar provides calories without providing good nutrients, plain sugar is called **empty calories** and is bad for you. Avoid it. These other simple sugars are also empty calories and should be avoided: **corn syrup** (which comes from corn), **fructose** (which comes from fruit), and **honey**.

Don’t binge

To lose weight, the main trick is: don’t binge. Don’t eat large portions of anything. Here’s why:

Your body needs just tiny quantities of most vitamins and minerals. Eating bigger quantities of them doesn’t help. In fact, some vitamins and minerals become *toxic* if you take an overdose.

Your body can tolerate small quantities of toxins, but bigger quantities are dangerous.

No single food has all the kinds of vitamins and minerals you need, so eat a variety of foods, a little of each.

Nutritionists have discovered many hundreds of vitamins, minerals, and other helpful substances in plants. Though a vitamin pill can be a useful supplement, no single pill provides the incredibly wide variety of helpful chemicals that a well-balanced diet provides.

Metabolic syndrome

Doctors say you have the **metabolic syndrome** (which is also called the **inactivity syndrome**, the **insulin-resistance syndrome**, and **syndrome X**) if you have at least 3 of these 5 warning signs of inactivity:

your waist is too big (over 35 inches for a woman, 40 inches for a man)
your HDL is too low (under 50 mg/dL for a woman, 40 for a man)
your blood contains too much sugar (fasting glucose level over 100 mg/dL)
your blood contains too many triglycerides (over 150 mg/dL)
your blood pressure is too high (over 130/85 millimeters)

(If you have *exactly* those numbers, you’re borderline, and doctors argue about whether you “have the syndrome” yet.)

The best way to avoid or reduce the metabolic syndrome is to get more exercise. Improving your diet can also help. (Your genetics play a role too but can’t be fixed by scientists yet.)

Diabetes

If you eat a huge meal, your pancreas will have trouble producing enough insulin to digest all those sugars and starches at once. Instead, eat several smaller meals (or small healthy snacks), spaced throughout the day.

If you have **diabetes** (a pancreas unable to produce enough useful insulin), eating smaller meals is necessary. If you don’t have diabetes yet, eating smaller meals is still desirable — because if you overwork your pancreas often, it will gradually get tired, quit working some year, and you’ll have diabetes then and forevermore.

Once you have diabetes, you can control it (by making sure you always eat small meals) but never cure it.

Nutritionists predict that 1/3 of all Americans will get diabetes before death. The best way to prevent diabetes is to eat small meals, get exercise, and lose weight.

When you eat more sugars and starch than your pancreas can handle, the excess stays in your blood, makes your blood vessels sticky, and wrecks the blood vessels in your eyes (leading to blindness), feet (leading to numbness, unnoticed cuts, infection, and eventual amputation), and kidneys (leading to kidney failure so you spend the rest of your life on a dialysis machine).

Afraid to look thin?

Unfortunately, Americans in this century are fatter than Americans were in the 1900’s or 1800’s or 1700’s. That’s because Americans get less exercise (they drive cars instead of walk, play videogames instead of real sports), eat more junk food (McDonald’s instead of Mom’s cooking), and many other reasons that are obvious. But here’s a reason that’s not so obvious: some people (especially inner-city blacks) are afraid to look thin, because they’re afraid that if they look thin, they’ll look like they have AIDS, and their friends will fear them and they won’t get dates.

Such people are misinformed and need to be reminded that it’s better to be a toothpick than a blimp.

Semi-vegetarian

Nutritionists recommend that you be semi-vegetarian: make ¾ of your dinner plate be filled with plants (vegetables, fruit, and high-fiber grains), and just ¼ of your plate come from animals (fish, meat, and dairy). That will give you a wide variety of nutrients and less fat.

Thinning diets

Many people have invented fad diets that claim crazy eating can make you thin. Each fad diet has a “catch”:

Some of these diets let you eat whatever you wish but in small quantities. Other diets let you eat as much as you wish but only of certain foods.

Most fad diets make you lose weight by being so unappetizing that you want to eat less.

Some diets let you lose 5 or 10 pounds during the first two weeks, but that’s just from losing water, not fat. The next two weeks are harder.

Most diets also tell you to get more exercise. If you claim that the diet “didn’t work,” the diet vendors reply, “You can’t sue us, since you didn’t follow our exercise plan.”

Nutritionists agree that the best way to get thin is to eat normally but with less saturated fat, smaller portions, and more variety.

The trick is to feel full while consuming fewer calories. Since calories come from “fat, protein, and carbohydrates,” eat food containing mainly water & fiber instead.

Some fad diets, such as the **Atkins Diet**, made the mistake of telling you to avoid all carbohydrates and eat fats instead. Here’s the truth:

The carbohydrates in vegetables and high-fiber grains are fine for a healthy diet; just avoid refined grains (such as white bread, white pasta, and white rice).

Unsaturated fats are okay in moderation, but avoid saturated fats.

The Atkins diet was later modified to say that certain carbohydrates are okay (and don’t count in “net carbs”), but Atkins advice to eat lots of fat is totally wrong. Nutritionists agree that of all the fad diets, the **Atkins Diet** is the unhealthiest and the **South Beach Diet** is the healthiest, but even the South Beach Diet is slightly off-kilter.

Just get exercise, eat a *variety* of food (especially vegetables), and avoid binging (especially on fats, cakes, and sweets). Then you’ll be fine!

Soup Since soup contains mainly water, it makes you feel full without adding many calories. (Just make sure it's not a "cream" soup, since cream is high in calories.)

Nutritionists have discovered a bizarre fact about soup: water in soup makes you feel fuller than water in a glass, even though it's the same water. If you're served chicken and a glass of water, you'll feel less full than if the water was dumped on the chicken to become soup. When the water is dumped on the chicken to make soup, your eye says "that's a lot of soup!" and you feel full just looking at it!

Just beware of salt: many canned soups contain too much salt.

Fruit Fresh fruit is like soup: it contains mainly water and makes you feel full without adding many calories.

If you eat 30 raisins (dried grapes) while drinking water, you'll still feel hungry; but if you eat 30 fresh grapes instead, you'll feel full, even though the ingredients are the same.

Fruit also contains fiber and lots of nutrients.

Bran cereal For breakfast, try eating bran cereal. Since it's high in fiber, it makes you feel full without adding many calories. Nutritionists have discovered that people who eat a high-fiber breakfast still feel full, many hours later, whereas people who eat a low-fiber breakfast feel hungry again 2 hours later.

Though bran cereal is good for you, bran muffins are bad, since bran muffins usually include lots of fats added to the bran.

Potato Nutritionists have discovered that the best vegetable for making you "feel full without many calories" is potato.

Just make sure you include the skin (to get its nutrition), cut out any tubers sprouting out (because they're poisonous), and avoid fatty toppings (such as butter or sour cream). If possible, bake the potato (instead of frying it) or make a potato soup.

Watermelon Another obvious candidate for "full with minimal calories" is watermelon. It contains lots of water and — like all fruits — some fiber.

Black Irish diet If you want to try a fad diet, try mine: it consists of eating mainly potatoes and watermelons. If you wish, try that diet for a week (supplemented by vitamin pills and a few other vegetables to keep you balanced). I call it the **Black Irish diet**, because it combines the food loved by stereotypical blacks (watermelon) with the food loved by stereotypical Irishmen (potatoes). Here's why the diet is good:

Of all vegetables, potatoes are the best at making you feel full on few calories.

Potatoes make you feel you've eaten heartily.
Watermelon makes you feel your eating was fun.

Potatoes and watermelon are both healthy foods.
Potatoes and watermelon are both cheap. This is the cheapest diet you can get!

Confession

So after all that preaching, am I a good example? Am I thin?
Not yet. I guess I'd better start taking my own advice!

Micronutrients

Nutrients are what you must eat or drink to survive.

To be healthy, you need big quantities of five kinds of nutrients: water, carbohydrate, protein, fat, and fiber. (Most Americans eat too much fat, not enough carbohydrate & fiber.) The quantities are measured in "grams" per serving.

You also need smaller quantities of other nutrients, called **micronutrients**, measured in "milligrams" or "micrograms" per serving. The most important micronutrients fall into two categories: **vitamins** (whose chemical formulas include carbon) and **minerals** (whose chemical formulas do not include carbon).

Vitamins

You need 13 vitamins:

Vitamin	Where to get a lot of it
vitamin A	milk, egg yolks, beef&chicken livers
vitamin D	sunlight, salmon, fortified milk, enriched flour&cereal&bread
vitamin E	corn&soybean&canola&sunflower oil, kale, sweet potatoes
vitamin K	spinach, lettuce, watercress, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, soybean oil
vitamin C (ascorbic acid)	peppers, currants, broccoli, Brussels sprouts, oranges, papaya, cranberries
vitamin B ₁ (thiamine)	pork loin, whole grains, enriched flour&rice, dried beans, nuts, seeds
vitamin B ₂ (riboflavin)	beef liver, milk, eggs, enriched flour&cereal
vitamin B ₃ (niacin)	chicken&turkey breast, tuna, swordfish, enriched flour&rice, peas, corn tortillas
vitamin B ₅ (pantothenic acid)	liver, fish, chicken&turkey, whole grains, yogurt, beans, lentils, peas
vitamin B ₆ (pyridoxine)	tuna, potatoes, bananas, chick-peas, prunes, chicken breasts, avocados
vitamin B ₉ (folate)	chicken livers, asparagus, beans, chick-peas, lentils, oranges, fortified cereal
vitamin B ₁₂ (cobalamin)	clams, chicken livers, tuna, sardines, salmon, lamb, milk
vitamin B _H (biotin)	corn, soybeans, egg yolks, liver, cauliflower, peanuts, mushrooms, yeast

Vitamins A, D, E, and K are **fat-soluble**: your body stores them for a long time in your fat tissue and in your liver.

Vitamin C and the B vitamins are **water-soluble**. Since your body can't store them long (except for B₁₂), you must eat them frequently. When cooking them, don't boil them long, since they'll escape from the food into boiling water instead of helping your body. Instead of boiling them, try steaming them or using your microwave.

Here are peculiarities:

Biotin was called vitamin H until researchers later discovered biotin's a kind of B vitamin. Though beef&chicken livers contain many vitamins, they also contain cholesterol and many toxins. Although swordfish contains vitamin B ₃ , it also contains a toxin (mercury). If you eat a well-balanced diet , you'll get enough of all those vitamins except perhaps C & E. Some nutritionists recommend taking pills for vitamins C & E, but others disagree. Since vitamin C leaves the body in 12 hours, eating 2 small doses per day is better than 1 big dose. Vitamin C does not prevent colds, but 1000 mg per day can make existing colds end 1 day faster and be 20% milder. Vitamin B₉ is called folate or folacin or folic acid . It prevents birth defects. If you're pregnant (or might be in 2 months), make <i>sure</i> you get enough vitamin B ₉ (by eating good foods or taking a pill). The US government requires the food industry to add vitamin B ₉ to all white flour (and therefore all white bread and white pasta); that's one of the few advantages of white bread over whole wheat: whole-wheat bread does <i>not</i> contain folate. Vitamin B₃ is called niacin or nicotinic acid . Milk and eggs contain little B ₃ but lots of tryptophan , which turns into B ₃ when digested. The vitamin B ₃ in corn is indigestible unless the corn is mixed with lime, as in a corn tortilla.

Minerals

In your body, the 7 main minerals (the **macrominerals**) are sodium, chlorine, sulfur, calcium, potassium, phosphorus, and magnesium. The average American eats too much sodium (which is in salt and preservatives) and an okay amount of chlorine & sulfur but should eat more of the other 4:

Mineral	Where to get a lot of it
calcium	milk, yogurt, cheese, canned sardines&salmon, fortified orange juice, fortified oatmeal
potassium	avocados, bananas, cantaloupes, oranges, tomatoes, potato skins, beans, yogurt, tuna
phosphorus	meat, chicken, turkey, seafood, milk, seeds
magnesium	whole grains, nuts, seeds, tofu, chocolate, spinach, beans, avocados, halibut

The typical multivitamin/mineral pill does *not* contain a full day's supply of those macrominerals. Be especially careful about calcium:

The average American doesn't eat enough calcium. The average American man should eat more calcium; the average American woman should eat *much* more calcium. Calcium builds strong bones and reduces a woman's PMS difficulties. Elderly people who have weak bones (because of many years of calcium deficiency) break their bones when they fall, and the resulting operations and disabilities are life-threatening. Eat more calcium foods, or buy a calcium pill, or buy Tums (which contains lots of calcium, though the antacids in Tums reduce the calcium's effectiveness). Vitamins D and B₃ help the body digest calcium, so make sure you eat those vitamins also.

Your body also needs smaller quantities of 15 other minerals (called **trace minerals**). The most important trace minerals are boron, chromium, copper, iodine, iron, manganese, molybdenum, selenium, and zinc.

Your body also contains about 40 other minerals that are not necessary.

Sodium's danger

Sodium is found mainly in salt. (The technical chemical name for "table salt" is **sodium chloride**, whose chemical symbol is NaCl.) Sodium is also found in preservatives (such as **sodium nitrite** and **sodium nitrate**).

Sodium raises the blood pressure in many people — though some super-healthy people who don't have blood problems yet are unaffected by sodium. There's no simple test for telling who's sodium-sensitive, so the general advice is for most people to reduce sodium. Reducing sodium is not as important as reducing fat but still helps.

Here's how to reduce sodium....

Instead of putting salt onto your food, try other spices instead (such as black pepper or crushed red pepper or fresh red peppers) or lemon juice (which is the secret healthy ingredient that wakes up any boring food).

Beware of prepackaged frozen dinners: most are high in salt, to make the dinners have a longer shelf life. Beware of canned soups and canned chili: they're high in salt also. Canned vegetables are high in salt unless you manage to get no-salt-added versions. Instead of canned beans (which are always high in salt), buy dried beans: they cost less and have no salt added but require you to rinse then soak then rinse again.

Eat less meat. Most meat is high in sodium, especially if the meat is sold as "hot dogs" or "prepackaged sliced meat," even if labeled "turkey."

Beware of tomato sauce and its variants (such as ketchup, spaghetti sauce, tomato juice, and V-8 vegetable juice): they're extremely high in salt (even though they don't taste salty), unless you buy no-salt-added versions.

Potassium chloride "Low-sodium" versions of some products (such as V-8) make that claim because they replace part of the sodium chloride (table salt) with **potassium chloride**, which is also a white "salt" but contains no sodium. Unfortunately, potassium chloride doesn't taste good (it tastes less "salty" and is bitter).

Eating potassium chloride is usually healthy, since the potassium in it is a useful mineral that helps your heart beat. But be careful: overdosing on potassium chloride will *stop* your heart. To kill prisoners on death row, the executioner injects a high dose of potassium chloride (after injecting other chemicals to make the killings seem less gruesome).

Antioxidants

When your body uses oxygen, some of the oxygen turns into an unstable, dangerous form called a **free radical**. Free radicals occur faster if there's a lot of pollution (or cigarette smoke, alcohol, X-rays, sunlight's ultraviolet rays, or heat). Free radicals interfere with cell activities, so the cells get damaged, age faster, and have a harder time warding off cancer and heart disease.

To get rid of that dangerous free-radical oxygen, your body uses **antioxidants**. Your body makes its own antioxidants, but you can help your body by eating extra antioxidants. The most popular ones to eat are vitamin C, vitamin E, selenium (a mineral), and **carotenoids** (yellow, orange, or red pigments in fruits and vegetables).

Although carotenoids are yellow, orange, or red pigments, they can hide in vegetables that are darker (purple or dark green): those darker colors hide the carotenoid molecules from your eyes. Vegetables that are light green contain hardly any carotenoids.

Here are the most popular carotenoids:

Carotenoid	Where to get a lot of it
alpha carotene	carrots, pumpkins, yellow peppers
beta carotene	carrots, sweet potatoes, squash, spinach, kale, cantaloupes, apricots, mangoes
beta cryptoxanthin	tangerines, oranges, peaches, papayas, mangoes
lycopene	tomatoes, watermelons, pink grapefruits, guava
lutein	kale, red peppers, spinach, endive, broccoli, romaine lettuce

Your body turns some carotenoids into vitamin A, but other carotenoids stay in their original state and provide extra benefits.

Although most fruits & vegetables are most nutritious when eaten raw, carrots & tomatoes are different: **carrots & tomatoes are more nutritious if cooked** than if eaten raw, because you need cooking to break their tough cells walls (so you can digest the carrot's beta carotene and the tomato's lycopene). Unfortunately, cooked tomato sauce typically contain lots of salt (unless you order the no-salt version).

Since pizza includes cooked tomato sauce, it's a good source of lycopene. The pizza industry likes to brag about that. Unfortunately, pizza can be high in salt (from the sauce), calories (from the breading), and saturated fat (from the cheese and any meat toppings). Go ahead, eat some pizza, but don't overdo it!

Other micronutrients

Researchers keep discovering other micronutrients in fruits and vegetables. To get all their benefits, eat a wide variety of fruits and vegetables.

The newest exciting research concerns grapes. The skin of a grape contains **resveratrol** (a chemical that helps the grape fight against pests). If you eat that chemical, it will help you fight cancer, heart disease, and oxidation. Grapes grown in the north produce more of that chemical than grapes grown in the south, since northern grapes need it to fight against their tough environment. The “food” that contains the most resveratrol is “red wine made from northern grapes,” since red wine’s manufacturing process uses skins more than white wine’s process, and since the alcoholic fermenting helps bring out the resveratrol. The French love of red wine is the chemical reason why French people have fewer heart attacks than Americans, even though French foods come in heavy sauces. (But I suspect that the main reasons why French people have fewer heart attacks are: the French binge less, eat more vegetables, eat less junk food, get more exercise, and have less stress.) Some resveratrol is also in peanuts.

Toxins

Avoid **cigarettes**, **illegal drugs** (such as marijuana, heroin, cocaine, and ecstasy), **excessive alcohol**, and **tanning**. They’re all very toxic: they wreck your body in many ways.

Alcohol

Drinking a little alcohol can be good in two ways: it raises HDL and also **tissue-type plasminogen activator (T-PA)**, which helps break up blood clots). But drinking alcohol can also harm your brain, liver, and other organs and be addictive, so doctors give these warnings:

Don’t drink alcohol if you’re pregnant or going to drive or going to need unimpaired judgment & thought.

Don’t have more than 1 drink per day if you’re a woman, 2 drinks if a man. (A “drink” means 12 ounces of beer, 5 oz. of wine, or 1½ oz. of 80-proof spirits.) If you’re very young or very small, drink even less — or don’t drink at all.

Don’t start drinking alcohol if you’ve never drunk before, since you might have trouble learning how to control your drinking.

Liver

If an animal eats toxins, the animal’s liver tries to filter those toxins out of the blood. Many of those toxins stay in the liver. Don’t eat the liver!

Mercury

Mercury’s a toxin that impairs your brain and nervous system: it makes you stupid and nervous. (During the 1800’s, people who made hats used mercury, became crazy, were called “mad hatters,” and formed the basis for Alice in Wonderland’s Mad Hatter Tea Party.)

Many industrial factories spit out mercury, which eventually winds up in water and infects aquatic plants. When small fish eat those plants, the small fish’s flesh gets infected. When bigger fish eat those small fish, the big fish’s flesh gets even more infected, and contains even more mercury per pound of flesh, because the mercury stay in the body while other substances are excreted. The bigger the fish, the more mercury per pound.

Big fish Don’t eat big fish (such as shark, swordfish, and mackerel): their flesh is all high in mercury. The US government especially warns pregnant women not to eat big fish.

Tuna Since tuna can grow *nearly* as big as those other fish, nutritionists get nervous about tuna also. When buying canned tuna, you can choose packaging (“packed in water” contains less fat than “packed in oil”) and what kind of fish was killed:

Solid white tuna is a slab of flesh cut from **albacore** (big tuna). It contains a lot of mercury.

Chunk light tuna is combined from small tuna. It looks darker than solid white. It costs half as much as solid white. It contains a third as much mercury per pound as solid white.

Pesticides

On farms, most fruits are sprayed with pesticides. Rinse the fruit to remove most of the pesticides. Gentle scrubbing helps further. You don’t have to peel the fruit. In fact, the best fruit nutrients are in the peel!

But here are two exceptions:

You must peel fruit when you visit third-world countries where farmers & vendors use unsanitary handling.

If you want to make your own orange marmalade from orange peel, don’t use ordinary oranges: the pesticides on orange peel are too strong to rinse or rub off. You must use unsprayed oranges instead.

Nitrite

Sodium nitrite (NaNO₂) and **sodium nitrate (NaNO₃)** are preservatives that are added to meat (especially hot dogs) and fish to improve color (make pork look pink instead of white) and prevent spoilage. They’re preservatives.

Sodium nitrite might cause cancer. But Consumer Reports concluded the amount of sodium nitrite added to processed meats is too little to worry about, since it accounts for just 5% of the sodium nitrite in an American’s body: the remaining 95% comes as a byproduct of eating healthy natural foods such as broccoli.

On the other hand, sodium nitrite and sodium nitrate can raise your blood pressure, since they both contain sodium.

Salt & sugar

Salt and sugar are preservatives. Dumping them into food prevents the food from getting moldy soon, because molds and bacteria can’t eat so much salt & sugar. Neither can you! Salt & sugar kill not just bacteria but also you! Eat less salt and sugar and you’ll live longer.

Burning

Burnt food causes cancer. For example, barbecued meat (with grilled char marks) causes cancer. So do smoked meat, toasted bread, and toasted cereal. One of the many reasons why cigarettes cause cancer is that they’re burnt.

To prevent barbecued food from causing so much cancer, barbecue less (by microwaving before you barbecue) and push the coals and fat to the sides (to prevent the fat from dripping onto the coals and then shoot hissing flames and smoke back up to the meat).

Refrigeration

Keep most foods refrigerated or frozen. In a typical American refrigerator (which has the freezer on top), the warmest spots are at the far bottom and in the door, so don’t store fish and meat there: the warmer spots are just for fruits, vegetables, and other items that can bear to be closer to room temperature. (Exception: health departments require restaurants to store raw meat below other foods, to make sure the raw meat’s juice doesn’t drip onto other foods.)

If food gets warm, bacteria and mold start growing there. You can’t solve that problem by just cooking the food afterwards: though cooking kills bacteria and mold, it doesn’t take away the

toxins that the bacteria and mold already squirted into the food. You'll still get sick.

When cutting out mold, cut a full inch around the visible mold, since the surrounding area has been infected even if your eyes don't see the mold there yet.

Strawberries spoil fast, so eat them soon after you buy them.

Bananas spoil even faster and are the hardest fruit to handle. In exactly one week, bananas turn from green to yellow to brown. The trick is to make the bananas ripen to yellow fast (by putting them in a paper bag), then eat them. Once you refrigerate bananas, they won't properly ripen further (though they'll get moldy), so don't refrigerate bananas until they've turned yellow. If you freeze bananas (to form a frozen treat), their skins will continue to brown but their insides will stay unchanged; so remove the skins before freezing, to prevent the skins from becoming disgusting to remove.

Fish is delicate: the bacteria in fish (and shellfish) can survive at low temperatures. So don't keep fish in the refrigerator or freezer long: eat the fish soon. When serving fish, serve it hot, as soon as it finishes cooking: don't let it sit. (If you let fish sit, you'll raise its bacteria count and also wreck the taste.)

Make sure all fish and shellfish is cooked. Don't eat raw shellfish (such as "clams on the half shell"): it's too dangerous and barely legal.

Best foods

Taking all those factors into account, nutritionists say the 2 best foods are **broccoli** and **kale**, because they contain many good nutrients (and few calories, fats, and toxins).

Here's a list of the 20 best foods, grouped by category:

Category	Best foods
green vegetables	broccoli, spinach, kale
orange vegetables	carrots, pumpkins, sweet potatoes
red vegetable	red bell peppers
dried vegetables for soup	lentils, dried beans
fruit	oranges, cantaloupes, strawberries, mangos
meat	skinless chicken breasts, skinless turkey breasts
fish	salmon
dairy	skim milk
grain	oatmeal, bran cereal, whole-grain bread

In that chart, when a category contains more than 1 entry, I list first the entry that's the easiest to buy in the supermarket.

You probably eat enough meat already. Concentrate on the vegetables.

Nutrition newsletters

To learn more about nutrition and keep up to date, subscribe to nutrition newsletters. These 3 are the best (because they're accurate, detailed, well balanced, easy to read, and relevant):

University of California Berkeley Wellness Letter

1 year (12 issues): \$28 officially, \$24 for first year
386-447-6328 or BerkeleyWellness.com

Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter

1 year (12 issues): \$28 officially, \$16 for first year
800-274-7581, 386-447-6336, or nutritionletter.tufts.edu

Nutrition Action Healthletter

1 year (10 issues): \$24 officially, \$10 for first year
202-332-9110 or CspiNet.org/nah

Disgusting foods

Here are disgusting foods for special occasions.

Bachelor cooking

Here's the main trick of bachelor cooking: when you don't know how to cook, just heat what-the-hell-ever-it-is and dump lemon on it. Lemon wakes up even the blandest food. Food companies do it all the time: for example, it's the hidden unadvertised ingredient in most "juice blends."

Use either a fresh lemon or bottled lemon juice (which is cheaper and lasts longer but tastes worse).

If you use a fresh lemon, squeeze it *before* you cut it. You'll extract more juice that way. Here's how to squeeze the not-yet-cut lemon: put it on the kitchen counter, press your palm down on it, and roll it back and forth.

Advanced techniques Here's the trick to "advanced" bachelor cooking.

Into a pot, throw whatever you want to eat. Meat, fish, or vegetables — fresh, canned, or frozen — it doesn't matter!

Cover with hot water, fresh from the tap. Drain the water. Cover with hot water again. Drain the water again. Now the food is slightly warmer.

Add some hot water again, but this time just enough to prevent the food from sticking to the bottom of the pot.

Put the pot on the stove. Cover it. Heat it. Stir occasionally to avoid sticking. After heating a few minutes, move the cover slightly and leave it ajar, so any excess steam can escape.

Exceptions For white rice, do *not* drain any water you put on it. Draining the water would remove the vitamins that white rice comes coated in.

For pasta (such as spaghetti and noodles), boil the water *before* you insert the pasta.

Emergency procedures If the resulting mess is **too wet**, make it drier by dumping **instant oatmeal** on it.

The oatmeal flakes soak up water quickly and turn the whole dish into a kind of granola. Add the oatmeal during the last minute of your cooking, since oatmeal cooks quickly and has better texture if not overcooked. If you don't have any oatmeal, use **rice** instead, which unfortunately takes longer to cook.

If the resulting mess is **too bland**, dump **lemon juice** on it.

If you can't afford lemon juice, use **orange juice** (which is cheaper but less intense). You can also dump **pepper** on it: dump black pepper if your stomach is weak; dump crushed red pepper or chili pepper if your stomach is stronger.

If the color is **too boring**, dump canned red **beets** (and their juice) on it.

Beet juice is *intensely* red: it's the strongest cheap natural dye you can buy. If you add too much beet juice and the whole thing becomes too watery, add more oatmeal.

Praise your mistakes

If you make a mistake in the kitchen, pretend you made it on purpose.

If you burn the food, so it's started to turn black, brag that it's "**char grilled**." If it's very black, call it "**blackened**," as the Cajuns do. If the vegetables at the bottom of a pot are just starting to burn, so they're turning brown and sticking to the bottom, call them "**caramelized**," as fancy restaurants do.

Mexicans try to brag about their “refried” beans, but you can surpass Mexican English: take your leftovers, heat them again, and call them “**doubly delicious.**” If you need to heat them a third time, don’t apologize, just brag that the food is “**triple fired.**” But if you try that too often while cooking in a restaurant, you might discover that you’re “triple fired” too!

Icy pleasures

On a hot day you want to put something icy into your mouth. Unfortunately, ice cream contains cream, which in turn contains fat, which increases your weight and cholesterol. Ice milk contains less cream but more sugar, so eating it still wrecks your diet.

Instead, eat frozen fruit:

In your supermarket, you can find frozen blueberries and frozen strawberries, without added sugar or syrup. If your supermarket is advanced, its freezer even includes cantaloupe, honeydew, peaches, grapes, and cherries — all frozen without sugar or syrup.

Make sure to buy the fruit pre-frozen. If you try to freeze fresh fruit yourself by using just an ordinary freezer, the fruit will freeze too slowly and accumulate large icy crystals that mar the texture. (The only fruit you can freeze yourself is bananas.)

For a wonderful zero-calorie summer treat, suck ice cubes.

Diner slang

In diner restaurants, waitresses slinging food use slang to talk to cooks:

Slang	Meaning
fry 2, let the sun shine wreck 'em	fry 2 eggs, unbroken yolks scramble the eggs
burn the British stack of Vermont life preserver	toast an English muffin pancake stack with syrup doughnut
hounds on an island paint a bow-wow red	hot dogs on baked beans hot dog with ketchup
take it thru the garden pin a rose on it	put lettuce on the burger put onion slice on the burger
frog sticks	French fries
one from the Alps	Swiss cheese sandwich
Bossy in a bowl	beef stew in a bowl
shit on a shingle	chipped beef on toast
let it walk	it's for takeout
cow paste	butter
wax	American cheese
draw one in the dark	draw a cup of black coffee
a blonde	cup of coffee with cream
a blonde with sand	coffee with cream & sugar
hug one	squeeze an orange for juice
an M.D.	Dr. Pepper
nervous pudding	Jello
houseboat	banana split
throw it in the mud	add chocolate syrup

For more examples, look at page 373 of *Uncle John's 4-Ply Bathroom Reader*, republished by Barnes & Noble Books.

Sleep

Researchers have discovered surprising facts about how adults sleep.

How much sleep?

You should sleep about 7½ hours per night. Anywhere from 7 to 8 hours is good. (Sleeping less than 7 hours is okay just if you compensate by taking a nap.)

If you sleep fewer than 6 hours, you'll feel noticeably tired. Being tired hurts you in 5 ways:

When you're tired, **your body's immune system is impaired.** You have less resistance to diseases. You're more likely to get viruses and other infections.

When you're tired, you have **poor motor skills.** If you're trying to type on a keyboard — or play a piano — your speed and accuracy will improve after you've slept.

When you're tired, you **can't pay attention consistently.** If you try to take a timed reaction test while you're tired, you'll react fast sometimes but at other moments you'll forget to react at all and instead stare blankly.

When you're tired, you can still remember facts but have **trouble making judgments.** For example, you'll have trouble driving a car, dealing with personal relationships, and writing essays. If you're cramming for a test, be careful: pulling an “all-nighter” will help you cram extra facts into your brain but hurt your ability to write essays. If you're debating how to react to a personal situation (such as a job offer), sleep on it: your judgment will be better in the morning, after you've rested. If you're in a hospital, pray that your doctor isn't an intern who was up all night, lacks sleep, and therefore makes wrong judgments.

When you're tired, your body has **difficulty using its own insulin to digest glucose sugar.** That difficulty makes you **pre-diabetic and hungry.** Your hunger increases because, when you're tired, your stomach produces too much **ghrelin** (a hormone telling the brain you're hungry), and your fat cells produce too little **leptin** (a hormone that telling the brain you're full). So though you're really just tired, those wrong hormone amounts make your confused brain think you're hungry instead of tired, so you long for food to “pep yourself up”: you crave foods that are sweet (cakes, candy, and ice cream), starchy (pasta, bread, cereal, and potatoes), and salty (chips and nuts). You overeat and become obese. Doctors say to avoid snacking when you're tired (at midnight) because you tend to overeat then, and your midnight snack won't make you feel full, so you'll keep eating until you become a blimp. A good way to prevent obesity & diabetes is to go to bed early and stay there, to avoid late snacking!

Statisticians have this sad news: people who sleep fewer than 6 hours per night die sooner. So do people who **oversleep** (sleep more than 9 hours), because people oversleep just when they're ill or depressed or previously deprived of sleep.

Unfortunately, most Americans undersleep on weekdays and try to compensate by oversleeping on weekends. The average American adult sleeps just 6.8 hours per weeknight, 9 hours per weekend night. Researchers consider that pattern to be unhealthy, like binge eating. Try to get a constant amount of sleep each night.

Philosophers blame American sleeplessness on electronics. We stay up later than our ancestors because of the invention of the light bulb and its 24-hour culture: car headlights, nighttime TV, the computer, and the Internet. America is always on, round the clock — and paying for it by getting underslept (and therefore ill, using poor judgment, accident-prone, obese, and diabetic).

When you feel tired

A brain chemical called **adenosine** makes your brain feel tired, so you want to sleep.

While you sleep, the adenosine binds to phosphorus to form **adenosine triphosphate (ATP)**. After the adenosine gets used up (to make ATP), your brain no longer feels sleepy, so you wake up.

After waking up, you feel groggy for the first half hour, so don't make any judgments then! After that first half hour, you're fully functional.

While you're awake, **your body's cells get energy by burning the ATP**.

That burning makes the ATP break down into adenosine and phosphorus again. The gradual increase in adenosine and decrease in ATP makes your body gradually feel sleepy again, so you eventually feel very tired ("zoned out") by the late afternoon (between 4PM and 5:30PM). Since you're tired then, it's a good time to take a nap (if your schedule permits). Your tiredness will tempt you overeat (by breaking your diet and eating a late-afternoon snack, especially as an excuse for having worked so hard throughout the day); but you should avoid that temptation: don't eat then, just nap instead!

After 5:30PM, your eye senses the sky is darkening (even if you're "blind"). Your eye passes the "darkness" sensation to your brain, into the hypothalamus's back part, called the **suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN)**, which reacts by outputting a hormone to keep you awake through the early evening. That hormone makes you feel rejuvenated, less tired than during your zonk-out period. The SCN's hormone level gradually increases. From 8PM to 10PM, you feel quite awake!

But at 10PM, your **pineal gland** increases its production of a hormone called **melatonin**, which quiets the SCN's output, so you start feeling sleepy again and fall asleep at 11PM (since the melatonin takes an hour to make you sleepy). You sleep 7½ hours, so you arise at 6:30AM to start another day.

That's the ideal sleep schedule for the typical American. Your own personal sleep schedule might differ, depending on how your hormones are working for you (and whether you recently got kissed, yelled at, or drunk).

Unique

Sleep's purpose is to build your ATP levels, so you'll have enough energy to function well throughout the day.

All animals sleep, even fish. (When a fish sleeps, it shuts down half its brain but uses the other half to keep swimming, so it can breathe.)

Humans are the only animals that typically sleep for 7½ hours in a row (and stay awake for 16½ hours in a row). Other animals sleep shorter and more often: they take lots of naps.

For example, cats rarely stay awake for more than 6 hours in a row; they take lots of catnaps. Cats can prowl at all hours of the day and night. Human eyes and noses are too poor to handle the night, so humans were built to just give up, sleep through the darkness, but think throughout the day.

Sleep positions

You can sleep in 4 positions:

face up (on your back)
face down (on your stomach)
facing your left (on your left side)
facing your right (on your right-hand side)

Each position has its own advantages and problems. Here are the issues....

Breathing The worst position for breathing is face up. When you're face up, you're most likely to snore, most likely to suffer from **sleep apnea** (repeatedly interrupted breathing), and most likely to have your snot run down your throat (which worsens your cold or flu by infecting your throat & tummy).

The best position for breathing is **face down**, so the snot drips away from your body (onto your pillow or Kleenex) instead of down your throat.

Leg spasms When you're sleeping, or trying to wake up, do you sometimes get painful spasms in your leg muscles? If so, the best way to avoid them (or stop them) is to go into the **fetal position**, where you look like a fetus: bend your legs, so your knees are near your tummy and your toes are turned toward your knees. One way to get into that position is to grab your toes and pull them toward your tummy. But you probably don't want to spend all night grabbing your toes! The easiest way to approximate that position is to sleep on your side (curled up): so sleep **facing your left or facing your right**. Don't sleep face up or face down.

Acid reflux If you eat too much, you might get **acid reflux** (where the acids in your stomach can't fit inside your stomach, so they flow back up your esophagus and even into your mouth). The acids burn your esophagus, giving you a burning sensation (called **heartburn** because it's near your heart, though it's actually in just your esophagus). Those acids weaken your esophagus and make your esophagus more likely to get cancer. The problem is called **gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD)**. If the acids reach your mouth, they'll eat away your teeth surfaces (the enamel).

To avoid acid reflux, many patients buy pills (or change diet or chew gum or get surgery or sleep on a slanted bed), but try this easy sleeping technique first: sleep **facing your left**. Here's why:

Your stomach is a *small* organ on your *left* side, just below your heart. (Your stomach is *not* the embarrassing big bulge at your waist; that bulge is your intestine.) By sleeping on your left side, you're keeping your stomach low (close to the mattress), so it's lower than your esophagus, so the stomach's acids won't spill to your esophagus.

Don't sleep facing your right. (If you sleep on your right-hand side, your stomach is higher than your esophagus, and your stomach's acids drip into your esophagus.)

Sudden infant death If you have an infant under the age of 1, make the infant sleep **face up**, to prevent **sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)**, even though the infant will sleep more soundly face down.

Comfort The only comfortable position is **face up**. Other positions scrunch part of your body: lying on your side crushes that side; lying face down strains your neck. Also, if you try to pamper yourself by lying on an electric massage bed, the bed massages you well just if you lie **face up**.

Masturbation If you sleep **face down**, your genitals will rub against the mattress, leading to masturbation. That's fun if you're alone (but distracting if your bedroom is shared).

Summary So here's the advantage of each position:

Face up	good for infants and comfort
Face down	improves breathing and masturbation
Facing your left	stops acid reflux and leg spasms
Facing your right	is another way to stop leg spasms

Most people change positions several times throughout the night. That's natural and good, since staying in the same position too long can create bedsores. That's why hospitals hire nurses to turn over the patients.

Insomnia

If you have trouble falling asleep, researchers recommend removing all distractions from your bedroom: avoid light, clocks, books, televisions, and food, so your bedroom is totally peaceful, boring, sleepy.

If you want to read a book or watch TV, do so in a separate room (or at least a separate chair), so your body gets in the habit of using your bed just for sleeping and sex. Instead of staring at an alarm clock and watching the minutes tick by, have a family member wake you — or at least turn the clock so you can't see the time.

3 hours before you go to bed:

Stop exercising (because it will stimulate you too much).
Stop drinking coffee and tea (because their caffeine will keep you awake).
Stop eating big meals (though a light snack can be helpful).
Stop drinking alcohol.

Though alcohol makes you fall asleep fast, the sleep it creates has poor quality, so you'll tend to wake up at 3AM.

For a light bedtime snack, try milk, turkey, peanuts, or their variants (cheese, chicken, tuna, cashews, or soy), because they all contain an amino acid called **tryptophan**, which helps your brain produce **serotonin** (a chemical that helps you relax). Try them warm (by microwaving them or by putting peanut butter on toast), so your body gets warm & cozy then cools down again: the cooling will make you sleepy.

If a list of worries prevents you from sleeping, write the list down, so you feel organized and can analyze the list the next morning.

Most people who suffer from insomnia are old women (not young men).

These Websites have more suggestions to cure insomnia:

4woman.gov/faq/insomnia.htm
HelpGuide.org/aging/sleep_tips.htm
FamilyDoctor.org/110.xml
well.com/user/mick/insomnia

Details

For more details about sleep research, read Craig Lambert's article "Deep into Sleep" (on pages 25-33 of *Harvard Magazine's* July-August 2005 issue).

AIDS

There are two common ways to get AIDS. One way is to be a drug addict who shares needles with other drug addicts. The other way is to have certain kinds of sex. But the media was afraid to say what those "certain kinds of sex" were.

Here's the truth: the main way to get AIDS is to get fucked in the ass. That's because when you get fucked in the ass, a few of your blood vessels there will pop, and the fucker's infected semen will mix with your blood. That's why gays get AIDS more than straights: gays are more likely to ass-fuck.

If you fuck normally or just kiss, your chance of transmitting or receiving AIDS is low, because you're not going to pop many blood vessels that way.

The official announcements say AIDS is transmitted by an "exchange of bodily fluids," but remember that the main "exchange" is by popping blood vessels during ass-fucking.

I recommend you go suck an ice-cream pop instead. It's a safer way to get creamed and popped, and it tastes better.

Death

Vampires and life-insurance companies like to think about death.

If you're an average American, here's when you'll probably die, according to the life-insurance table published by the government's **Center for Disease Control (CDC)**:

Your age	How much longer you'll probably live	Probability you'll die in next 5 years	% of newborns who'll reach your age
0 (newborn)	78.6 more years, so die at age 78.6	.7%	100%
5 years old	74.1 more years, so die at age 79.1	.1%	99.3%
10 years old	69.2 more years, so die at age 79.2	.1%	99.3%
15 years old	64.2 more years, so die at age 79.2	.3%	99.2%
20 years old	59.4 more years, so die at age 79.4	.5%	98.9%
25 years old	54.7 more years, so die at age 79.7	.6%	98.5%
30 years old	50.0 more years, so die at age 80.0	.7%	97.9%
35 years old	45.3 more years, so die at age 80.3	.9%	97.2%
40 years old	40.7 more years, so die at age 80.7	1.1%	96.3%
45 years old	36.1 more years, so die at age 81.1	1.6%	95.3%
50 years old	31.6 more years, so die at age 81.6	2.4%	93.8%
55 years old	27.4 more years, so die at age 82.4	3.6%	91.5%
60 years old	23.3 more years, so die at age 83.3	5.1%	88.2%
65 years old	19.4 more years, so die at age 84.4	7.2%	83.7%
70 years old	15.7 more years, so die at age 85.7	10.7%	77.7%
75 years old	12.3 more years, so die at age 87.3	16.7%	69.4%
80 years old	9.2 more years, so die at age 89.2	26.7%	57.8%
85 years old	6.6 more years, so die at age 91.6	42.1%	42.4%
90 years old	4.5 more years, so die at age 94.5	61.9%	24.6%
95 years old	3.1 more years, so die at age 98.1	79.8%	9.4%
100 years old	2.2 more years, so die at age 102.2	nearly 100%	1.9%

That table is based on the U.S. recent past (2017). It assumes there will be no new major medical advances or disasters.

It assumes you're "average," but nobody is "average." For example, women tend to live longer than men.

If you're a woman or in good health, you'll probably live longer than the table says.

If you're a man or ill, you'll probably die sooner.

How will you die? Here are the top 15 causes of death:

Cause of death	Percentage
heart disease	23.0%
cancer	21.3%
accident	6.0%
chronic lower-respiratory disease	5.7%
stroke	5.2%
Alzheimer's disease	4.3%
diabetes	3.0%
flu or pneumonia	2.0%
kidney failure	1.8%
suicide	1.7%
chronic liver disease	1.5%
sepsis (bacteria-infected blood)	1.5%
high blood pressure	1.3%
Parkinson's disease	1.1%
lungs inflamed by solids or liquids	0.7%

For example, that table's top entry means: in 23% of all deaths, the death's *main immediate* cause is heart disease.

If you combine the table's top 2 data rows, you see that 44.3% of all deaths are caused by heart disease or cancer.

If you combine the table's top 3 data rows, you see that most deaths (50.3%) come from 3 causes: heart disease, cancer, or respiratory disease.

But when a *young* person dies, the cause is usually *not* one of those 3. Here are the top 5 causes of death in each age bracket:

	Age under 1 year old	Age 1-4	Age 5-9	Age 10-14	Age 15-34	Age 35-44	Age 45-54	Age 55-64	Age 65-116
top cause	birth defect	accident	accident	accident	accident	accident	cancer	cancer	heart disease
#2 cause	premature birth	birth defect	cancer	cancer	suicide	cancer	heart disease	heart disease	cancer
#3 cause	mom's difficult pregnancy	homicide	birth defect	suicide	homicide	heart disease	accident	accident	respiratory
#4 cause	sudden infant death syndrome	cancer	homicide	birth defect	cancer	suicide	liver disease	respiratory	stroke
#5 cause	accident	heart disease	respiratory	homicide	heart disease	homicide	suicide	diabetes	Alzheimer's

For example, that table's "top cause" line says:

The top cause of death in babies (under 1 year old)	is birth defects.
The top cause of death in other kids & young adults (ages 1-44)	is accidents.
The top cause of death in middle-aged adults (ages 45-64)	is cancer.
The top cause of death in the elderly (ages 65-116)	is heart disease.

That table is based on *Time* magazine's chart summarizing the CDC's 2015 data. For more details, see the complete chart on pages 70-71 of *Time* magazine's issue of July 6, 2015.

Cancer

Cancer is any cell that grows out of control. Cancer can start anywhere in your body. If you die from cancer, which part of the body did the cancer cell originate from? Here are the 15 most common places:

Where the cancer cell originated	Percent of cancer deaths originating there
lung (or bronchus)	23.5%
blood (or bone marrow or lymph system)	9.4%
colon (or rectum)	8.4%
pancreas	7.5%
breast	7.0%
liver (or intrahepatic bile duct)	5.2%
prostate	5.2%
brain (or nerves)	2.9%
bladder	2.9%
esophagus	2.6%
kidney (or renal pelvis)	2.4%
ovary	2.3%
uterus	2.0%
skin	1.9%
stomach	1.8%
elsewhere	15.0%

Here are 8 of those locations, their “deaths per year” (using the American Cancer Society’s estimate for 2019), and their warning signs (where a frown means “your chance of having that cancer is increased”):

	<u>Lung</u>	<u>Colon</u>	<u>Pancreas</u>	<u>Breast</u>	<u>Liver</u>	<u>Prostate</u>	<u>Esophagus</u>	<u>Ovary</u>
male deaths per year	76,650	27,640	23,800	500	21,600	31,620	13,020	0
female deaths per year	66,020	23,380	21,950	41,760	10,180	0	3,060	13,960
total deaths per year	142,670	51,020	45,750	42,260	31,780	31,620	16,080	13,960
percentage of the 606,880 cancer deaths per year	23.5%	8.4%	7.5%	7.0%	5.2%	5.2%	2.6%	2.3%
overweight (or obese)		☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹	☹
parent or sibling had same cancer	☹	☹	☹	☹		☹		☹
smoked tobacco (or was exposed to second-hand smoke)	☹	☹	☹		☹		☹	
age at least 65		☹		☹		☹	☹	
ate lots of red or well-done meat	☹	☹	☹					
child had same cancer		☹		☹		☹		
didn't get enough exercise		☹		☹		☹		
age 55-64		☹				☹	☹	
ate lots of processed meat	☹	☹						
age 50-54		☹				☹		
have type 2 diabetes			☹		☹			
drank alcohol				☹	☹			
female				☹				☹
you, your mother, or your daughter had breast cancer				☹				☹
have mutated gene BRCA1 or BRCA2, or you never gave birth				☹				☹
male						☹	☹	
exposed to radon, asbestos, diesel exhaust, or air pollution	☹							
didn't get enough vitamin B-6 or took too much beta-carotene	☹							
had colon polyps, ulcerative colitis, or Crohn's disease		☹						
didn't get enough milk, calcium, or vitamin D		☹						
have chronic pancreatitis			☹					
menstruated before age 12, or menopause began after 55				☹				
had your first child when you were over 30				☹				
took hormones after menopause				☹				
have dense breast tissue or abnormal breast cells				☹				
didn't eat enough vegetables				☹				
have cirrhosis, alcoholic liver disease, or chronic hepatitis B or C					☹			
have type 1 diabetes					☹			
didn't drink any coffee					☹			
African ancestry or bad prostate biopsy						☹		
took too little cooked-tomato products or too many calcium pills						☹		
have Barrett's esophagus or had a lot of acid reflux							☹	
took estrogen (without progestin) in last 3 years								☹
drank too much milk (3 or more cups per day)								☹

In that table, the rows near the top have the most frowns. Those rows say cancer is more probable if you do any of these bad things:

become overweight, smoke tobacco, eat lots of red or well-done meat, or don't get enough exercise

Those rows also say cancer is more probable if you're old or a close blood relative got cancer already. (In that table, the numbers are from 2019 but the frowns are from pages 3-7 of *Nutrition Action* newsletter's May 2015 issue. Read that issue, which gives more details about the warnings.)

Cleaning

They say "Cleanliness is next to Godliness." Does that mean "Dirtiness is next to Devilishness?"

Wash your hands

To prevent disease and infection, the main thing you can do is: wash your hands!

Colds, the flu, and other communicable diseases are spread mainly by dirty hands (not by getting cold, not by bad breath). To remove germs from your environment, wash your hands frequently, using hot water, soap, and friction: rub them! Soap and water are more effective than most antiseptic or antibacterial sprays. Wash your hands before you eat; wash your hands after taking out garbage; wash your hands after blowing your nose.

If you have a cold, the most common way to transmit it to others is to blow your nose then shake somebody's hand. More colds are transmitted by shaking hands than by sneezing into the air. If you wash after you blow, and if the people who shake your hand wash before they eat, you won't infect your neighbors. Besides shaking hands, another common way to spread colds is to blow your nose, then grab a stair's handrail just before someone else grabs it.

Soap

Most soaps are normal, but 2 famous soaps are extreme:

Dove makes your skin feel oily (because ¼ of Dove is moisturizing cream).
Ivory makes your skin feel dry.

In winter, your skin will feel too dry, unless you use Dove to make it feel oily and counteract the dryness. In summer, when you sweat like a pig, your skin will feel too wet, unless you use Ivory to counteract the wetness and make your skin feel drier.

Dove is the perfect winter soap.
Ivory is the perfect summer soap.

Don't use them in the wrong seasons! Dermatologists especially recommend against using Ivory soap in the winter: your skin will crack and bleed if you use Ivory when you're cold.

Dove soap is expensive; you can substitute "generic" moisturizing soaps instead. Ivory soap is cheap but vanishes fast when you use it: you'll need many bars to get through a month.

A new, green version of Ivory includes a moisturizer: aloe.

Sponges

Bacteria and molds love to grow on damp objects, such as sponges.

When you're not using your sponges, keep them dry. Each week, replace them (you can get about 10 per dollar at discount stores such as Dollar Tree) or microwave them for 2 minutes (after wetting them so they won't burn).

Wiping with an ancient untreated sponge is less sanitary than not wiping at all.

Bleach

You can buy chlorine bleach in a bottle or as a powder. The cheapest powdered forms are **Ajax** and **Dutch Cleanser**. To remove mold from bathtubs, shower curtains, sponges, and decks, let bleach sit there a while: the bleach loosens the mold. The more minutes or hours that the bleach makes contact with the mold, the looser the mold gets. Unfortunately, bleach also destroys the sponge's fibers.

Sweat

Since sweat can be sticky, clammy, and smelly, people worry about it. But sweat's an amazing blessing given us by God. Although our bodies were intended to operate at 98.6 degrees, they can survive temperatures of over 110 degrees, by sweating.

Sweat itself isn't cool. In fact, since sweat came out of our bodies, sweat itself is 98.6 degrees. Yet, sweat feels cool. Why?

The answer is: when sweat hits the air, it evaporates. According to the laws of physics, evaporation requires energy; to get that energy needed for evaporation, the sweat "sucks" heat energy from the surrounding tissue. Since your body loses that heat, your body feels cooler.

But you don't need a physicist to tell you that. Just ask the typical teenage punk, "Does sweat suck?" and he'll say, "Sure, and so do you!"

Your body's temperature is 98.6 degrees because of an error:

When Gabriel Fahrenheit invented the thermometer around 1700, he wanted to define "100 degrees" to mean the temperature of an average human body, so he measured his secretary's body (which was probably fun) but didn't realize how hot-blooded his secretary was: in fact, his secretary was 1.4 degrees hotter than the average human! Although his secretary's temperature became defined as 100 degrees, the average human is 1.4 degrees cooler. The next time you have a temperature of 100 degrees, console yourself by remembering you're no hotter than Fahrenheit's secretary!

If you see a person's brow drip with sweat, the air is not really hot. In truly hot air, sweat evaporates immediately, so you never see it on the person's brow! The cast of the "Twilight Zone" TV show discovered that the hard way:

Around 1960, when they were filming Twilight Zone's first episode, they needed to pretend they were on Mars, so they took their cameras to Death Valley, which looks nearly as hot and barren as Mars; but since Death Valley was so hot, the sweat evaporated immediately: the actors didn't look sweaty and didn't look hot. The producer had to cover the actor's faces with oil, which looked like sweat but didn't evaporate.

Facial creams

Many women who want younger-looking skin put special creams on their faces. They're just wasting their money.

The best way to develop younger-looking skin is to stay out of the sun, since tans cause wrinkles.

To see how facial creams are useless, look at my friend Pierrette:

A facial-cream saleswoman asked Pierrette which cream she was using. Pierrette said, "Just soap and water."

The saleswoman said, "You shouldn't do that! Plain soap will age your face! By the time you turn 26, you'll look 30!"

The saleswoman didn't realize that Pierrette was already 40. Using just soap and water, Pierrette looked at least 15 years younger!

Doctors

No matter how hard you try, eventually you're gonna get sick and try to see a doctor but die. Here are the delicious details....

Kinds of doctors

If you're a medical student who's trying to decide what kind of specialist to become, you'll be told:

general practitioners (GPs) are friendly but stupid

internists are smart but overly cautious

surgeons are carefree playboys who like to play with women and knives and don't worry about details

To illustrate those stereotypes, you'll be told this tale:

A GP, an internist, and surgeon go on a duck shoot but share a shotgun.

They agree to let the GP go first. When the first bird flies overhead, the GP says, "It looks like a duck, it flies like a duck, I'll call it a duck." Then he fires, but misses.

When the second bird flies overhead, the internist says, "It looks like a duck, it flies like a duck, but we'll have to rule out the ostrich and the golden eagle and the whooping crane, which are endangered species." Before he finishes analyzing the situation, the bird flies away.

Finally, it's the surgeon's turn. When the third bird flies overhead, the surgeon takes his shotgun and shoots the bird immediately. The bird drops at his feet. Then the surgeon looks at the conquered bird and says, "Well, what do you know, it's a duck!"

Some doctors know what to do, but don't act. Other doctors act even though they don't know the right thing to do. Medical students learn this rule about how specialists differ:

An **internist** knows everything and does nothing.

A **surgeon** does everything and knows nothing.

A **psychiatrist** knows nothing and does nothing.

A **pathologist** knows everything and does everything too late.

For the medical profession's reactions to those barbs, dig up Marilyn Chase's article on *The Wall Street Journal's* front page (May 15, 1984).

My friend Clayton Thomas (a physician) passed me 2 more barbs he heard from his colleagues:

The only science less exact than nutrition science is Christian Science. Doctors are generous: they tell you all they know, plus a bit more.

Doctor-patient chat can get bizarre:

Doctor: you're very sick.

Patient: I want a second opinion.

Doctor: Okay, you're *ugly*, too.

Doctor: What's your problem?

Patient: It hurts when I do *this*.

Doctor: So don't do that!

That last quote was from comedian Henny Youngman.

Carrie Snow said:

A male gynecologist is like an auto mechanic who never owned a car.

Jan King complained:

Whoever thought up the word "mammogram"? Every time I hear it, I think I'm supposed to put my breast in an envelope and send it to someone.

Feminists recommend the **manogram**, which is a similar device for men: it grabs the prick and crushes it to death.

Party doctors

When a doctor attends a party and another guest says to him, "I have a medical question," the doctor's way to politely decline spending the party dishing out unpaid advice is to reply:

Great! Just get undressed.

A surgeon who lived a full life

Here's the story of my favorite surgeon. He wasn't perfect, but his good outweighed his bad, and he was ahead of his time.

Outline of a lifetime He was born in 1890. He skipped 8th grade — and so did all his classmates — because his teacher felt the 8th-grade curriculum just repeated what was taught in 7th grade. He went to a top-notch public high school, where his curriculum even included Latin, Greek, linguistics, and astronomy, and the graduates were given automatic bachelors' degrees. When he finished high school, he skipped "college" and immediately entered one of the country's most prestigious medical schools. So he finished medical school when he was 21 and became a surgeon — much younger than would be possible now.

He was a surgeon in the US Army during World War I. After the war, he married a nurse. He was Jewish; she was not. He picked her instead of a Jewish woman because he reckoned the typical Jewish woman would want to start marriage by being treated as a princess or a queen; he liked the woman he married because she was a Christian who "knew the meaning of hard work."

Throughout his marriage, he slept in a separate bed from her, so he wouldn't have to disturb her in the middle of the night when he'd get called for medical emergencies. When their kids grew up and moved out, he and his wife moved from a big house to a small apartment but slept in separate bedrooms, even after he retired.

Though he called himself a Jew, the only religious services he went to were weddings, funerals, and inescapable Bar Mitzvahs.

He was a hospital's surgeon, a university's medical professor, a distinguished medical journal's book reviewer, and a large industrial corporation's top physician — all simultaneously! That hard work and lack of sleep gave him a heart attack when he was about 55. While he was recovering, his colleagues told him he'd have to either slow down or risk dying from a second heart attack within 5 years. He slowed down and lived a very long life: he died when he was about 90 years old. He outlived his wife and practically all friends.

Medical taboos & fads He ignored the medical profession's taboos and fads. He broke the unwritten rules; but since he was the *head* surgeon at a large and prestigious city hospital, other doctors couldn't argue.

For example, a general rule among surgeons is: don't perform surgery on your own relatives.

He ignored that taboo: he removed the appendix of each of his ill children and grandchildren. Why? Because he wanted to make sure the operation was done right! He felt that the only way to be sure was to do it himself.

During the 1950's, most doctors made their patients stay in the hospital about 2 weeks after an operation for "thorough recuperation," even after a relatively minor operation, such as removing an appendix.

Ignoring that tradition, he made his patients get up and walk out of the hospital after 3 days, so they didn't run up big hospital bills. He was ahead of his time: today, most doctors copy him.

Up through the 1950's, the biggest medical fad was the **tonsillectomy**. If a patient's tonsil was even slightly inflamed, doctors would say that the patient had "tonsillitis" and send the patient to the hospital to have the tonsil removed. Since so many 10-year-old kids had tonsillectomies, that operation became a rite of passage, like getting circumcised.

He spurned that practice and refused to do tonsillectomies. He felt God built the tonsil to be the body's first line of defense against illness: the tonsil's purpose was to intercept infection that was heading for the rest of the body. His cure for an inflamed tonsil was to just wait for the tonsil to feel better. For minor cases of tonsillitis, he recommended just gargling with salt water. He used antibiotics just when necessary. He was right: today, the medical profession agrees with him and recommends salt water and occasional antibiotics instead of surgery.

Since he never went to undergraduate college, he never learned organic chemistry and other "hard" sciences.

To him, surgery was an art, not a science: it was the art of slicing people up and making them well. As he neared retirement — and medical science advanced — most doctors were measuring the patient's chemistry; but since he didn't understand chemistry (and didn't even understand what today is called "high-school algebra"), he let the young interns fresh out of school do all those boring chemical calculations. They were the bookkeepers; he was the master butcher, kind and wise and experienced.

After he retired and was about 80, he developed a tumor in his knee. Rather than trust the operation to another surgeon — which would also mean having to go to a hospital and leave his ailing wife unattended — he went into his home's bathroom, slit open his own leg, removed the tumor himself, and then sewed his leg up again.

Magic His hands, skilled in surgery, were also skilled in magic. He made coins disappear and performed other sleights of hand that mystified his children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.

As he grew older, he got scared about the consequences of one of his tricks. In that trick, he'd rub a penny into a kid's palm, until the penny "disappeared" (it was secretly hiding between the doctor's own fingers); then he'd say the penny was passing through the kid's body; and finally he'd pull the penny out the kid's ear. But eventually he began to worry that kids would try to imitate him by sticking pennies in their ears, so he stopped that trick.

Music His whole living room was surrounded by 300 albums of classical-music records, all numbered and indexed. He had new records but still kept the ones he bought around 1900, as a young boy. For example, he had 78 RPM records that were so old that they were recorded on just one side, before "flip" sides had been invented.

He loved listening to operas and knew all the popular ones by heart. He also loved watching football and reading the newspaper. He did all 3 activities simultaneously:

In his living room, he'd turn on the radio (to listen to the opera), while simultaneously turning on the TV (to watch football) and opening the newspaper. While reading the newspaper, he listened to the opera, and at the end of each paragraph he peeked at the game on TV. Modern society would call that "multitasking," but he lived in an era where such living was just called "being efficient."

Traveler A true patriot, he visited each of the 50 states. But he never wished to visit any foreign countries.

For 60 consecutive summers, he drove to Maine, to eat lobsters and enjoy the sea breezes. When he became 70 and then 80 years old, his weather-beaten face gave him the look of an ancient lobsterman.

Life after death When he was about 80, his wife died. That marked the beginning of his new life.

He traveled more. Many women loved him and tried to "snag" him, because he was intelligent, responsible, rich, famous in his field, and — most important — possibly die soon and leave a big inheritance. But he resisted most female advances. Besides, those women were too young for him: he was 85, and he said they were just "spring chickens"; he didn't want to "rob the cradle."

He finally took a fancy to a widow who lived in the same apartment building as he. Her late husband had been one of his patients. But though he enjoyed the widow's company, he refused to marry her and refused to live with her.

Since they were both old, and either might die at any moment, they phoned each other every morning to make sure they'd both gotten through the night safely.

So each morning, he phoned her, let her phone ring just once, then hung up before she answered it. That was a signal: she'd phone him back and they'd chat. He made her phone him, because she talked a lot, and he didn't want to pay the phone bill.

Calling her wouldn't have cost him much, since the call was very local: they both lived in the same apartment building. But since she was a blabbermouth, she'd bought the "unlimited calling option" from the phone company so she could call him free; and, Jew that he was, he'd never pay for a service that she could get free.

He sent her a Valentine card that said he loved her because she was the only woman who could put up with his crabbiness.

They liked to travel. When he was about 85, he hitchhiked across Wyoming — and dragged her along.

She was warm and friendly, but also disorganized and somewhat senile. He helped her figure her taxes, but his accounting wasn't enough to prevent her from making a mess. For example, one day she phoned him and announced she paid her taxes. He said, "You already paid your taxes!" She was so senile that she'd forgotten she'd paid her taxes; she paid them twice! He phoned the IRS to explain her error, but the IRS staffers couldn't stop laughing: they spent the day whispering to each other, "Hey, did you hear about the old lady who was so senile that she paid her taxes twice?"

Eventually, she grew too senile to be reasonable company, so he ditched her. She died, from senility and loneliness.

Years later, when he was about 90, dying of cancer, and hospitalized, an elderly woman patient claimed she entered his room and made love to him on his deathbed. She was surprised that a 90-year-old immobile cancer patient could do it! But that was the last time.

Daily survival

Surviving life's difficulties can be tough. For example, the Internet tells of this letter from a mother:

Dear son,

I'm writing this slow because I know you can't read fast.

After you left home, we moved, because your dad read in the newspaper that most accidents happen within 20 minutes of your home. I can't send you our new address, since the last family that lived here took the house numbers when they moved, to avoid changing *their* address.

This nice place even has a washing machine, though I'm not sure it works well: I put 4 shirts in, pulled the chain, and haven't seen them since.

The weather here isn't bad. It rained just twice last week: the first time for 3 days, the second time for 4 days.

As for the coat you wanted me to send, your aunt said it would be too heavy to send in the mail with the buttons on, so we cut them off and put them in the pockets.

The funeral home sent a bill saying if we don't make the last payment for grandma's funeral, up she comes!

Your brother worried us by locking his keys in the car. It took him 4 hours to get me and your dad out.

Your sister had a baby, but I haven't found out yet whether it's a girl or a boy, so I don't know whether you're an aunt or an uncle. The baby looks just like your brother.

3 of your friends accidentally went off a bridge in a pickup truck. The driver rolled down the window and swam to safety, but your other 2 friends drowned because they were in the back and couldn't get the tailgate down.

No more news. Nothing much happened.

If you don't get this letter, tell me and I'll send another.

Love, Mom

P.S. I was going to send you money, but the envelope was already sealed.

To survive, you need food and shelter. The previous chapter explained food; now gimme shelter....

Housing

In the South, low-income folks who can't afford housing live in their cars. My roommate asked one such fellow why; he replied:

You can't drive a house, but you can live in a car.

In the North, cars there are too cold to live in, unless your "car" is a luxurious mobile home.

Heat

Europeans detest Americans for wasting everything, including energy. For example, Europeans detest Americans for making homes be "warmer in winter than in summer."

During the winter, Americans overcompensate for the cold outside, by turning the heat up to 74 degrees. During the summer, Americans overcompensate for the heat outside by air-conditioning their homes and offices down to 68 degrees. Many women in American offices bring sweaters to work with them — in the middle of the summer — because their bosses have turned the air conditioning to near-freezing temperatures, especially in computer centers.

Change your clothes In the winter, the most effective way to stay warm in your home is to wear thick clothing. In the summer, the most effective way to stay cool in your home is to take off your shirt and buy a fan (unless you're a shy woman who's afraid of going shirtless, or you live in a ridiculously hot place, such as a desert or a jungle or the South, or you're a New Jersey cry-baby).

But Americans strangely insist on wearing practically identical clothing during both seasons: they heat or air-condition their entire homes when all that's really needed is to insulate or fan the air next to their skins.

Air conditioners destroy society Philosophers blame air conditioners for destroying American society. Before air conditioners were invented, Americans spent summer outdoors, sitting on the front stoop or playing with friends. Now Americans spend summer hiding inside their air-conditioned mansions, ignoring their neighbors, and glued to the TV or computer or videogames. Some Americans *never* meet their neighbors, even after living nearby for many years! Air conditioners have made neighborhoods colder not just physically but also socially.

New Yorkers fret that since normal folks hide indoors during the summer, the streets are now controlled by street gangs. That's how air conditioners breed violence. (But Southerners say air conditioners breed high property values.)

Computer excuse If you wish to buy an air conditioner, your easiest excuse is to buy a personal computer then tell your family that computers don't work in the summer unless you also buy an air conditioner.

Windows

Suppose you want to air out a room by opening a window, but your window is the "double-hung" kind that lets you open either the top half or the bottom half but not both simultaneously. Which half should you open?

According to research done in the 1800's by M.I.T.'s first woman professor, pollution tends to rise to the top half of your room, so you should let it out by opening the window's top half.

I'd consider these issues also:

Since hot air rises, opening the top half releases hot air from the room and makes the room cooler, whereas opening the bottom half releases cold air from the room and makes the room warmer.

If your real goal is a "cleansing breeze," open two windows and the door, so that your room becomes a wind tunnel.

If you have just one window and can't open the door, open part of the window's top half and part of the window's bottom half, so you create a small breeze from one half to the other.

To impress a visitor, maybe open the window's *bottom* half, since the bottom half typically offers a prettier view! On the other hand, if you open the bottom half, the dirt on the window's top half will be embarrassingly noticeable against the sky.

If your neighborhood is noisy, open the top half, so that the bottom half blocks noise coming up from the street.

To keep your house cool during a summer day without an air conditioner, put curtains over the windows that are in direct sunlight, and open (just slightly) the top half of each window. At night, open the top half of every window wide.

When you visit your friend's house, notice the windows, which reveal your friend's priorities.

Color

To sell your house, paint its outside yellow, because yellow houses sell faster than any other color. That's probably because "light objects look bigger than dark objects and look light-hearted and cheerfully sunny, but white shows dirt too easily." Yellow has just one problem: it fades fast.

To sell your house easily, make it yellow outside but white inside, since white looks newer and goes with a greater variety of furniture.

Throwing things away

When I lived in Boston, one of my roommates was a grad student at M.I.T., where his professor told him, "The hardest thing to learn is to throw away information."

In my own case, I gave up. When leaving Somerville, Donna hired a bunch of Chinese guys who threw all my stuff out on the street. Then the trash collectors came, saw a whole block full of garbage, and called the building inspector and fire department, who circled my block with fire trucks every few minutes to embarrass me until I hired a dumpster company.

Hint: throw out a moderate amount each week. Give yourself a goal: "This week, I'll throw out x boxes of stuff." The last week will still be heartbreaking, but less so.

Sexy clothing There's always a market for women's panties, slightly soiled. One woman got her first taste of the transvestite marketplace when guys started paying for her used clothing. Finally, she started a big business (called "Clothes by Caroline") that manufactured guy-size versions of women's clothing (such as maid's costumes) and, more profitably, baby clothing (for the "adult baby" market).

Undone housework

Here's a tale from the Internet:

A man coming home from work found total mayhem in his house. His 3 kids were outside, still in pajamas, splashing in mud. Empty food boxes & wrappers were strewn all over the yard. The door of his wife's car was open, and so was the front door of the house. In the house, he found an even bigger mess: a lamp knocked over, the throw rug wadded against one wall, cartoons loudly blaring from the TV, the family room's floor strewn with toys & many clothes. In the kitchen, dishes filled the sink, breakfast food was spilled on the counter, dog food was spilled on the floor, a broken glass lay under the table, and sand was by the back door. He ran upstairs, leaping over toys & more piles of clothes, to find his wife. He worried she might be ill or had some bigger calamity. He found her curled in bed and reading a novel. She looked up at him, smiled, and asked how his day went. He looked at her bewildered and asked, "What happened here today?" She smiled again and replied, "You know every day when you come home from work and ask me what in Hell I did all day?" "Yes" he gasped. She replied, "Well, today I didn't do it."

Lawns

The main things a lawn wants are water, fertilizer, and sunshine.

Water

The best time to water the lawn is early in the morning, about 4:30AM. Any time between 3AM and 6AM is okay. After that, winds and heat make the water evaporate too fast, and your city's water pressure drops too low because more humans try to use water then.

Don't water in the late afternoon or evening, because that makes the lawn remain wet too long at night: dark wet lawns are a breeding ground for mushrooms, molds, and diseases. (Exception: in the Southwest and other environments that are desert-like with ridiculously low humidity, watering in the evening is okay, since few mushrooms or molds live there.)

How much water? You want the water to penetrate 7 inches into the soil, to encourage the grass's roots to grow long and be hardy. To accomplish that, water a long time. If you water just briefly, the water will evaporate before getting down that deep.

How often to water To water deeply without wasting water, water just twice a week, but make each watering long. Do not water daily. Do not water several times per day. (Exception: if you're on a hill and the water runs off the hill and onto the street, interrupt your watering until the ground has a chance to soak up the water, then continue.)

Check yourself Make sure at least one inch of water falls on the grass each week. (That's half an inch per watering, when you water twice a week. To measure the amount of water, you can use a bucket or empty soup can.)

If you don't water the grass enough, it eventually turns brown. But even before the grass turns brown, it gives you 2 signs of inadequate water:

The grass looks gray (because its blades are too weak to stand straight, and they bend so you see more of their gray backsides).

When you step on the grass, it's too weak to pop back up, so your footprints stay in the grass.

Fertilizer

Fertilizer is a strong chemical. The lawn needs a little bit of it. If you fertilize too much, the lawn will die.

You should fertilize every 2 months, while the grass is growing. In most parts of the USA, the winter is too cold for grass to grow (the grass just sleeps then), so you should fertilize 4 times: early spring, early summer, late summer, and fall.

When you buy a bag of fertilizer, you see 3 numbers on the bag's front. Typically, those numbers are **32-3-10**, which means the fertilizer is **32% nitrogen, 3% phosphorus, 10% potassium**, and 55% "other minerals, coatings, binders, and junk."

Nitrogen makes the grass grow taller and stay green instead of turning yellow.

Phosphorus makes the roots grow deeper and seeds sprout, and it helps prevent the grass from turning purple.

Potassium makes the grass hardy (so it can withstand disease, drought, cold, and trampling).

If a bag of fertilizer says 10-10-10 instead, it's mainly for flowers and shrubs rather than grass.

The bag's back gives more details. If the fertilizer is high-quality, it also includes other minerals the grass needs, such as iron, calcium, magnesium, and sulfur.

Put on fertilizer when the grass is dry, so the fertilizer hits the ground instead of sticking to wet blades. Then immediately water the lawn (so the fertilizer sinks in before it blows away and before it burns any grass blades it landed on).

Fertilize mainly while the grass is growing fast. Don't fertilize in the winter.

Cool-season grasses (such as **Kentucky bluegrass** and **fine fescue**) grow fastest when the temperature is about 70 degrees (spring and fall). They're popular in the North.

Warm-season grasses (such as **Bermuda grass** and **Saint Augustine grass**) grow fastest when the temperature is about 87 degrees (summer). They're popular in the South.

I believe grass can talk and say things such as:

We young blades are glad Russ knew it would rain this weekend, so he put fertilizer on us. Yummy!

He used a strange brand that smells like shit, but we piggish grasses love to be covered with it. Call us deviant or call us herbal, but that's what we like.

He was the first on the block. We're turning green. The neighbors' grasses are white with envy.

You gonna bring us any more showers? That was fun!

Mowing

Grass doesn't like to be cut, but your neighbors will insist that you cut it.

When you cut the grass, **don't cut off more than a third of the grass's blade at a time**: if you cut more, the grass gets traumatized, tries to regrow the blade, and uses all its nitrogen for that activity instead of for growing healthy roots and keeping protective storage. Also, cutting off so much blade makes the grass's bottom get too much sunlight and turn gray-brown.

If you want to cut more (because the grass has gotten very tall and your neighbors are ready to kill you), do it in two stages: cut off a little, then cut off a little more a few days later, but never cut more than a third at a time.

Keep the grass as tall as you and your neighbors can bear it. Tall grass has 3 advantages over short grass:

Tall grass prevents weeds from growing (because weeds don't like shade).

Tall grass needs less water (because it shades the soil from evaporation).

Tall grass stays healthier and grows bigger roots (because its big blade performs lots of photosynthesis, turning sunlight into energy).

Most experts recommend that you **let the grass blades get to about 4 inches tall, then cut back to 3 inches** (so you're cutting off just a quarter of the blade). 3 inches is about the length of your index finger. To get 3 inches, set your lawnmower at one of the "high off the ground" settings. If you wish, instead of letting "4 inches cut to 3," you can let "3½ inches cut to 2½."

Here are exceptions:

For **zoysia grass**, you must cut to 2½ inches to avoid excessive thatch.

For **Bermuda grass**, you must cut to 1½ inches to avoid excessive thatch.

For a golf course, you must cut to ¼ inch to let golf balls roll easily.

When grass grows fast (because of rain, fertilizer, and mild temperatures in the 70's), you must mow often (to avoid lopping off more than a third at a time). When the grass grows slowly, you can wait longer before mowing.

Try to leave the cuttings on the lawn. Though the cuttings look ugly, they actually improve the lawn, since they act as fertilizer and contain many more nutrients than just nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium. For best results, get a **mulching** lawnmower (which can chop the cuttings into tiny pieces). If you mow often enough, each mowing will produce cuttings small enough to avoid smothering the grass. Though the cuttings might look big at first, they disappear fast, since most of their bulk is water that evaporates fast.

Mow when the grass is dry, to make the grass easier to cut and the cuttings less bulky.

Killing your enemies

A **weed** is just a plant that grows too fast and spreads across your lawn too fast.

The best way to avoid weeds is to keep the grass healthy and tall, so weeds don't get enough sunlight and enough empty space to survive. If you get weeds, the best way to get rid of them is to pull them out by hand, if you have the patience.

Dandelions are hard to pull out, since they have deep roots. If your lawn has a lot of clover, that's a sign your grass needs more fertilizer.

Some people hate weeds; other people love them. For example, kids love dandelions because their yellow flowers are pretty; but gardeners hate dandelions because they spread too fast and quickly take over your whole lawn; then the wind blows their seeds to the rest of your neighborhood, and your neighbors get angry at you for wrecking *their* lawns.

If you apply the typical weed killer (called **post-emergent weed killer**), apply it when the lawn is wet, so the weed killer sticks to the weed's leaves (which is how it kills the weed). If you apply bug killer, apply it when the lawn is dry, since the bugs spend most of their time in the ground, which is where you want to hit them. One kind of weed killer, called **pre-emergent weed killer**, attacks the weeds in early spring while they're still underground, before they emerge from the soil; apply that kind when the lawn is dry.

Weed killers and bug killers also can hurt or kill birds, pets, and small kids, so use the killers as little as possible and just on the parts of the lawn that are having severe problems. Keep kids and pets off those parts of the lawn afterward.

My wife complains that it's not fair for me to pull out weeds — or put chemicals on them — just because they look different from grass. She calls me a discriminatory racist.

I apologize.

Grass professors

To learn more about lawns, read what agriculture professors say!

Learn from the University of Illinois' Website (**Lawn Talk, extension.illinois.edu/lawntalk**). Then read this delightful book (full of good photos and text) by Professor Nick Christians (from Iowa State U.) and Ashton Ritchie (from The Scotts Company):

Scotts Lawns, published by Meredith Books, \$19.95 list, \$14.84 at Wal-Mart

Snow removal

I live in New Hampshire, where we have lots of snow. We've learned that the best way to remove snow depends on your religious beliefs.

Gene's philosophy

My neighbor Gene removes snow by performing a religious ritual — he walks out to the snow, raises both hands up to the sky, and recites the incantation chanted by ministers at funerals:

What the Lord giveth, the Lord taketh away.

Then he sneaks back into the house and waits for the Lord to remove the snow by letting it "melteth away." When his wife asks him about "snow removal," he just says:

It's the Lord's work.

When she asks "Won't that take a long time to melt?" he'll say:

Patience is a virtue.

Tom's philosophy

The opposite religious philosophy, espoused by Tom and my other brawny neighbors (armed with shovels, axes, and blowtorches), is:

The Lord helps those who help themselves.

They believe in hacking at the snow until the helpless miserable snow gets a black eye, as the black asphalt starts showing underneath. They believe in the Lord's ability to finish the job, since Ben Franklin proved black absorbs sunshine and converts it to heat, forming a devilishly hot Hell underground that melts the snow above. If you ask them about "snow removal," they say:

It's the Devil's work.

If you ask "Why not wait until the snow melts?" they paraphrase John F. Kennedy and say:

Ask not what the snow can do to you,
ask what you can do to the snow.

Then they start swinging their axes — and you'd better get out of their way!

Triple-good shovels

If you buy a shovel to handle the snow, make sure it's triple-good! Make sure it has all 3 of these characteristics:

It should be almost entirely aluminum (which weighs much less than wood, iron, or steel), so you don't get tired lifting.

Its scoop should have big sidewalls on the left and right (so the scoop looks more like a bucket), to prevent snow from falling off the scoop's sides before you lift.

Its handle should be long and bent (to look more like a slithering snake than a straight pole), so you don't have to stoop while shoveling.

Home Depot sold one having all those properties for \$15. It was made by **Ames True Temper** and called the **Arctic Blast 70405**. That model's no longer made, but Home Depot sells a similar one, **True Temper model 1603400**, for \$26.

Other shapes are better for "very light snow" or "very wet snow" or "very narrow walkways" or "roofs" or "elderly people who can't lift". For photos of different shapes and their advantages, go to HomeDepot.com or AmesTrueTemper.com.

Transportation

Let's go places!

Cars

While driving, beware of distractions. The song *Seven Little Girls* warned:

Keep your mind on your driving,
Keep your hands on the wheel,
Keep your snoopy eyes on the road ahead.

We're having fun,
Sitting in the back seat
Kissin' and a-huggin' with Fred!

The song was written in 1959 by Lee Pockriss & Bob Hilliard and sung by Paul Evans, with the help of little girls. See them sing at YouTube.com/watch?v=ulcjaheraq8. The girls in his back seat are real dolls!

Driving tricks These driving tricks aren't obvious:

Air conditioner in summer

When you're driving fast on a highway on a hot day, turning on the air conditioner consumes less gas than opening the window, because opening the window creates a strong breeze whose airflow slows down the car and acts as a brake. The air conditioner reduces your gas efficiency by just 1 mile per gallon; the open window costs slightly more at highway speeds. (But here are the *most effective* ways to improve your gas efficiency: remove unused junk from your trunk, put enough air in your tires, and get a tune-up.)

Air conditioner in winter

If you live in the north, buy a car that has an air conditioner and turn it on in the *winter*. That's because the air conditioner is a dehumidifier: it takes the humidity out of the air, so the foggy icy dew on the inside of your windshield evaporates. While the air conditioner is on, set it to a warm temperature, so you don't freeze.

Left lane after turning

If you want to drive slowly on an American road, you're supposed to drive in the right lane, except in this special situation: when you turn left onto a multi-lane road, you're supposed to stay in the new road's *left* lane until you're safely past the intersection.

To leave Hell, go straight

If your car is stuck in a snow bank or on a patch of ice, make your wheels point straight ahead temporarily, even if that's not the direction you ultimately want to go. That's because when you drive straight ahead, you have more power and control than when you try to turn. If you can't go forwards, go backwards, but in any case don't turn the wheel until after you've achieved speed and control.

Color If you buy a car, which color should you get? Which is better: a light color (such as white or yellow or silver) or a dark color (such as blue or black)?

A light-color car is easier to see (and safer) at night.
A dark car is easier to see in a snowstorm.

A yellow, orange, or red car is easier to see under normal conditions. (That's why fire engines are those colors.)

A light car is easier to keep cool in the summer (because it reflects sunlight).
A dark car is easier to keep warm in the winter (because it absorbs sunlight).

Silver is the most popular color, because it looks high-tech.
Just make sure it includes sparkle, so your neighbors don't call it "gray."

Silver and brown are the best at hiding dirt (because they *look* like dirt).
White and black are the worst: every spot on your car will be an eyesore.

Purple cars appeal to hippies (like me) but look cheap, so they're hard to resell.
Gold cars appeal to retired folks who act rich and have no imagination.

Researchers in New Zealand examined records of car crashes and concluded that, in general, silver is the safest color; black and brown are the most dangerous. In a silver car, your chance of serious injury is ¼ as much as in a black or brown car, and ½ as much as in a "normal" car (white, yellow, red, or blue) — at least if you drive in New Zealand! The researchers analyzed the data carefully (to control for differences in sex, driver age, alcohol, weather, and time of day) and published the results in the *British Medical Journal*.

Upgrade Everybody loves a status symbol.

I had a friend named Jerry Mender.
His blood is on my Dodge's fender.
If I could have dear Jerry back,
I'd hit him with my Cadillac.

Repairs Cars eventually need repairs:

Dead cars and skin

My car and my body are both breaking down.
We go to mechanics, who think I'm a clown.
My car and my body will be in the ground
Someday, but for now we can both tool around.

In sunshine, we dine on cod livers and oil.
We laugh at Death's hatchet, his evil plans foil
Awhile, until finally he starts to chop,
And our little joking forever shall stop.

Dear Jesus says pieces of us shall resume,
Be born-again Christians or Cadillacs soon.
We look to the Son while our friends give us moons
Out windows of wild things that we'll become soon.

Vans

I remember when my first wife went to the hospital, with body ills that were life-threatening.

Her name was Dodge. She was born in 1990. She must have been Dutch, since everybody called her "the van." She was so huge that folks called her a "one ton."

Her race was more interesting than "Black" or "White." She was silver.

She was a battered woman over the years, but that day she lost her battery. She had many other maladies, too. My friends told me to sell her to the slave traders, but most folks would spurn her because she was "too old," "too big," and "traveled too many miles."

For many years, she'd supported me and carried me through life, and I supported her; but she'd been into the hospital many times and now seemed near death. The ambulance came. Since she was so big, she wouldn't fit on a cot, so the ambulance driver put her on a flatbed.

Merger

The Internet says FedEx will merge with UPS. The merged company will be called **Fed-Up**. Then the driver can come to your door and say:

I'm Fed-Up. With you!

Planes

When Katie Rose Cappeller was an 8-year-old girl, she took her first flight on an airline. At the flight's end, she observed:

Takeoff and landing are fun. The middle is boring.

The pilot replied —

That's my job: to keep it boring.

Airline pilots often recite this prayer:

I want to pass away quietly in my sleep, like my grandfather —
Not screaming in horror, like his passengers.

Airplane crews get tired of repeating the same speeches to passengers on each flight. The Internet says some crews got creative, as follows...

Getting passengers to sit down The typical Southwest Airlines flight has no assigned seats: it lets passengers enter the plane then grab whatever seats they wish. When passengers took too long to pick seats, a flight attendant said:

People, people, we're not picking out furniture here. Find a seat and *get in it!*

Teaching passengers about safety Here's what flight attendants told their passengers:

To operate your seatbelt, insert the metal tab into the buckle and pull tight. It works just like every other seatbelt; and if you don't know how to operate one, you probably shouldn't be out in public unsupervised.

If you wish to smoke, the smoking section on this airplane is on the wing; and if you can light 'em, you can smoke 'em.

In the event of a sudden loss of cabin pressure, masks will descend from the ceiling. Stop screaming, grab the mask, and pull it over your face. If you have a small child traveling with you, secure your mask before assisting with theirs. If you're traveling with more than one small child, pick your favorite.

There may be 50 ways to leave your lover, but there are just 4 ways out of this plane.

In the event of an emergency water landing, your seat cushions can be used for flotation. Please paddle to shore, and take them with our compliments.

Pilot's welcome The pilot is supposed to make an announcement, welcoming passengers aboard. Here's what pilots announced:

Delta Airlines is pleased to have some of the best flight attendants in the industry. Unfortunately, none of them are on this flight.

Ladies and gentlemen, we've reached cruising altitude and will be turning down the cabin lights. This is for your comfort and to enhance the appearance of your flight attendants.

Weather at our destination is 50° with some broken clouds, but we'll try to have them fixed before we arrive. Thank you and remember: nobody loves you — or your money — more than Southwest Airlines.

One pilot announced:

Ladies and gentlemen, this is your captain speaking. Welcome to Flight 293, nonstop from New York to Los Angeles. The weather ahead is good, so we should have a smooth and uneventful flight. Now sit back and relax... *Oh, my God!*

Silence followed. After a few minutes, the pilot continued, on the intercom:

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm so sorry if I scared you earlier. While I was talking to you, the flight attendant accidentally spilled a cup of hot coffee in my lap. You should see the front of my pants!

A passenger in coach yelled back:

That's nothing. You should see the back of mine.

Deplaning After landing, here's what flight attendants said:

Thank you for flying Delta Business Express. We hope you enjoyed giving us the business as much as we enjoyed taking you for a ride.

We'd like to thank you folks for flying with us today; and the next time you get the insane urge to go blasting through the skies in a pressurized metal tube, we hope you'll think of US Airways.

Please be sure to take all your belongings. If you're going to leave anything, please make sure it's something we'd like to have.

Make sure to gather all your belongings. Anything left behind will be distributed evenly among the flight attendants. Please don't leave children or spouses.

After rough landings, flight attendants added these comments:

That was quite a bump, and I know what y'all are thinking. I'm here to tell you it wasn't the airline's fault, it wasn't the pilot's fault, it wasn't the flight attendant's fault, it was the asphalt.

Please remain seated, as Captain Kangaroo bounces us to the terminal.

Please remain in your seats with your seatbelts fastened, while the captain taxis what's left of our plane to the gate.

Please remain in your seats until Captain Crash & the Crew have brought the aircraft to a screeching halt against the gate. Once the tire smoke has cleared and the warning bells are silenced, we'll open the door, and you can pick your way through the wreckage to the terminal.

Please take care when opening the overhead compartments because, after a landing like that, sure as hell, everything's shifted.

Balloons

To have more fun, try riding in a balloon! It's thrilling, if you don't mind being blown around in the air and not being quite sure where you'll land.

Balloonist instructor Clayton Thomas tells his passengers:

Ballooning is a wonderful way to go from point A to point B, if you don't care where B is.

I asked him where that thought arose. He asked his friends, who came up with these paeans to the balloon philosophy of life...

In about 50 A.D., the Roman philosopher Lucius Annaeus Seneca said:

If you know not what harbor you seek, any wind is the right wind.

In 1947, William Pène du Bois wrote *The 21 Balloons*, a novel where he said:

The best way to travel, if you aren't in any hurry at all, if you don't care where you're going, if you don't like to use your legs, if you don't want to be annoyed at all by any choice of directions, is a balloon. In a balloon, you can decide only when to start, and usually when to stop. The rest is left entirely up to nature.

About the same time, Lord Ventry said:

The only way for a gentleman to travel is by balloon.

Skates

With a little practice, you can travel faster on roller skates than on foot. So why didn't God give you roller skates instead of feet? Why didn't the law of "natural selection" develop a race of wheeled-footed creatures?

An engineer wrote an article saying roller skates are worse than feet at 3 tasks:

going over bumps (and hills and stairs)
walking through sand (and mud)
making sharp turns (and sudden stops)

I found that article comforting, because now I know, when I see a roller-skater pass me on the sidewalk, that my appendage is superior to his.

But the article added a note of gloom: it went on to say that as our society builds even more paved roads and surfaces, roller skates will become more and more effective, and that — if the law of “natural selection” takes place — a future generation of rats will someday have biological roller skates instead of feet, to help them cross our highways fast without getting struck by a car.

I’ve dreaded the era of “Darwin’s Street Rats.” But that era’s come already: in 1998, Roger Adams invented **heelies** (whose brand name is **Heelys**), which are shoes with removable rollers in the heels. They combine the best features of shoes and roller skates. Kids love ‘em!

Finances

Finances are fun — when they’re fat.

Luxury

Coco Chanel said:

The best things in life are free. The second-best things are very, very expensive.

Stocks

The stock market’s a fun game of Chicken Little. If the economy goes down a bit, stocks go down. If the economy goes very down, stocks go up, because investors think the Federal Reserve Bank will finally “sneeze” (do something about blowing out the problem); but when that bank finally decides *not* to sneeze, stocks go down even faster.

Teach your daughter According to a magazine called *The Industry Standard*, you should have a frank talk with your daughter about the “s” word. No, it’s not “sex,” it’s stocks! Teach her the facts of life about “the bulls and the bears” and to distrust men who say “You can’t lose on your first trade.”

Stock-market jargon Remember why they call them stockbrokers: because after you give them money for stocks, you’re broker.

Rising stocks should be called “helium.” Fallen stocks should be called “feathers” (because they’re down), which sounds better than “dogs.”

Then analysts can say, “That stock is a feather — it’s down.” They can also advise, “When a stock goes helium, it’s a gas; but when it turns to a feather, don’t panic: sleep on it.” Bears complain such advice is “full of bull” and you should “sell the feathers before they fall out of your pillow.”

Here’s a stock-market report from the Internet (transmitted by a computer club in Arizona):

Today in the stock market... Helium was up, but feathers were down. Elevators rose, while escalators continued their slow decline.

Knives were up sharply. Cows steered into a bull market. Weights were up in heavy trading. Balloon prices were inflated. Caterpillar stock inched up a bit. Sun peaked at midday. Batteries exploded in an attempt to recharge the market.

Paper was stationary. Diapers remain unchanged. Shipping lines stayed at an even keel.

Mining equipment hit rock bottom. Pencils lost a few points. Light switches were off. Coca Cola fizzled. Fluorescent tubing was dimmed in light trading. Hiking equipment was trailing. The market for raisins dried up.

Banks

Banks try hard to get new depositors. I keep waiting for a bank ad to brag:

You get more interest from us than from your spouse.
We give you something *really big* to play with.

Women who are bank tellers intrigue male customers.

The lady in the bank
Is looking very swank.
I want to call her “honey,”
But she just wants my money.

She sits behind the glass.
She’s got a pretty ass?
Alas, I’ll never know,
Since I can’t see below.

That gal is really spiff.
She looks so damn terrific!
She makes me want to drool,
But she thinks I’m a fool.

Each day my interest grows.
How much? She always knows.
At least she doesn’t groan
When I ask for a loan.

Her skillful hands! Her knowing eyes!
Men wait in line for her surprise.
With clever charm and dazzling flair
She’ll stash our cash in there somewhere:
She makes dreams vanish in thin air.

Insurance

Insurance companies are strange: you give them money and hope you never get anything in return.

I’m not an insurance-oriented person. I’ve tried hard in my life to avoid health insurance (optional), car insurance (optional in New Hampshire), and home insurance (optional if you don’t have a mortgage). I figure, “Why give them money then waste time arguing with them to pay claims?” Except for my wife’s restaurant business, all those insurances are optional. If I have an emergency and go broke, that’s fine with me: a change would do me good.

Gambling

Getting addicted to casino gambling is stupid, since the odds are always against you (unless you’re a blackjack “card counter” who’ll eventually get thrown out).

In roulette, the losses are simple to compute: you have 36 numbers plus 0 and 00, making a total of 38 numbers, and roulette pays out just 36 to 1 (35 extra chips plus your original) instead of 38 to 1, so on an average bet you’ll receive $\frac{36}{38}$ of what you wagered, giving the house a profit of $\frac{2}{38}$ per transaction, which is $\frac{1}{19}$, which is about 5%. Why would I want to play a game where I know I’m going to lose an average of 5% per play?

I admit it can be “cheap entertainment per hour” when “there’s nothing else to do at night” so you “feel like a big shot when you bet big” or “bet just a buck and maybe get lucky,” but those arguments aren’t convincing.

Gambling is the opposite of democracy. In democracy, we try to treat everybody equally; in gambling, we try to anoint somebody as the “winner,” the “king” to which all the others must pay homage and call themselves “losers” or “serfs.” We gamble because of our hidden desire to return to a feudal system, to see who’ll be the “king with the concubines” or the “knight for the night.”

Mathematicians admit gambling is good in this situation:

Suppose you're running a nonprofit organization, and some philanthropist or government agency says that if your organization can raise a million dollars by a certain date, you'll receive a matching fund of another million dollars. Suppose the deadline is approaching and you've raised nearly a million dollars but you're still short. In that case, it would be rational to go to Las Vegas and gamble some of the money, since the winner's payoff gets increased by a million dollars.

Payroll taxes

To understand how payroll taxes work, suppose you're a typical American: you have a job that's advertised as paying a salary of \$30,000 per year (or, equivalently, a wage of \$15 per hour for 2000 hours per year). Part of that \$30,000 goes to the government for taxes. How much of the \$30,000 is left for you to keep?

Here's how to figure that out, using **Form 1040** for the tax year 2019. (Later years are similar.)

If you're at least 65 years old, the IRS calls you a "senior citizen" and lets you file **Form 1040-SR**, which resembles Form 1040 but has bigger print (because the IRS assumes you're half blind) and automatically computes a "senior citizens" discount for you (because the IRS assumes you're too demented to compute that discount yourself).

On the form, lines 1-6 and 7a ask you to list all forms of income. You're supposed to list what you gained from salaries, wages, savings-bank interest, stock & bond sales, renting out rooms in your home, businesses you own, and other things. Let's suppose your life is simple and you got no significant income beyond the \$30,000, so your **total income** is just \$30,000. Line 7b asks you to write that total, \$30,000.

Next, line 8a asks you to total any **special deductions** you can take, such as for tuition and IRAs. (You write the details on Schedule 1, Part II.) Suppose your life is simple and you're not entitled to any special deductions, so your special deductions total \$0. Line 8a asks you to write that total, \$0.

Line 8b tells you to subtract the special deductions (\$0) from the total income (\$30,000) and write the result, which is still \$30,000, which is your **adjusted gross income (AGI)**.

Let's assume you're boringly normal: you're single, not blind, not yet 65 years old, not having kids or other dependents, and nobody can claim *you* as a dependent. Since you're a boringly normal person, you get the \$12,200 **standard deduction** (unless you want to go to the trouble of filling out Schedule A, which lets you substitute a list of **itemized deductions** instead, which works to your advantage just if you gave *lots* of money to charities, doctors, unions, accountants, sales tax, real-estate tax, mortgage bankers, or thieves). So if you're boringly normal, you get just the \$12,200 standard deduction, which the government thinks is enough for you to live on (hah!) and therefore won't tax you on. You write that \$12,200 on line 9. If you own a business, the government might thank you by giving you an extra deduction (20% of the business's profit), which you write on line 10. The sum of lines 9 & 10 is your **total above-line deduction**, which you write on line 11a; so if line 9 shows \$12,200 and line 10 is blank (because you don't own a business), line 11a is \$12,200. You subtract that \$12,200 from the \$30,000 adjusted gross income, giving you \$17,800, which is your **taxable income**, on line 11b.

To compute the tax on that \$17,800, the government uses this method:

Pay 10% tax on the first \$9,700.
Pay 12% tax on the rest.

So you should pay \$970 (10% of \$9,700) plus \$972 (12% of "\$17,800-\$9,700"), which gives a grand total of \$1,942. But since that math is complicated, the government tells you to skip that math and look up the answer in a **tax table** instead, which gives a similar answer, \$1,945. That's your **income tax**, which you write on line 12a and, since your life is simple, also on line 12b.

So on the \$30,000 you made, you must pay an income tax of \$1,945. That doesn't seem big. But you must also pay 2 more taxes: **Social Security** and **Medicare**. They're supposed to help you later, when you become old, decrepit, or dead. Social Security tax is 6.2% of the salary or wage; Medicare tax is 1.45% of the salary or wage. So for your \$30,000 salary, your taxes look like this:

\$1,945 for income tax
\$1,860 for Social Security (6.2% of \$30,000)
\$435 for Medicare (1.45% of \$30,000)

That makes a total tax of \$4,240.

Withholding Your employer automatically takes the Social Security tax and Medicare tax out of each paycheck (and sends that money to the government for you), so you don't have to compute those taxes, and they aren't even mentioned on Form 1040.

Also, your employer automatically *tries* to take the income tax out of each paycheck (using the data you wrote on your W-4 form when you were hired), but computing that tax accurately is hard, so the government makes the employer take out slightly *more* than necessary, just to be safe. On Form 1040's line 17, you write how much your employer took out (**federal income tax withheld**). If that amount was more than necessary, you get a refund.

That's how the federal payroll tax system works for a typical employee.

Extra laws Most states and towns make you pay taxes to *them*, too: sales taxes, real-estate property taxes, income taxes, excise taxes (on gasoline, etc.), and license fees.

The government keeps creating new laws to make rich folks pay even more, poor folks pay even less, and decent people get tax breaks whenever they exhibit good citizenship. To learn about all those laws, you can read (on paper or at IRS.gov) Form 1040's 108-page instruction book and (on paper or at IRS.gov) and Publication 17 (a general intro to IRS taxes), then read hundreds of other books & booklets revealing more details — or use a tax program or ask an accountant.

For example, to make rich folks pay even more, the full tax computation goes like this:

Pay 10% tax on the first part of taxable income (\$0-\$9,700).
Pay 12% tax on the next part of taxable income (\$9,700-\$39,475).
Pay 22% tax on the next part of taxable income (\$39,475-\$84,200).
Pay 24% tax on the next part of taxable income (\$84,200-\$160,725).
Pay 32% tax on the next part of taxable income (\$160,725-\$204,100).
Pay 35% tax on the next part of taxable income (\$204,100-\$510,300).
Pay 37% tax on the rest of taxable income (over \$510,300).

The lines in the chart are called the **tax brackets**. For example, if your taxable income is between \$39,475 and \$84,200, that chart's 3rd line says **you're in the 22% tax bracket** — which means that for every extra dollar of income you get, the government will take away 22% of it (and also take away 6.2% for Social Security and 1.45% for Medicare).

Why do those tax brackets have such strange-looking numbers (such as \$84,200) instead of simple round numbers (such as \$80,000)? That's because, each year, the IRS nudges those numbers up slightly, to account for inflation — until a new Congress votes to compute taxes totally differently.

Employer taxes If you're an employer, you're supposed to pass to the federal government the taxes you withheld from employee paychecks (the federal income tax, the 6.2% Social Security tax, and the 1.45% Medicare tax). But you must give the federal government *extra* money too, out of your *own* pocket.

For example, consider the Social Security tax. The employee contributed 6.2% for that, but the government wants to receive twice as much (12.4%) instead. Where does the difference come from? The *employer's* pocket! The employer withholds 6.2% from the employee's paycheck but must give 12.4% to the government!

Similarly, the employee contributed 1.45% for Medicare tax, but the government wants to receive twice as much (2.9%); that extra comes out of the *employer's* pocket.

Insurance taxes The employer also has to pay **state unemployment insurance, federal unemployment insurance, and worker's compensation insurance (worker's comp)**. The formulas for those amounts get complicated; they depend on each employee's salary and the company's history (how many employees got fired or injured). They typically add up to about 10% of what employees earned. For example, if an employee earned \$30,000, those insurance taxes total about \$3,000. The employer pays for all that insurance; it's illegal for the employer to ask the employee to pay any of it.

Health insurance Many states require big employers to also provide health insurance.

Under the table The employer is supposed to pay, from the employer's own pocket, the 6.2% Social Security tax, 1.45% Medicare tax, and 10% in insurance taxes, making a total of 17.65%, which is \$5,295 per employee per year (for \$30,000 employees), plus maybe health insurance.

To avoid paying all that, dishonest employers pretend they have fewer employees, by paying employees secretly, "**under the table**," which is illegal. If you're an employee who's being paid under the table, remember that you'll get screwed when you eventually try to collect benefits from Social Security, Medicare, unemployment insurance, worker's compensation, or health insurance.

Self-employed You've seen that if you're a typical employee, you "contribute" a 6.2% Social Security tax and 1.45% Medicare tax, and your employer "contributes" an equal matching amount on your behalf, so altogether the government receives 12.4% Social Security and 2.9% Medicare contributions on your behalf. But what if you have no employer? What if *you're* the boss?

In that case, since you're acting as the "employee" and also the "employer," the government makes you pay the whole thing yourself: you must pay "12.4% Social Security and 2.9% Medicare," which totals 15.3%. But since the employer's part of that is a "business expense," you get to deduct part of that tax. To do all that fairly, the government does fancy math:

The government has you fill out **Schedule C** (to compute your business's profit, which is your "salary"), then sends you to **Schedule SE** (to compute the 15.3%). But Schedule SE gives you two surprising breaks: it lets you multiply by .9235 (instead of paying the full amount) and also lets you take half the result as a business deduction (on Schedule 1's line 14, which affects Form 1040's line 8a).

Accountants

Being an accountant can:

be **boring** (staring at numbers all day and reading thousands of pages of arcane tax laws)

require **long hours** (especially at tax time, but also when trying to understand a new client's peculiarities and develop a correct way to account for them)

demand **precision** (produce accurate answers even if the numbers your client gave you were just rough estimates)

To be a business accountant, you must:

ignore how your client's business is ridiculous

talk out of both sides of your mouth (on tax forms, claim the business *lost* money; but on statements to grab investors & loans, claim your client's business is *wildly successful*)

According to the Internet...

Here are answers to your questions about accounting:

What's a budget? An orderly system for living beyond your means.

What's an accountant? Someone who solves a problem you never knew you had, in a way you don't understand, for a fee you can't afford.

What are the 4 laws of accounting? Trial Balances don't; Bank Reconciliations never do; Working Capital does not; Return on Investments never will.

What do you call an accountant without a spreadsheet? Lost.

Why do accountants make good lovers? They're great with figures.

What do accountants suffer from that ordinary people don't? Depreciation.

Why don't accountants read novels? Because a novel's numbers are just page numbers.

Why do accountants get excited on Saturdays? Then they can wear casual clothes to work.

How can you drive an accountant insane? Tie him to a chair, stand in front of him, and fold a road map the wrong way.

What's the definition of "a good tax accountant"? Someone who has a loophole named after him.

What's the most wicked thing a group of accountants can do? Go into town and gang-audit someone.

What does an accountant say when you ask him the time? "It's 9:18AM and 12 seconds; no wait — 13 seconds; no wait — 14 seconds; no wait..."

When an accountant's wife can't sleep, what should she say? "Darling, tell me about your work."

How do accountants have sex? With double entries, between spreadsheets, without losing their balance, and are Certified to do it in Public.

Accountants use what pickup line to snag a date? "Nice assets."

What does a constipated accountant do? Get a pencil and work it out.

You're an accountant if...

You say "and ninthly..."

Going to sleep is an exciting event you look forward to all day long.

"Today's Chuckle" said:

A great actor can bring tears to your eyes. But then, so can your accountant.

Here are tales about accountants:

A doctor told a woman, "You have just 6 months to live." The woman asked, "What should I do?" "Marry an accountant." "Will that make me live longer?" "No, but it will *seem* longer."

A businessman said his company's looking for a new accountant. His friend asked, "Didn't your company hire a new accountant a few weeks ago?" "Yes, that's the accountant we're looking for."

An accountant told his doctor, "I can't fall asleep at night." The doctor asked, "Have you tried counting sheep?" "Yes, but that's the problem! I count, make a mistake, then spend 3 hours searching for it."

When an accountant visited the Natural History museum, he told another visitor, "That dinosaur's age is 200 million years plus 7 months." "How did you get that exact age?" "When I visited 7 months ago, the guide told me the dinosaur was 200 million years old."

When an accountant finished reading nursery rhymes to her son, she answered his question: "No, when Little Bo Peep lost her sheep that wouldn't be tax deductible — but I like your thinking."

When an accountant was reading the story of Cinderella to his 4-year-old daughter, the little girl was fascinated, especially the part where the pumpkin turns into a golden coach. Suddenly she piped up, "Daddy, when the pumpkin turned into a golden coach, would that be classed as income or a long-term capital gain?"

An accountant left his wife this letter: "Dear wife, I'm 54 years old, and by the time you get this letter I'll be at the Grand Hotel with my sexy 18-year-old secretary." But at that hotel, a letter waiting for him said, "Dear husband, I too am 54 years old, and by the time you receive this letter I'll be at the Savoy Hotel with my 18-year-old toy boy. Since you're an accountant, you'll surely appreciate that 18 goes into 54 many more times than 54 goes into 18."

A student asked the head of an accounting firm to explain ethics in accounting. The accountant replied, "A client paid me his bill of \$2,000 in cash. After he left, I counted the cash and it came to \$2,100." The student said, "I see. The ethics question is: *Do I tell the client?*" "Wrong answer! The question is: *Do I tell my partner?*"

To hire a new manager, a company's president asked the first applicant, a mathematician, "What's 2+2?" The mathematician replied, "It's 4, and I can show you the proof, but to understand it you must first take a course in symbolic logic." For "what's 2+2?" the second applicant, a psychotherapist, replied, "Thank you for expressing your concern. To solve that challenge to your life, it's not my role to impose on you a force-fed answer, but I can *guide* you to find *your own* answer, the answer best meeting your unique personality's needs, the answer that's right for *you!*" But the third applicant, the winner, was an accountant who, upon hearing the math problem, got out of his chair, tiptoed to the door to see whether anyone was listening in, then ran around the room to pull down all the window shades, then leaned over the owner's desk and whispered, "What would you *like* it to be?" A different version of that joke, slightly kinder to accountants, has the mathematician say "4," the accountant say "4, plus or minus 10%," and an economist ask "what do you want it to be?"

Auditors are scared to try anything different: they're chicken.

Why did the auditor cross the road? Because he looked in the file and that's what they did last year.

Why did he cross back? So he could charge the client for travel expenses.

Careers

Good luck with your career.

Careers careen.
Use your bean!

A good-for-nothing relative sent me this memo from the Internet about how job-hunting requires the patience of Job:

My first job? In an orange-juice factory! But I got canned: couldn't concentrate. Then I worked as a lumberjack but couldn't hack it, so they gave me the ax. I tried working in a muffler factory but found it was exhausting. I worked for a pool-maintenance company but found the work too draining. I became a professional fisherman but found I couldn't live on my net income.

218 Tricky living: daily survival

I got hired to feed giraffes at a zoo but got fired because I wasn't up to it. I tried being a tailor but wasn't suited for a sew-sew job. I tried being a barber but couldn't cut it. I tried being a deli worker; but any way I sliced it, I couldn't cut the mustard. I worked at Starbucks but quit because it was always the same old grind. To spice up my life, I tried being a chef but didn't have the thyme. I tried working in a shoe factory but didn't fit in. I got a job in a health club, but they said I wasn't fit for the job. I tried being a musician but wasn't noteworthy enough. I spent years studying to become a doctor but didn't have enough patience. I took a job as an historian, until I realized there was no future in it. So I retired — and found I'm a perfect fit for the job... of doing nothing!

To create an impressive résumé, you can give yourself a fancy title, even if you're just unemployed at home:

What you do

answer & screen phone calls
generally mow the lawn
use weed killer & bug killer
scrub & wash the dishes
rinse & dry the dishes
take out the garbage
clean the house
general housework
get divorced

Your title

Manager of high-speed fiber-optic network
General in charge of advanced weaponry
Director of chemical warfare
Chief surgeon, microbiology department
Chief officer, aquatic rescue operations
Director of environmental services
Curator of the Americana museum
Domestic engineer
First mate on the USS Matrimony

By dishing out those titles to your housemates, you can make household chores more fun. Aye, aye, mate! Salute the dishes!

When an airline pilot (Larry Govoni) was leaving his plane, he peeked under the plane and saw a worker trying to empty the plane's toilet. The hose burst and sprayed shit all over the worker. Larry looked at the poor worker and asked, "Why do you put up with a job like this? Why don't you quit?" The worker replied:

What!!! And give up a career in the aerospace industry?

Here's the moral of that tale:

Your first job might rain shit on you, but it can lead to better things.

Here's the counter-moral:

If your first job rains shit on you, remember it can lead to better things — but probably won't.

Drew Carey said:

You hate your job? Why didn't you say so!

There's a support group for that: it's called *Everybody*, and they meet at the bar.

If you must work nights, recite this poem:

Night crew

I'm called a secret worker.
I work throughout the night.
I keep the world in order,
So mornings will delight.

Though you may never see me,
You're glad that I've been here.
When folks come to relieve me,
We give each other cheer.

I try to do what's right.
Please tell me if I'm wrong
And give me one more chance
To show the world my song.

A creature of the night,
I venture out at day
To stare at God's bright light,
Then sleep, then work and pray.

Ultimate boss

Who's your ultimate boss, really? Each employee lusts to be the employee's boss, but that boss wants to be the boss's boss, until you finally get up to the **chief executive officer (CEO)**, who's still not really the final boss, since the CEO is at the mercy of the Board of Directors and its chairman, who really isn't the boss either, since he's at the mercy of the stockholders who can

vote him out of office. But the stockholders aren't the bosses either, since they're rather powerless to control the company: they just gaze at it from afar.

Some computer techs view their employers not as "bosses" but as "clients." If the "clients" are mean to them, they quit and find different clients who are nicer. The techs treat those corporations not as their bosses but as just tools, to use as ways to get "computers to play with" and "interesting experiences," until it's time to move on to experiences that are even wilder.

Remember: you're not just an "employee"; you're your own boss. If your "client" ever gives you a hard time, find another and let your client go begging and whither.

You're the master of your own fate. In 1875, William Ernest Henley said in his poem *Invictus*:

I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

You're in charge, tiger. Just make sure that, before you quit, you have another job lined up — or at least some savings to get over the bump in your road.

Fame

Becoming famous is easy: just do something wonderful, horrible, or crazy. The hard part is living with yourself afterwards, since the rest of your life will seem boring after your bout of fame.

For example, Albert Einstein is usually pictured as an old, wise guy; but the work that made him famous, "The Special Theory of Relativity," was done when he was about 20, just a kid. Albert Einstein, sports heroes, and rock stars became famous because of what they accomplished during their youths. They fight bouts of depression when they get older.

If you're not famous yet, don't be discouraged: be happy you still have a chance to look forward to, instead of a youth to look back at and mourn the loss of.

No matter how famous you become, you don't control your career.

If you're a famous actor, you're at the mercy of the script written by somebody else. If you're the screenwriter who wrote that script, you're at the mercy of how the director and actors butcher it.

If you're President of the United States, you can't accomplish anything unless you convince Congress to pass laws supporting your position. For example, President Kennedy didn't accomplish much, because Congress disagreed with him; President Lyndon Johnson, who came next, created many wonderful programs (such as Head Start) because he got Congress on his side; but he got booed anyway because he botched one "little" part of his job: the Vietnam War.

If you're the president of a company, you can get fired by the board of directors.

If you're a TV anchorman, you're at the mercy of the scripts and video clips that the rest of the news team hands you. If you're a TV weatherman, you feel useless when the weather is boringly nice or when the U.S. Weather Service feeds you a prediction that turns out wrong.

If you're a sports hero, what happens when your team loses?

Passions and dreams

A friend asked, "What are your passions, and did you follow your dreams?" I replied, "I followed my dream, until she locked the door."

Follow your dreams until they turn impractical. Then fine-tune them, to maximize ROI (return on investment).

I confess to this passion:

I want to do enough good to make me famous for doing good.

Though the word "famous" makes me seem vain, it's my form of reinforcement and at least produces a positive social effect.

Word on the door

Here's a famous tale:

A professor, walking to his classroom, tries to think of how to inspire his students to improve. When he reaches the door, he sees the word "Push," which gives him the idea: he walks into the classroom and gives an inspiring speech ending with, "To get ahead in your career, you need one key thing, written on the door you came through!" The students look at the door and see the key to getting ahead: "Pull."

To get ahead, you must **push** yourself to work harder but also make friends with folks who can **pull** you up.

Apologize

If you make a mistake at work, apologize. My uncle recommended saying this:

I'm the opposite of a mechanic. A mechanic screws things *down*. I screwed things *up*. Sorry!

Marketing

If you're a woman who sees an attractive guy at a party, how should you react? The Internet includes this explanation of marketing terms, so you can get your MBA:

If you go up to him and say "I'm fantastic in bed," that's **direct marketing**. If instead you say "Clint Eastwood said I'm fantastic in bed," that's **celebrity marketing**. If you say "I'm fantastic in bed and you can take me to just Burger King afterwards, unlike that blonde, whom you must take to the Keg," that's **price differentiation**. If you say "I'm fantastic in bed" and he says "She's fantastic in bed" to the next guy, who passes the comment to a third guy, that's **viral marketing**.

Suppose you go up to him, pour him a drink, say "May I," reach up to straighten his tie, while brushing your breast lightly against his arm, then say "By the way, I'm fantastic in bed." That's **public relations**.

If instead one of your *friends* goes up to him, points at you, and says "She's fantastic in bed," that's **advertising**. If your friend adds, "She's more fantastic in bed than that brunette," it's **comparative advertising**. If she says "Every guy at the McDonald's on First Avenue says she's fantastic in bed," that's **institutional advertising** and **corporate endorsement**.

Suppose instead you go up to him, get his phone number, then phone him the next day and say "Hi, I'm fantastic in bed." That's **telemarketing**.

Suppose you go up to him and he *promises* to give you his number, but then a whole bunch of new girls arrive, so all the guys hesitate to give you their numbers, and at the end of the night you give your number to the pathetic guy collecting empties. That's **product life cycle**.

If, on the other hand, *he* walks up to *you* and says "I hear you're fantastic in bed," that's **brand recognition**.

If a man ignores you because there are other women at the party, that's **elastic demand**. If he jumps on you right away (and offers you dinner and a movie) because no other women are at the party, that's **inelastic demand**.

If you go up to a *group* of handsome guys you never slept with and say "I'm fantastic in bed," that's **market penetration**. If, just before saying that, you open your top more and tug down your pants to expose your thong, that's **product development**.

Suppose you go up to a group of guys. By using covert hugging and flicking off imaginary lint, you manage to slip your phone number into their wallets. You also remove any phone numbers they collected from other women and write your phone number atop of those other numbers and bigger than those numbers. That's **search-engine optimization**.

Suppose you see a group of guys you never slept with, ignore them, walk up to the *girls* they're with, and tell the *girls* "I'm fantastic in bed." That's **product diversification**.

If you walk around the room, asking guys how much money's in their wallets and whether they have jobs & cars, to decide which guys to give your phone number to, that's **target-market segmentation**.

If you go up to a guy you slept with before and say "I'd like to sleep with you again in a different position," that's **market development**.

If you talk a guy into going to bed with your *friend*, you're a **sales rep**. If your friend can't satisfy him, so he calls *you*, you're doing **tech support**.

While you're on your way to a party, suppose you think about all the great men that could be in all the houses you pass, so you climb on the roof of a house at the center and shout at the top of your lungs "I'm fantastic in bed." That's **spam**.

Those examples were collected at:

witiger.com/marketing/marketingisnotadvertisingalone.htm

Office worse than prison

According to the Internet, being in an office is worse than prison:

prison:	you spend most of your time in a 10-by-10 cell
work:	you spend most of your time in an 8-by-8 cubicle
prison:	you get 3 free meals a day
work:	you get a break for 1 meal and must pay for it
prison:	if you have good behavior, you get time off
work:	if you have good behavior, you get more work
prison:	you can watch TV and play games
work:	you get fired for watching TV and playing games
prison:	you get your own toilet
work:	you must share the toilet with people who pee on the seat
prison:	they let your family and friends visit
work:	you're not supposed to chat with your family
prison:	the helpful guard locks and unlocks all doors for you
work:	you must open and close all doors yourself
prison:	all expenses are paid by taxpayers, with no work required of you
work:	you pay all your expenses to go to work, and the IRS deducts taxes from your salary to pay for prisoners
prison:	you spend most of your life inside bars, wanting to get out
work:	you spend most of your time wanting to get out and go inside bars
prison:	you must deal with sadistic wardens
work:	they're called "managers"

Now get back to work. You're not getting paid to read jokes!

Yes, jail is often better than normal life! In 1904, the author "O. Henry" (whose real name was William Sydney Porter) wrote a short story called "**The Cop and the Anthem.**" It's about a bum who wanted to go to jail, because jail is much better than his normal homeless life. You can read it at:

<http://etc.usf.edu/lit2go/131/the-four-million/2401/the-cop-and-the-anthem>

Management

Here are tricks to becoming a good boss.

Signs

To help your company succeed, hang cute signs that make your customers smile, such as these gems (from the Internet and my personal observations):

Where seen	Message
Tire shop	Invite us to your next blowout.
Muffler shop	No appointment necessary. We hear you coming.
Radiator shop	Best place in town to take a leak.
Tow truck	We don't charge an arm and a leg. We want tows.
Tow truck #2	If you drink and drive, we might meet by accident.
Car dealership	Best way to get back on your feet: miss a car payment.
Restaurant	Don't stand there hungry. Come in and get fed up.
Pizza shop	7 days without pizza makes one weak.
Propane-filling station	Tank heaven for little grills.
Septic-tank truck	We're #1 in the #2 business.
Plumber's truck	We repair what your husband fixed.
Plumber's truck #2	Don't sleep with a drip. Call your plumber.
Plumber's truck #3	We keep you in hot water.
Septic-tank service	Our product may stink, but our service is excellent.
Electrician's truck	Let us remove your shorts.
Electric company	We'd be delighted if you send in your payment. But if you don't, you will be.
Landscape's truck	You grow it. We mow it.
Blasting company	We set earth-shattering standards.
Steel-construction co.	Our erections last a lifetime.
Plastic surgeon's office	Can we pick your nose?

Podiatrist's office	Time wounds all heels.
Proctologist's door	To expedite your visit, please back in.
Veterinarian's office	Be back in 5 minutes. Sit! Stay!
Maternity-room door	Push. Push. Push.
Gynecologist's office	Dr. Jones, at your cervix.
Optometrist's office	If you don't see what you're looking for, you've come to the right place.
Dry cleaner	Drop your pants here and get prompt attention.
Funeral home's lawn	Drive carefully. We'll wait.
Motel swimming pool	We don't swim in your toilet. Please don't piss in our pool.
Fence	Salesmen welcome! Dog food is expensive.
Fence #2	Beware of owner — never mind the dog.
Office door	Danger: contents under pressure.
Employee's T-shirt	I've used up my sick days, so I'm calling in dead.
Nonsmoking area	If we see smoke, we'll assume you're on fire and take action.
Store security dept.	God helps those who help themselves, but God help those who help themselves here.

Employees appreciate this advice from the Internet:

Grant me the serenity to accept what I cannot change, the courage to change what I cannot accept, and the wisdom to hide the bodies I butchered today when they pissed me off.

Be careful of the toes you step on today, as they may be connected to the ass you must kiss tomorrow.

Always give 100% at work: 12% on Monday, 23% Tuesday, 40% Wednesday, 20% Thursday, and 5% Friday.

When you get upset, remember it takes 42 muscles to frown but just 4 to extend your middle finger.

Be nice

Jimmy Durante said:

Be nice to people on your way up — because you might meet them on your way down.

If you're the boss, here are 4 cost-effective ways to be nice to your employees:

Give raises often If necessary, make the raises small, but give them *often* (to employees doing well).

For an hourly employee, give a 25¢-per-hour raise, often. For example, instead of giving a \$1-per-hour raise at the end of the year, give a 25¢-per-hour raise 4 times per year.

That way, the employee can proudly tell family & friends about the frequent raises, and the employees will feel their careers and lives are moving forward. That pride will turn into a more enthusiastic work ethic, more energy & speed, more efficiency, and less turnover. It will also encourage other employees to do better so *they* can get raises soon too! Just tell employees, "I'm looking for a solid excuse to give you all raises soon, so do well!"

I've had good luck starting employees at low salaries (while in training) but giving them frequent raises as they learn more and become more marketable: a 25¢-per-hour raise *every 2 weeks!*

Do "favors" Although high wages and salaries are effective motivators, "favors" are even more effective and cost less.

Take the employees to dinner. (The meal is partly a tax write-off if you spend at least half of the conversation on business.) Give the employees a pleasant working environment. Give them flexible hours. Let them take time off from work whenever they wish (without pay but without criticizing them). Thank them and praise them when they do well (or at least haven't screwed up recently).

Employees remember favors, tell their friends about them, and make the employees want to stay at your company because of their love for your personal interest in them.

Look at your bottom line: a bunch of favors costs even less than a tiny raise and is remembered more. Moreover, they make you seem human instead of an asshole.

Don't fire a bad employee immediately Instead, chat with the employee.

Say you want to help the employee do better to protect the employee from getting fired. Say that you're on the employee's side and you won't fire the employee unless you have to, but warn that the "have to" might come soon unless the employee and you can work together to make things better.

When you say that you're willing to "go to bat" for the employee, the employee will typically respond by trying to "go to bat" for you.

If you think the employee is hopelessly incompetent and will get fired anyway, chat with the employee to help find a more suitable line of work. That will help the employee's future and also help yours, since you'll avoid getting penalized by the state government for generating unemployment claims.

Congratulate a good employee who leaves If a good employee decides to leave the company, congratulate the employee on moving ahead and for "graduating" from the job. Remind the employee that alumni are always welcome to come back, as consultants or part-timers or temps or, after further experiences outside the company, to higher positions in management.

When other employees see you congratulate the dear departed, those employees will feel less nervous about telling you *their* career plans, so you won't be hit by *unexpected* departures that could wreck your company.

Job recommendations

When my employees go on to hunt for better jobs and ask me for a "job recommendation," I say "gladly" and also say I prefer to give the recommendation by phone.

When the interviewer phones me to ask whether the employee was good, I try to think of at least one good thing and one bad thing to say about the employee.

If I were to say just good things, the interviewer would think I was just whitewashing over problems and wasn't telling the whole truth, so I try to include something that's negative but not important to that particular job. Then the interviewer trusts me for being a well-balanced objective journalist and thinks employee's strengths and weaknesses are good match to the new job, making the employee an enthusiastic member of the new team.

I try to help all employees do well in their afterlife, just like a high school tries to help its graduates move on to the best colleges. Then I can brag to new faces who are thinking of working for me, "This is a great place to work, because this job prepares you for a super-successful career: just look at what happened to my graduates!"

That's the same pitch the military uses, to get kids to enlist: this job trains you to be tomorrow's leaders.

On the Internet, I found this cute example of a job recommendation:

Memo to Managing Director:

- 1 Bob Smith, my assistant programmer, can always be found
- 2 hard at work at his desk. He works independently, without
- 3 wasting company time talking to colleagues. Bob never
- 4 thinks twice about assisting fellow employees, and always
- 5 finishes given assignments on time. Often he takes extended
- 6 measures to complete his work, sometimes skipping coffee
- 7 breaks. Bob is a dedicated individual who has absolutely no
- 8 vanity in spite of his high accomplishments and profound
- 9 knowledge in his field. I firmly believe that Bob can be
- 10 classed as an asset employee, the type which cannot be
- 11 dispensed with. Consequently, I recommend that Bob be
- 12 promoted to executive management, and a proposal will be
- 13 executed as soon as possible.

Addendum:

That idiot was standing over my shoulder while I wrote that report. Please reread just the odd-numbered lines.

3 envelopes

Business executives ponder the tale of the 3 envelopes:

It's time for a new person to be the CEO. He gets this advice from his predecessor: "I've prepared 3 envelopes. Here they are, but don't open them yet. If you ever have trouble, open the first envelope. If you have further trouble, open the second envelope. If you have even more trouble, open the third envelope. Each envelope contains 3 magic words saying what to do so the company will succeed. Good luck."

At first, the new CEO does well, as the company's employees eagerly help him learn the ropes and give him the benefit of the doubt. But after that honeymoon period, things start going downhill.

He opens the first envelope. It contains these 3 magic words: "Blame your predecessor." He's so happy to read those words, because they're so right! He obeys those words. He tells the employees and stockholders that the company's problems are just the delayed consequences of the mistakes that his predecessor made, and he'll usher in the dawn of a new, better era. That pep talk works. Everybody is inspired by his gung-ho forward-looking attitude, and the company improves. But eventually, things start going downhill again.

He opens the second envelope. It contains these 3 magic words: "Reorganize the company." He's so happy to read those words, because they're so right! He obeys those words. He fires the employees who are deadwood and invents new ways of managing everything. That improves the company. But eventually, things start going downhill again.

He opens the third envelope. It says: "Prepare three envelopes."

Every CEO goes through those 3 cycles before getting canned. Which envelope is *your* company's CEO using now? #1, #2, or #3?

How many employees?

My dad owned a company. He was sad the employees were often lazy, doing no work. When people asked him "How many employees work for you?" he replied:

About half.

Restaurant management

Most Americans (over 50% of them) wind up eventually working for a restaurant sometime during their careers. "Working for a restaurant" could mean as a cook, a server (waiter or waitress), a bartender, a dishwasher, a greeter (host or hostess or costumed character), a table-cleaner (busboy or busgirl), an entertainer (musician, magician, or DJ), or a manager.

Here are tips about being a good restaurant boss. Even if you'd rather be the boss of some other kind of business, you'll find these tips worth reading, for 2 reasons:

Many of these tips about restaurant management apply to other businesses also.

When you eat at a restaurant, you should have some kind of idea of the hell that takes place when you aren't looking.

Some of these tips are well known throughout the restaurant industry. Others are derived from my personal experiences helping my wife Donna run her restaurant.

Should you own? If you dream of owning your own restaurant, cool your enthusiasm. Owning a restaurant is less pleasant than most people think:

You'll feel pressure to work long hours: breakfast, lunch, and dinner; weekdays, weekends, and holidays; prep before breakfast; cleanup after dinner; late-night bar and party functions. bar-and-parties. If you're not at the restaurant during all those hours, employees will screw up (if they're there) or competitors will steal your business (if your employees are *not* there).

You'll be constantly handling crises. In the restaurant business, the employees, food suppliers, and equipment are all unreliable: either they don't show up or else they screw up so badly that you wish they didn't exist at all. The customers are unpredictable: huge hordes of customers show up at unexpected moments; you can't handle them all well, so you get a bad reputation. The health inspector shows up at unexpected moments, too, with a single mission: to find things to yell at you about. The labor department and fire department send inspectors too, just to find *more* things to yell at you about. At unexpected times, no customers show up at all, and you regret paying so many employees to stand around doing nothing. Each day, you'll tear your hair out, though by the end of the day the crisis is usually solved and you can put your toupee back on.

You'll make less profit than you expect. In fact, if you make any profit at all, you're lucky: the average restaurant lasts just 2 years, before it goes bankrupt (or gets shut down by authorities, or its owner gets disgusted and quits). You'll discover that the chefs and servers typically make more dollars per hour than an owner does (especially when you include any "fringe benefits" they get, such as tips, free food, and state-required insurance). Here's the word that best describes the typical restaurant owner: *deluded!*

Ted Turner (the billionaire who started CNN and married Jane Fonda) said that if you want to get rich fast, the *worst* businesses to own are "restaurants" and "gas stations," because both require long hours, give you little pay, and are harder to manage than you think. For example, if you're a Mom who does a great job of cooking for your family, don't jump to the conclusion that you have the experience necessary to run a restaurant business profitably: you need to learn a lot about "business profitability" first! Before opening your own restaurant, try working in somebody else's, to get practice and see what goes wrong and how to handle crises. Let somebody else take the risks while you learn. Wayne Green said:

Make your mistakes on somebody *else's* money.

How to start If you nevertheless decide to start a restaurant, you must decide whether to create your own from scratch or buy a pre-existing restaurant.

If you create your own restaurant from scratch, you must buy or lease a building space then spend many thousands of dollars for equipment and décor.

The equipment will cost more than you think, because health inspectors require you to buy equipment that's for commercial (heavy-duty) use rather than residential use. You're not allowed to use the cheap kitchen appliances you see for sale at discount stores such as Best Buy.

You must obey all the rules about "restaurant buildings," such as having good vents (to let out the cooking smoke), many kinds of sinks (some for dirty dishes, some for rinsing dishes, some for washing vegetables, some for washing mops), handicapped-accessible bathrooms, tables far enough apart so customers can run between them to escape a fire, handrails on stairs, kitchen doors that shut automatically (to stop any kitchen fire from spreading), not too much junk stored in the basement, and no electrical cords that people can trip on.

The fire department will also require that the cooking vents be cleaned every six months, so put them where the professional "cooking vent cleaning crew" can get into them easily. Any big change to the flooring or walls will require approval from a building inspector, who will charge you for a building permit (and charge you fines for whatever you screw up).

If you buy a restaurant that already exists, find out how many laws might be broken. Officials don't bother old restaurants much, but since you'll be the new owner, your layout and operations will be looked at critically, even if you keep the same layout and operations as your predecessor. Officials like to give new owners a hard time, to make sure the new owners "get the message" and get off to a good, clean start.

You must register your restaurant's name with your state's "Secretary of State Office," which will reject the name if it sounds confusingly like the name of any other business in the state (even if the other business is far away, and even if the other business has been defunct for many decades). If you want to put a sign in your window or on your lawn or in your parking lot, you'll need

permission from the town's "architecture committee" (or zoning board), to make sure your sign doesn't violate your town's sense of beauty, especially if the town considers itself beautifully picturesque (as many towns here in New England do). If you plan to serve alcohol or stay open late, you'll need permission from the town, to make sure you won't bother nearby families who want to go to bed early without hearing songs, yells, and crashes from your drunk customers.

If you plan to sell wine, beer, or harder liquors, you must get a license from your state's "liquor authority," which will make you fill out lots of forms about your financial background and operations, to make sure you're not controlled by the Mafia. You must follow your state's laws about where to buy your alcohol supplies: typically, restaurants aren't allowed to buy alcohol from consumer stores, such as supermarkets. Similar restrictions apply to cigarettes — if your state permits cigarette smoking in restaurants at all.

As with any business that has employees, you're required to set up paperwork so you can hand the state its sales taxes, meals taxes, profit taxes, and unemployment taxes, hand the IRS the other payroll taxes, pay workers comp insurance, and pay whatever other health & liability insurance your state or landlord demand.

Holidays

Holidays are when you're required to join family and friends, to give hearts a warm glow; but sometimes the glow comes from a radioactive facade.

Here's how we celebrate holidays in the United States.

On **Thanksgiving**, we walk to the dinner table, bow our heads, and thank God for what didn't happen:

Dear Lord, thanks for not making us be turkeys, Indians, or Pilgrims. Thanks for not making us attend that first Thanksgiving dinner, whose participants all became hunted creatures. Thank God we weren't there! And could Thou please make our current relatives vanish?

In 1844, Lydia Maria Child wrote a long poem about visiting grandparents on Thanksgiving day. Later, the poem was set to music. Singers changed 2 words ("grandfather" became "grandmother," and "wood" became "woods"), simplified others, and omitted the boring verses, so the song becomes:

Over the river and through the woods
To grandmother's house we go.
The horse knows the way to carry the sleigh
Through white and drifting snow. Oh!

Over the river and through the woods,
Oh, how the wind does blow!
It stings the toes and bites the nose
As over the ground we go.

Kids tired of grandma prefer this variant:

Over the river and through the woods
To grandmother's house we go.
The hearse knows the way to carry and slay
Our grandma in the snow. Oh!

Over the river and through the woods,
Oh, how the witch does blow!
We'll slice her toes and bite her nose,
Then bash her to grounds. Let's go!

On **Mother's Day**, Dad treats Mom to dinner. To thank him, she has the kids buy a tie to strangle him on **Father's Day**.

On **Christmas**, we celebrate the universe's biggest miracle: that Joseph believed his wife when she said she got pregnant from "nobody." This is a Jewish holiday: Christians pay Jewish merchants to create a holiday that stimulates the economy, while homeless bums wandering in the snow mumble carols such as "Chestnuts roasting on a funeral pyre." Happy Christians say:

I wish you a merry Christmas, and happy New Year!

But naughty Christians mispronounce the words slightly, to say:

I wish you a merry clit, Miss, and a hoppy nude year!

On **Easter**, Christ vanished then reappeared as a miraculous bunny who lays eggs tasting like chocolate.

Halloween is the ultimate "wear anything to work" day, when you can wear costumes showing bosses and neighbors how you really feel. You can even change your sex without raising an eyebrow: just raise your pitchfork.

February is the shortest month but lets you get twice as crazy:

Valentine's Day is the only day you can wish your lover "Happy VD!" On this day, you hope to get a card from a "secret admirer" — in vain.

On **Presidents' Day**, ghosts of Washington & Lincoln abolish their true birthdays and create a joint holiday to sell cars at dealership joints.

So in February, if you don't find true love, you get the booby prize of buying a car instead.

Martin Luther King Day was created by people who care about equality of car sales, to let you buy cars even in January, so fewer car salesmen will commit January suicide. It's the day when car salesmen, happy at not having to wait another month for glory, sing "We shall overcome you *today!*"

On **Saint Patrick's Day**, we dress up as green Martians but when asked "Where are you from?" pretend to be from "Ireland."

On **Memorial Day**, we remember the souls who died on our behalf, then barbecue more of them because they taste so good.

On **Labor Day**, we thank unions for standing up for their rights, so prices go up and economists claim the economy is growing.

Independence Day is when we Americans celebrate being independent from England, which is too stuffy. **Columbus Day** is when we honor the man who got lost and dumped us here.

Sinful holidays

Fact:

For the original Pilgrims, Thanksgivings were days of fasting, prayer, and attending Thursday sermons.

Just in recent years did Thanksgiving become a celebration of gluttony, which is one of the 7 deadly sins. God granted Americans the inalienable right to create holidays celebrating all 7:

7 deadly sins Holidays to celebrate them

lust	Valentine's Day
gluttony	Thanksgiving
greed	Christmas (greed to get presents)
sloth	Labor Day (workers relax)
wrath	Martin Luther King Day (anger at racism)
envy	Easter (envy at fashions)
pride	Independence Day (pride in America)

I listed those sins in the order proclaimed by Pope Gregory (and copied by Dante's *Divine Comedy*).

Christmas party

Planning a Christmas party can be a challenge, according to these memos on the Internet:

December 1 from Patty Lewis, Human Resources Director, to all employees

I'm happy to say the company Christmas party will take place December 23 at noon in the banquet room of Luigi's Open Pit Barbecue.

Plenty of eggnog! We'll have a band playing carols; feel free to sing along. Don't be surprised if our CEO shows up dressed as Santa!

A Christmas tree will be lit at 1PM. Employees can exchange gifts then; but to make gift-giving easy for everyone's pocket, no gift should be over \$10. Our CEO will make a special announcement at that time.

Merry Christmas to you and your family!

December 2 from Patty Lewis

In no way was yesterday's memo intended to exclude our Jewish employees. We recognize Hanukah's an important holiday that often coincides with Christmas, though unfortunately not this year. From now on, we're calling it our "Holiday" party. The same goes for employees celebrating Kwanzaa.

There will be no Christmas tree, no Christmas carols sung. We'll have other kinds of music for your enjoyment. Are you happy now? Happy Holidays to you and your family!

December 3 from Patty Lewis

Regarding the note I received from a member of Alcoholics Anonymous requesting a non-drinking table: you didn't sign your name. I'm happy to accommodate that request, but if that table has a sign saying "AA only," you wouldn't be anonymous anymore. How am I supposed to handle this?

Forget about the gifts exchange. No gift exchanges will be allowed, since union members feel \$10 is too much, and executives think \$10 is too chintzy.

December 4 from Patty Lewis

What a diverse group we are! I had no idea that December 20 begins the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which forbids eating & drinking during daylight. Perhaps Luigi's can hold off on serving your meal until the party's end (since days are short this time of year) or package everything for take-home in little foil swans. Will that work?

Meanwhile, I've arranged for members of Overeaters Anonymous to sit farthest from the dessert buffet. Pregnant women will get the table closest to restrooms.

Gays are allowed to sit with each other. Lesbians don't have to sit with gay men; each group will have its own table. Yes, there will be a flower arrangement for the gay men's table. To the person wanting to cross-dress: sorry!

For short people, we'll have booster seats.

For those on a diet, we'll have low-fat foods. Since we can't control salt in the food, people with high blood pressure should taste first. The restaurant can't supply sugar-free desserts for diabetics, but there will be fresh fruit.

Did I miss anything?

December 5 from Patty Lewis

December 22 marks the Winter Solstice? So what? What do you want me to do, tap-dance on your heads? Fire regulations at Luigi's prohibit burning of sage by our "earth-based Goddess-worshipping" employees, but we'll try to accommodate your shamanic drumming circle during the band's breaks. Okay?

December 6 from Patty Lewis

C'mon, people! Nothing sinister was intended by having our CEO dress up like Santa! Even if the anagram of "Santa" happens to be "Satan," there's no evil connotation to our own "little man in a red suit." It's a tradition, folks, like sugar shock at Halloween, family feuds over Thanksgiving turkey, and broken hearts on Valentine's Day. Could we lighten up, please?

The CEO's changed his mind about having a special announcement at the gathering. You'll be notified instead by mail sent to your home.

December 7 from Patty Lewis

I have no f*cking idea what CEO's announcement will be about. What the f*ck do I care? I know what I'm going to get!

If you change your address now, you're dead! No more changes of address will be allowed in my office. If you try to come in and change your address, I'll have you hung from the ceiling in the warehouse!

Vegetarians!?!?!? I've had it with you people! We're going to keep this party at Luigi's Open Pit Barbecue whether you like it or not. You can sit at the table farthest from the "grill of death," as you put it. You'll get your f*cking salad bar, including hydroponic tomatoes; but you know, *they* have feelings, too. Tomatoes scream when you slice them. I've heard them scream. I'm hearing them scream right now!

I hope you all have a rotten holiday! Drive drunk and die, you hear me? Signed, the bitch from Hell!

December 8 from Terri Bishop, acting Human Resources Director

I'm sure I speak for all of us in wishing Patty Lewis a speedy recovery from her stress-related illness. I'll keep forwarding your cards to her at the sanatorium.

Management's decided to cancel our Holiday Party and instead give everyone the afternoon off. Happy Holidays!

Nerdistan

Six “-istan” countries are famous: Pakistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan. But for more fun, visit **Nerdistan**, which is the international community of nerds, who invented 3 nerd holidays:

March 14 is **Pi Day**, because pi (π) is 3.14. In the U.S., “ π ” is pronounced “pie,” so Americans celebrate Pi Day by eating pie. (In Greece, “ π ” is pronounced “pee,” but Greeks do *not* celebrate by eating pee.) It’s also Einstein’s birthday. Pi Day was started by physicist Larry Shaw in the San Francisco Exploratorium (1988).

May 4 is **Star Wars Day**, because the Star Wars movie says “May the Force be with you,” which sounds like “May the Fourth” if you lithp. It began in London when Margaret Thatcher became prime minister (May 4, 1979) but first became popular in Toronto (2011), as a day to celebrate royally wacky movies.

November 11 is **Singles Day**, because it’s 11/11. Especially in China, singles celebrate their independence from marriage — or desire for it — by buying lots of presents for themselves. Singles Day was started in Nanjing University (1993), later popularized by Alibaba’s online sites (Tmall and Taobao), which made Singles Day the Chinese imitation of America’s Black Friday: shopping for bargains! It’s the same date as U.S. Veterans Day and honors the valiant men & women caught in the battles of the sexes.

Put those dates on your calendar, so you can become a true nerd and join a nerdist colony!

Aging

How old are you? According to the Internet, here’s what people will call you:

Age	Name
less than 2 months after fertilization	embryo
2-8 months after fertilization	fetus
born but younger than 1 month	newborn
2-11 months after birth	infant
Age	Name
1-2	toddler
3-5	preschooler
6-9	schoolkid
10-12	tween (or tweeny or preteen)
13-19	teenager (or teen)
20-39	young adult
40-59	middle-aged
60 & up	elderly (or senior citizen or oldster)
60-69	sexagenarian
70-79	septuagenarian
80-89	octogenarian
90-99	nonagenarian
100-109	centenarian
110 & up	supercentenarian

Objections:

In England & Wales, an “**infant** school” is for ages 4-7, not kids under 1.

Some people define “**toddler**” as someone “old enough to walk but young enough to do it awkwardly.”

Some people consider the “**tween**” years to begin at age 9 instead of 10, since 9 is the age when girls become “too old for toys, too young for boys.”

The publishing industry considers “**young-adult** fiction” to be for & about kids ages 12-18, not 20-39 (though those books are also enjoyed by people in their 20’s). Some people consider “**young adults**” to be ages 18-29 (old enough to vote but young enough to still act stupidly, so “old enough to legally screw but young enough to still screw up.”

Because people are living longer now, many people think “**middle-aged**” should be 45-64 (instead of 40-59), so if you’re under 45 you’re still “young.”

If you live to be at least 60, congrats! These famous people didn’t last that long:

Travelers	Age when died
Amelia Earhart	39
Christopher Columbus	54
Artists	
Raphael & Vincent van Gogh	37
Andy Warhol	58
Actors	
James Dean	24
Rudolph Valentino	31
Bruce Lee	32
John Belushi & Chris Farley	33
John Candy	44
Lou Costello	52
Clark Gabel	59
Actresses	
Jayne Mansfield	34
Marilyn Monroe	36
Gilda Radner	42
Judy Garland	47
Composers	
Schubert	31
Mozart	35
Mendelssohn & Gershwin	38
Chopin	39
Schumann	46
Tchaikovsky	53
Debussy	55
Beethoven	56
Writers	
Anne Frank	15
John Keats	25
Edgar Allen Poe & Franz Kafka	40
Jane Austen	41
David Thoreau	44
Oscar Wilde & George Orwell	46
Douglas Adams	49
William Shakespeare	52
Charles Dickens & James Joyce	58
Nathaniel Hawthorne	59
Leaders	
King “Tut” Tutankhamun	19
Nero	30
Alexander the Great	32
Jesus Christ	33 or 34
Princess Diana	36
Marie Antoinette	37
King Louis the 16 th	38
Cleopatra & Martin L. King Jr.	39
John F. Kennedy	46
Alexander Hamilton	49
Napoleon Bonaparte	51
Vladimir Lenin	53
King Henry the 8 th	55
Julius Caesar, Lincoln, Hitler	56
Musicians	
Ritchie Valens	17
Sid Vicious	21
Buddy Holly	22
Tupac Shakur	25
Hendrix, Joplin, Jim Morrison	27
Hank Williams	29
Patsy Cline	31
Glenn Miller & John Lennon	40
Elvis Presley	42
Ricky Nelson	45
Edith Piaf	47
Whitney Houston	48
Michael Jackson	50
Spike Jones	53

When you get older, you gain wisdom and lose hair.

Hair today, gone tomorrow

When I was young and hairy,
I saw the world with glee.
But now I'm fat and balding,
A lump on which birds pee.

Just one thing makes me proud,
Though this might sound quite lewd:
At least I'm old and wise
Enough to not get screwed.

And when I meet the angels
(Or red guy with the tail),
I'll greet my hosts politely
Then shut my eyes and wail.

At a camp where I was a counselor, the staff sang:

No matter how old a prune may be,
He's always getting wrinkles.
A baby prune is just like his dad,
Except he's only half as bad.

Aging is a series of sad losses. Scott McClanahan said:

First you lose your youth, then your parents, then your friends, and finally end up losing yourself.

"You're 25"

If a woman asks you how old she looks, Joe Kita says you should answer "25," because **25 is the age all women want to be**: women under 25 want to look as wisely mature as 25, while women over 25 want to look as youthfully pretty as 25.

I guess that means women who actually *are* 25 suffer by being content but bored, since they have nothing to look forward to and nothing to look back to reminisce about.

Though I respect Joe — he's editor of *Men's Health* magazine and author of the *Guy Q* book — I don't think his advice is realistic.

If a woman looks 5 years old or 90 years old, saying she looks "25" will just get a laugh. Instead, try this:

Take 25, then add double the woman's apparent age, then divide by 3.

That gets you a weighted average between 25 and her appearance. That weighted average will still be ridiculously complimentary; but instead of just laughing, the woman will actually believe you.

But if the woman then asks "Did you take the weighted average by reading the *Secret Guide?*" you're in trouble.

According to Professor Elizabeth Bruch's analysis of U.S. online dating sites, **a woman's "desirability" peaks at age 18, but a man's desirability peaks at age 50.**

Aha! That explains why I got engaged to my wife when I was 50! Now I'm older and less desirable. By the time you read this, I'll be even *less* desirable — or, if I'm lucky, dead!

As for women, they want to be 25, but men want them to be 18. That's a difference of 7 years. That's called the **7-year twitch** (not to be confused with the **7-year itch**, which is a man's itching to get out of marriage after 7 years).

Generations

Here are the names for various generations:

Born	Age at 2021's end	Name	Reputation
1883-1900	121-138	lost generation (or generation of 1914)	fought in World War 1
1901-1924	97-120	greatest generation (or GI generation)	fought in World War 2
1925-1945	76-96	silent generation (or lucky few)	lived quietly, grew the economy
1946-1964	57-75	baby boomers (or Me generation)	protested (Vietnam War & beyond)
1965-1984	37-56	generation X (or gen X or latchkey gen)	felt alone, alienated, slackers
1985-1998	23-36	millennials (or gen Y or echo boomers)	saw 2000 & 9/11, nacist
1999-2009	12-22	generation Z (or gen Z or iGeneration)	used Internet when they were kids
2010-2021	0-11	generation alpha (or gen alpha)	used iPads & iPhones as toddlers

Older generations (such as baby boomers) have difficulty dealing with younger generations (such as millennials), as shown in these comic YouTube videos:

Millennial applies for a job:	YouTube.com/watch?v=Uo0KjdDJr1c
Millennial has a job:	YouTube.com/watch?v=Sz0o9clVQu8
Baby boomer applies for a job:	YouTube.com/watch?v=Ed-5Zzdbx0E
Baby boomer tries to teach:	YouTube.com/watch?v=Zh3Yz3PiXZw

Age tests

According to the Internet, here are 11 signs you're aging and past your college days:

You go from 130 days of vacation time to 14.

6AM is when you get up, not when you go to bed.

You don't know what time Taco Bell closes anymore.

You actually eat breakfast food at breakfast time.

A \$4 bottle of wine is no longer "pretty good shit."

Jeans and a sweater no longer qualify as "dressed up."

Your car insurance goes down and your car payments go up.

You hear your favorite song in an elevator.

Older relatives feel comfortable telling sex jokes around you.

Your friends marry and divorce instead of "hook up" and "break up."

When you learn your friend is pregnant, you congratulate the couple instead of asking "Oh, shit, what the hell happened?"

A 25-question test was copied around the Internet, with the help of folks such as Father Dennis McNeil. The test tries to compute when you were born, by asking how much you know about American culture of the 1950's and 1960's. Here's my corrected version. In each blank, try to put the right word or name. The more blanks you can fill, the older you are!

Ads

1. What helps build strong bodies 12 ways? ____.
2. What do M&M's do? _____, _____.
3. You'll wonder where the yellow went, _____.
4. "Brylcreem: _____."

TV shows

5. Superman fights a never-ending battle for truth, justice, and ____.
6. "Hey kids, what time is it?" _____!
7. M-I-C: see ya' real soon! K-E-Y: ____? _____!
8. "Good night, David." "____, ____."
9. ____ said, "Good night, Mrs. Calabash, _____."
10. "When it's least expected, you're elected. You're the star today. ____! _____."
11. Young folks know Bob Denver as the Skipper's "little buddy," but oldsters know Bob Denver is actually Dobie's closest friend, __ G. __.

Politics

12. In 1962, a politician lost a race for governor, said he was retiring from politics, and told the press, "You don't have __ to kick around anymore."
13. 60's protesters (beginning with Jack Weinberg) said, "Don't trust anybody ____."

Songs

14. Name the 4 Beatles: __, __, __, and __.
15. "I found my thrill _____."
16. From the early days of rock 'n roll, finish this line: "I wonder, wonder, wonder, wonder who, _____?"
17. And while we're remembering rock n' roll, try this one: "War? Hoo, yeah. What is it good for? _____."
18. "Every morning at the mine, you could see him arrive. He stood 6-foot-6 and weighed 245, kinda' broad at the shoulder and narrow at the hip; and everybody knew you didn't give no lip to _____."

Cartoons

19. "I'm Popeye the sailor man; I'm Popeye the sailor man. I'm strong to the finish, _____.
I'm Popeye the sailor man."
20. Pogo said, "We have met the enemy, and _____."

Movies & plays

21. "Lions and tigers and bears, __, __!"
22. In a 1967 movie, Paul Newman played Luke, a ne'er-do-well who cut off parking-meter heads and was sent to prison camp. He tried to escape but was captured and beaten. The camp's commander (played by Strother Martin) used that experience as a lesson for other prisoners and explained, "What we've got here is, _____."
23. Young folks remember Peter Pan was played by Robin Williams, but oldsters remember when Peter was played by ____.

Sports

24. He came out of the University of Alabama and became one of the best quarterbacks in NFL history. Later, in a TV commercial, he wore women's stockings. He's Broadway ____.
25. Long before he was Mohammed Ali, we knew him as ____.

Answers:

1. Wonder Bread
2. melt in your mouth, not in your hand
3. when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent
4. a little dab 'll do ya
5. the American way
6. It's Howdy Doody Time
7. Why? Because we like you
8. Good night, Chet
9. Jimmy Durante, wherever you are
10. Smile! You're on Candid Camera
11. Maynard G. Krebs
12. Nixon
13. over 30
14. John, Paul, George, and Ringo
15. on Blueberry Hill
16. Who wrote the book of love
17. Absolutely nothin'
18. Big John, Big Bad John
19. 'cause I eats me spinach
20. he is us
21. oh, my
22. failure to communicate
23. Mary Martin
24. Joe Namath
25. Cassius Clay

Scoring:

<u>How many correct</u>	<u>When probably born</u>
20-25	before 1950
15-19	in the 1950's
10-14	in the 1960's
5- 9	in the 1970's
0- 4	in or after 1980

Baby boomers

Here's another insight from the Internet:

Baby boomers then and now

then: long hair
now: longing for hair
then: acid rock
now: acid reflux
then: a keg
now: an EKG
then: getting out to a new, hip joint
now: getting a new hip joint
then: killer weed
now: weed killer
then: moving to California because it's cool
now: moving to California because it's hot

Loss

During funerals, memorial services, and daydreams about loved ones who left, people often recite this famous poem (as edited by me):

Lost love

The ones we lost don't go away:
They walk beside us ev'ry day,
Unseen, unheard, but always near,
Still loved, still missed, so very dear.

Those old times fondly we recall.
That's when we miss them most of all.
The pain still lingers through the years;
It tweaks our hopes, our dreams, our fears.

We miss our love and how it grew:
Unspoken words we never knew!
May we find hope within our sorrow,
Comfort now and each tomorrow.

Here's another (originally by Melissa Shreve in 1992 when her grandmother died from cancer, but edited here by me to regularize the rhythm):

God's garden

God looked around his garden and found an empty place.
He then looked down upon the earth and saw your tired face.
He put his arms around you and lifted you to rest.
God's garden must be beautiful: he always takes the best.

He knew you suffered greatly. He knew you were in pain.
He knew you'd never get quite well on planet earth again.
He saw the road was getting rough, and hills were hard to climb,
So then he closed your weary eyes and whispered, "Peace be thine."

It broke our hearts to lose you. But you were not alone,
For part of us went with you, the day God called you home.

If you're sad because you lost what you loved (such as a relative, friend, lover, celebrity, fun job, house, or dear possessions), recite the words of poet Alfred Lord Tennyson:

Better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.

Useless searches

There's the tale of a guy who told his kid:

Go to the hardware store to buy a can of striped paint.

The store told the kid:

We don't have any. Try the store around the corner.

According to Richard Asche, on the USS *Turner Joy* a sailor told a newbie:

Go to the supply office and order a fallopian tube.

The supply officer told the newbie:

What size? Find out.

Each prank was helpful: it gave a young "victim" a chance to meet & chat with suppliers — and laugh about it afterwards.

Crooks

Many people fantasize about becoming crooks. This section explains how to turn that fantasy into reality.

Since your reputation is your most valuable asset, becoming a crook is foolish: in the long run, you'll lose more than you gain. The chapter's purpose isn't to make you a crook but rather to answer your questions about crookedness and protect yourself against the crooked.

Your first little swindle

The first step to becoming a professional crook is the "little swindle."

Suppose you buy a toaster and it breaks after the warranty's run out. Here's how to get a fixed toaster: free!

Go back to the store, buy another toaster having the same model number, and take it home. Then return the old, defective toaster to the store and complain it's defective. To prove you bought that toaster recently, show the store the sales slip you received that day. Unless the store's clerk notices that toaster's serial number doesn't match the sales slip, the clerk will let you return the defective toaster and give you a refund.

How to shortchange

The fundamental philosophy of shortchanging is: create so many simultaneous transactions that the cashier can't remember which transaction is which.

For example, suppose you want to buy an item for \$3.50. Give the cashier a 5-dollar bill. Before he gives you the change, give him an extra dollar and say, "Never mind, just give me change for that."

Before he gives you change for the dollar, sneak away the 5-dollar bill. After he gives you the change, walk away — without having paid for the \$3.50 item. If he asks "What about the \$3.50?" reply "I gave you a five!" You can even ask him, "And where's my change for the five?"

One crook makes his living from just two sources: shortchanging and pimping. For example, he managed to create so many 1-dollar, 5-dollar, and 20-dollar transactions simultaneously at a gas station that the attendant got totally confused — and got cleaned out of \$100 altogether!

How to pickpocket

To pick a wallet from the back pocket of a man's pants, use this 3-step method....

The first step is to **put your fingers into his pocket**. Put just two fingers into his pocket: your middle finger and your index finger. When putting them into his pocket, make sure the palm side of your hand is near his skin, rather than the knuckle side of your hand (which is too bony and therefore too easily detected). Use those two fingers as chopsticks: make those fingers pinch his wallet. During that process, he might feel your fingers, but he won't be suspicious, since he can't feel their bones, and since your fingers are moving down into his pocket and therefore aren't removing anything from his pocket. For best results, distract him by touching some other part of his body. (If you're in a crowd, "accidentally" bump against this guy. If you're pretending to be a prostitute, rub his balls.)

The second step is to **pull the wallet away from his skin**, so that the wallet is still inside his pocket but he can't feel the wallet.

Finally, **lift the wallet from the pocket**. He can't feel you lift the wallet, since the wallet isn't against his skin.

Nifty, huh? Try that 3-step process on a friend. But please don't try it on me!

Big time

Once you get into the “big time,” you can make lots of money!

For example, you can buy a tow truck, take it to a street where many cars are parked illegally, and tow them all away, to do with as you please!

Better yet, buy a van, pretend you’re a house mover, and clean out somebody’s apartment while he’s away at work!

Since the police view such activities unkindly, you’ll spend the last part of your life in jail. But the first part can be really fun!

How to steal legally

Now I’m going to teach you a more clever way to steal money. This clever way is used by many shady companies and is completely legal!

It’s called the **pyramid debt**.

Just put an ad in the paper. The ad says you’re selling a popular item at a ridiculously low price — just a hair over dealer cost.

Lots of consumers mail you money. According to the Federal Trade Commission, you must fill their orders within 30 days. So 30 days after the money starts rolling in, you buy a big supply of the item you’re selling, and ship it to your customers. You pay for that big supply by using the money your customers mailed you.

As the months go on, you’re theoretically not making much money, since you’re selling the items for just a hair over cost. But your cash flow gets huge. As your business grows, and you increase the number of your ads, and your customers tell their friends about your wonderful prices and service, more and more money comes in each month.

For example, suppose you begin your business in January. Let’s see what your business looks like, by April.

In April, suppose your ads make consumers send you \$100,000. Federal law lets you delay shipping until May. So during April, you have \$100,000 to play with.

During April, you must ship the goods that consumers ordered in the previous month (March). But since your business has been growing fast each month, March was a smaller month than April. Whereas April orders total \$100,000, suppose March orders totaled just \$60,000. So during April, you must ship items worth just \$60,000 to consumers. Suppose those items worth \$60,000 had cost you \$55,000 to buy (just a hair under your selling price). In that case, during April you take in orders totally \$100,000, but shipping orders costing you just \$55,000. The difference — \$45,000 — you can put into your own pocket, at least temporarily.

But wait! The math is even more in your favor than that, because, as your business grows and you develop a good reputation for paying your bills on time, your suppliers start offering you credit. The suppliers send you the goods and don’t expect you to pay for them until 30 days later. So in April, you’re paying the suppliers for the orders that you shipped in March, which were the orders that customers sent you in February. Back in February, your business was much smaller; you probably took in orders worth just \$40,000, for which the suppliers charged you just \$37,000.

To summarize all that, let’s look at your cash situation in April. In April, customers mail you checks totaling \$100,000 for new orders, you ship out the orders that were placed in March, and you pay your suppliers for just the orders that you received in February, which cost you just \$37,000. The difference — \$63,000 — you put in your pocket, at least temporarily.

Theoretically, that \$63,000 difference should be used to eventually pay suppliers for orders that came in after February. But by the time those later bills come due you’ll have received more checks in the mail (from customers in May and June). So, in practice, as long as the business continues to grow fast and bring in lots more customers each month, you’ll never need to use the \$63,000 that you pocketed. So you keep it in your pocket — or give yourself a large salary, or use it towards a new house, boat, fur coat, luxury car, or whatever else turns you on.

Eventually, someday, your business will stop growing by such large percentages, and the whole scheme will fall apart.

You can extend the scheme a few extra months by being slightly late in paying suppliers and shipping to customers. (Since you’ve already built such a good reputation for fulfilling all your obligations, your suppliers and customers won’t worry anymore if you’re a few days late.) But eventually, as your business stops growing rapidly, the pyramid scheme fails, and you won’t be able to pay your suppliers and ship to your customers.

Finally, one of your suppliers will sue you for the money that’s due him. If you can’t pay his large bill, just declare that your company is “bankrupt” and walk away from the whole problem. None of your recent customers receives any goods, and none of your suppliers receives any payment for recent bills, but the law is on your side: bankrupt companies can’t be sued!

Then you move to another part of the country, start another business, and start the whole scheme all over again!

That’s how you can continually be running businesses where you charge customers just 5% over dealer cost, and yet each month you keep 70% of the sales in your pocket or for your own personal pleasures.

Nifty, huh? I know dozens of companies using that scheme. It ought to be against the law; but since the U.S. Constitution protects bankrupt citizens and bankrupt companies from lawsuits, there’s no legal way to fight such rip-offs!

If you start such a scheme, you face just one disadvantage: when your company finally goes bankrupt, everybody will hate your guts! Your name will be mud. But who cares: just commit suicide, and you’ll have had a life that was short but fun! Or do what the professionals do: just change your name! After moving out of state, start your fun pyramid all over again!

Stupid criminals

Criminals are only human: they make mistakes.

My favorite example of a stupid criminal is the guy who went into a convenience store, put \$20 on the counter, asked the clerk to give him change, and then — when she opened the cash register’s drawer — demanded all the money from the register. She gave it to him. Then he fled. Just one problem: he forgot to take back the \$20 he’d put on the counter. Since the cash register contained just \$15 dollars, the criminal’s net profit was minus \$5.

Another criminal demanded a free carton of cigarettes, but the clerk said she couldn’t give them unless he was at least 21, so he showed her his ID. After he left, the clerk reported the robbery to the police, along with the criminal’s name and address. Crime solved instantly!

Another criminal wanted to rob a bank but got tired of standing in the long waiting line, so he walked to the bank across the street. But there the teller refused to pay him because he wrote his demand on a withdrawal slip from the other bank: she sent him back to the first bank, where he stood in line again and was nabbed.

Intellectuals

To get more out of life, become an intellectual! Being intellectual is fun.

Try to learn the truth. Dig deeper! Mark Twain said:

It ain't what you don't know that gets you into trouble. It's what you know for sure that just ain't so.

He also said:

To begin, God made idiots. That was for practice. Then he made school boards. I've never let my school interfere with my education.

Intellectuals say there are 3 kinds of people:

intellectuals, average people, small-minded people

President Franklin Roosevelt's wife (Eleanor Roosevelt) said:

Great minds discuss ideas.
Average minds discuss events.
Small minds discuss people.

Keep learning, even after you've left school, even after you got a job or raised kids, even after you've reached retirement age. Learning keeps your mind young & well. Bill Gates said (in *Time* magazine's 6/5/17 issue):

You don't start getting old until you stop learning.

Even if you have a nice job already, keep learning more! Encourage your coworkers & bosses to help you get smarter: let them train you, mentor you, become your mentors. Bob Proctor said:

A mentor is someone who sees more talent & ability in you than you see in yourself — and helps bring it out of you.

Professors

To have fun, become a professor! Professors get low pay but enjoy short hours and long vacations (for summer, Christmas, and "spring break"). They use their free time to soak up more cultural experiences or moonlight as consultants or writers.

How many hours?

There's the tale of the farmer who asked the professor how many hours of class he taught. The professor said "14 hours." The farmer said, "Well, that's a long day, but at least the work's easy." The farmer didn't realize the professor meant 14 hours *per week*.

Being a professor ain't a total joyride: you must spend lots of time grading papers, going to faculty meetings, preparing & researching your lectures, and performing

other administrative crap. But compared to most other jobs, it's a piece of cake. And you get lots of free benefits, such as medical plans, campus events, and other entertainment, such as the joy of laughing at your students.

Promotion

If you're a successful professor, you'll be promoted to "dean" or "president," which will make your life more miserable, since then you must spend lots of time administering instead of "fooling around" (I mean "doing research"). "Administering" means "dealing with headaches and trying to embarrass people into donating money."

Back in the 1960's, when students protested for more freedom, Stanford University's president gave this description of his job:

A university president has 3 responsibilities: provide sex for the students, athletics for the alumni, and parking for the faculty.

Advice for students

What colleges teach is overpriced. Instead of paying many thousands of dollars per year to enroll, you can just visit a bookstore, buy the textbooks, and read them yourself, for a total cost of a few hundred dollars instead of thousands. But you won't take that shortcut, because nobody will motivate you. **The main reason for going to college is social:** to chat with other students and professors who'll motivate you, argue with you, and encourage you to move yourself ahead.

The average professor spends just a small percentage of his day in front of a big class; he spends most of his day helping individuals or tiny groups. But most students spend most of *their* days in the big classes; just a *few* take the opportunity to chat with the professor one-to-one or in small groups. That's why the typical student says "most of the classes I take are big" while the typical professor says "most of the classes I teach are small." Example:

At Dartmouth College I did statistics proving the average student spent most of his time in huge classes, while the average professor spent most of his time in tiny classes, leading to wildly different perceptions of what the "average" student-faculty ratio was.

In many colleges, students complain the professors are cold and unapproachable. On the other hand, the professors complain that not enough students come visit the professors during the professors' office hours. When students fail, the students therefore blame the professors (for being unapproachable), while the professors blame the students (for not approaching).

If you're a student, remember that you (or your parents) spend lots of money on college. Make sure you get your money's worth!

Ask professors lots of questions, during class or privately. Interact with your classmates. Take advantage of the many cultural events on campus. Do whatever else you can to make your experience more worthwhile than just reading textbooks you could have bought for a tenth of the price of a college education.

Cynical quotes

Definition (in Hilary Price's *Rhymes with Orange* cartoon):

College: assisted living for young adults.

Groucho Marx said this in *Horsefeathers*:

Let's tear down the dormitories! The students can sleep where they've always slept: in the classroom!

W.H. Auden said:

A professor is a person who talks in someone else's sleep.

Dave Barry gave this advice to students:

Memorize things, write them down in little exam books, then forget them. If you fail to forget them, you become a professor and must stay in college the rest of your life.

To get good grades on English papers, never say what anybody with common sense would say. Anybody with common sense would say Moby Dick's a big white whale, since the book's characters often call it a big white whale. So in your paper, say Moby Dick is actually the Republic of Ireland. Your professor, who's sick of reading papers and never liked Moby Dick anyway, will think you're enormously creative. If you can regularly come up with lunatic interpretations of simple stories, major in English.

To encourage students to read the classics, update the titles:

Original title	Edited title, to increase sales
The Iliad and the Odyssey	The ill & the odd
The Bible	The Buy Bell
Romeo and Juliet	Row me! Oh! And you'll "ee!" yet!
House of the 7 Gables	House of the 7 girls
Moby-Dick; or the Whale	Mo' by dick, my Big Dick; oh, you'll wail!

Philosophers

Honest philosophers call themselves “fullosophers,” because when they present their arguments, the audience thinks, “You’re full of it!”

Will philosophy vanish?

When the BBC (British Broadcasting Company) interviewed philosopher Bertrand Russell, he said most “philosophical” problems eventually become “scientific” problems. Examples:

The question of whether matter is **infinitely divisible** (able to be divided into smaller and smaller particles, without reaching any limit) was originally a “philosophical” problem argued by Greek philosophers but eventually became a “scientific” problem analyzed by physicists.

The question “What is happiness” used to be a philosophical problem but has become a question of psychology, psychiatry, and biochemistry.

The interviewer asked him, “Does that mean philosophy will disappear?” Bertrand Russell replied, “Yes.”

Why be a philosopher?

When Bertrand Russell was young, he was a mathematician and the world’s most famous logician. But when he saw dead bodies come back from World War 1, he switched his career to philosophy, because he felt math wasn’t relevant to the most important problems of living. He said:

The “timelessness” of mathematics consists just in the fact that mathematicians don’t talk about time.

Wesleyan’s tunnels

Back in the 1970’s, the basements of Wesleyan University’s dorms were connected by tunnels, upon whose walls the students wrote philosophy. Sample:

“To do is to be.” — Socrates
“To be is to do.” — Sartre
“Do be do be do.” — Sinatra

Another sample:

There’s nothing to do on a rainy day in Kansas; but it never rains, so you never get the chance.

Failures

Don’t let your failures discourage you. Learn from them. They’ll also help you appreciate your later successes more. Truman Capote said:

Failure is the condiment that gives success its flavor.

Remember this famous saying:

If at first you don’t succeed? Try, try again!

But also heed W.C. Field’s elaboration:

If at first you don’t succeed? Try, try again!
Then stop. No use being a damn fool about it!

Shavian philosophy

George Bernard Shaw said:

Life is not meant to be easy, my child; but take courage: it can be delightful.

Success versus happiness

Don’t confuse “success” with “happiness.” Actress Ingrid Bergman said:

Success is getting what you want.
Happiness is wanting what you get.

My philosophies

I have 2 philosophies of life.

My **optimistic philosophy** can be summarized in 3 sentences:

Life’s an adventure. Enjoy the ride. Watch out for the curves.

Here it is in one sentence:

Have fun, but be careful.

My **pessimistic philosophy** is:

God (or Fate) is a practical joker who says, “You thought *that* was bad? How about *this*...”

Donkey

The Internet offers this inspiring tale.

A farmer’s donkey fell into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do.

Finally, he decided that since the donkey was old and the well needed to be covered up anyway, it wasn’t worth the trouble to retrieve the donkey.

He invited his neighbors to come help him. They all grabbed shovels and began to throw dirt into the well.

The donkey realized what was happening and whined horribly. But then he suddenly quieted down. A few shovelfuls later, the farmer looked down the well and was astonished to see that for every shovelful of dirt hitting the donkey’s back, the donkey would shake it off and step up onto it. Soon everyone was amazed as the donkey stepped up over the well’s edge and trotted off.

Life is going to shovel dirt on you, all kinds of dirt. The trick to getting out of the well is to shake off the dirt and take a step up.

Each of our troubles is a steppingstone. We can emerge from the deepest wells just by persevering. Never giving up! Shake it off and take a step up!

Remember these 5 simple rules to be happy:

Free your heart from hatred.

Free your mind from worries.

Live simply.

Give more.

Expect less.

By the way, the donkey kicked the shit out of the bastard who tried to bury him.

Moral:

When you try to cover your ass, it always comes back to get you.

Chicken

Why did the chicken cross the road?

According to the Internet, these thinkers would give straight answers....

Traditional answer:	To get to the other side.
Ernest Hemingway:	To die. In the rain. Alone.
Walt Whitman:	To cluck the song of itself.
Robert Frost:	To cross the road less traveled by.
Mae West:	I invited it to come up and see me sometime.
Captain Kirk:	To boldly go where no chicken has gone before.
Jack Nicholson:	’Cause it fucking wanted to. That’s the fucking reason.
Timothy Leary:	That’s the only kind of trip the Establishment would let it take.
Jerry Falwell:	The chicken was gay, going to the “other side.” If you eat it, <i>you’ll</i> get gay.
Moses:	God told the chicken, “Thou shalt cross the road.” There was much rejoicing.
Zsa Zsa Gabor:	To get a better look at my legs, which — thank goodness — are good, dahling.
Martin Luther King:	It had a dream where <i>all</i> chickens can freely cross without their motives questioned.
Sigmund Freud:	The chicken was female and envied the crosswalk-sign pole as a phallic symbol.

So would these scientists....

Sir Isaac Newton:	Chickens at rest tend to stay at rest. Chickens in motion tend to cross the road.
Darwin:	Chickens, over centuries, have been naturally selected to cross roads.
Hippocrates:	Because of an excess of light pink gooey stuff in its pancreas.
Gregor Mendel:	To get various strains of roads.

These thinkers would *deny* that the chicken simply crossed the road:

Joseph Conrad:	Mistah Chicken, he dead.
Emerson:	It didn't <i>cross</i> the road: it <i>transcended</i> the road.
Mark Twain:	The news of its crossing has been greatly exaggerated.
John Cleese:	This chicken is no more. It's a stiff, an ex-chicken. Ergo, it didn't cross the road.
Saddam Hussein:	Its rebellion was unprovoked, so we justifiably dropped 50 tons of nerve gas on it.
Albert Einstein:	Did the <i>chicken</i> really cross the <i>road</i> , or did the road move beneath the chicken?

These thinkers would investigate further:

Jerry Seinfeld:	Why the heck was this chicken walking around all over the place anyway?
George W. Bush:	We just want to know whether the chicken is on <i>our</i> side of the road or not.
Sherlock Holmes:	Ignore the chicken that <i>crossed</i> ; the answer lies with the chicken that <i>didn't</i> .
Oliver Stone:	Who <i>else</i> was crossing and overlooked, in our haste to observe the chicken?

These thinkers would raise questions....

Bob Dylan:	How many roads must one chicken cross?
Shakespeare:	To cross or not to cross, that is the question.
John Lennon:	Imagine all chickens crossing roads in peace.
Dr. Seuss:	<i>Did</i> the chicken cross the road? Did he cross it with a <i>toad</i> ?
Voltaire:	I may not <i>agree</i> with the chicken, but I'll defend to death its right to cross."

These thinkers would brag about technology:

Al Gore:	I invented the chicken and the road. The crossing serves the American people.
Bill Gates:	My eChicken 2.0 also lays eggs, files documents, and balances your checkbook.

These thinkers think the others are too long-winded:

Grandpa:	In my day, we didn't ask why. We were told the chicken crossed. That was that!
Fox Mulder:	You saw it with your own eyes! How many must cross before you believe?
Alfred E. Neumann:	What? Me worry?
Colonel Sanders:	I missed one?

Which of those thinkers is closest to your own philosophy?

Blunt predictions

Here are blunt, true predictions to tell a kid, if you're mean:

You're young & cute, but someday you'll be old & ugly. Before you're 20, you'll want to kill yourself. The sooner you die, the less unhappiness you'll experience. Your friends will eventually hate you. Some people will be glad when you die. Name the 5 things you want most for your future. You'll fail at most of them.

Psychologists

The most misspelled word in the English language is "**psychology**." You should spell it "**sighcology**," since it's the study of why people sigh.

It studies what makes people sad or glad — ah, the meaning of happiness! — and what motivates people to be effective.

It also studies why people act crazy. At Dartmouth College, the course in "Abnormal Psychology" is nicknamed "**Nuts & Sluts**."

Many psychology experiments are performed on rats before being tried on people, so the course in "Psychology" is nicknamed "**Ratology**."

Trick the professor

According to psychology, if you make your victim happy when he performs an activity, he'll repeat that activity more often. That's called **reinforcement**.

At Dartmouth College, a psychology professor was giving a lecture about reinforcement, but his lecture was too effective: his students secretly decided to make him the victim! They decided on this goal: make him teach while standing next to the window instead of the blackboard. Whenever he moved toward the window, they purposely looked more interested in what he was saying; whenever he returned to the blackboard, they purposely looked more bored. Sure enough, they finally got him to give all lectures from the window! They'd trained their human animal: the classroom was his cage; his class became a circus. When the students finally told him what they'd done, he was so embarrassed!

Okay, kids, try this with your teachers! Pick a goal ("Let's make the teacher lecture from the back of the room while he does somersaults") and see how close you can come to success!

With an experiment like that, everybody wins, since the students must keep watching the teacher to find out when to pretend to look interested. So the students can't fall asleep in class. If a student secretly snitches to the teacher about what's going on, the teacher should play along with it, because the teacher knows the students will watch the teacher's every move while the game continues. A rapt, excited audience is exactly what the teacher wants!

Double-blind

If you want to experiment on humans, to determine which social settings and drugs are most effective, make sure neither the experimenters nor the patients know which patients got which treatments, until after the experiment is over. If the experimenters or patients know too much too soon, they'll bias the test results.

The most accurate kind of experiment is called **double-blind**: neither the experimenters nor the patients know who gets which treatment; the experimenters & patients are both blind to what's going on, until after the test. For example, to accurately test whether a pill is effective, it's important that neither the experimenters nor the patients know which patients got the real pills and which patients got the **placebos** (fake pills) until after the experiment is over.

Here are 3 famous examples proving that double-blindness is essential to accuracy....

Clever Hans In the late 1800's, a Berlin math professor named Wilhelm Von Osten believed animals could become as smart as humans. He tried to teach a cat and a bear to do arithmetic but failed. Then he tried to teach a horse to do arithmetic and seemed to succeed, after training the horse for just 2 years. He called the horse "**Clever Hans**."

The horse correctly answered questions about arithmetic — and also about advanced math, German, political history, and classical music. Whenever Wilhelm asked the horse a question whose answer was a small integer (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc.), the horse would tap his foot the correct number of times, even if the question was complicated, such as:

"What's the square root of 16?" (The answer is 4.)
"If you add $\frac{2}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$, what's the total's numerator?" (The answer is 9.)
"How many people in the audience are wearing hats?"

Wilhelm really believed he'd taught the horse to do advanced thinking. He and his horse became famous celebrities.

In 1904, Germany created a scientific committee to determine whether the horse was really smart or the whole thing was a hoax. The committee included two zoologists, a psychologist (Carl Stumpf), a horse trainer, and a circus manager. The committee concluded that the horse really was smart, since it could answer questions asked by audience members (who'd never seen the horse before) even when Wilhelm Von Osten and his staff weren't present.

But one of Carl Stumpf's students, Oskar Pfunkst, experimented on the horse further. Oskar discovered that if the interrogator (the person interrogating the horse) didn't know the right answer himself, the horse didn't know the answer either. He finally discovered how the horse got the right answer: the horse looked at the interrogator's body. After an interrogator asked the horse a question, the interrogator had a natural human tendency to look intently at the horse's leg, lean forward to look at it, and be tense until the horse tapped the correct number of times. Then the interrogator relaxed a bit, unconsciously. The horse noticed that relaxation and stopped tapping.

Moral: when testing the intelligence of a horse — or anything else — it's important that the experimenter (interrogator) not be biased by expecting an outcome, since the patient (horse) can be influenced by that bias.

Hawthorne In the 1920's and 1930's, psychologists tried some experiments in Western Electric's "Hawthorne" factory in Chicago.

First, psychologists tried improving the lighting, by making the place brighter. As expected, the workers' productivity increased.

But then the psychologists tried another experiment: they lowered the lighting. Strange as it seems, lowering the lighting made productivity increase further!

It turned out that what made the workers productive wasn't "more lighting"; it was "attention and variety." Anything that made the workers' life more interesting and less monotonous made productivity increase. Also, perhaps more important, workers work harder when they know they're being watched!

The same thing happened when the "rest breaks" and pay were changed: the act of change itself made productivity increase, regardless of whether the change was intended for better or worse.

That's called the **Hawthorne Experiment**. Moral: workers (and patients) do better when they know they're watched and cared about, even if the conditions are worse. So if you try a new technique (or pill) that seems to be successful, the success might be just because the patients know they're being watched, not because your technique itself is really good.

Bloomers In the 1960's, Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson had psychologists sit in the back of 18 elementary-school classrooms, watch the students, and then tell the teachers that certain kids were "intellectual bloomers" who'd probably improve a lot. Then the psychologists left. At the end of the year, the psychologists came back, gave the kids IQ tests and, sure enough, the kids that had been called "intellectual bloomers" improved more than the other kids and were also "better liked," even though those kids had actually been picked at random! That's because the teachers treated those kids differently, after hearing they were "intellectual bloomers."

They repeated the experiment with a welding class: they told the teacher that certain students in the welding class were "high aptitude." Sure enough, those students scored higher on welding exams, learned welding skills in about half as much time as their classmates, and were absent less often than classmates, even though those students had actually been picked at random.

In an earlier test, they told psychology students that certain rats were "bright." Sure enough, the "bright" rats learned to run through mazes faster, even though those rats had actually been picked at random.

Moral: if you expect more of a person (or rat), you'll tend to give that individual more helpful attention, so the individual will live up to those expectations. Second moral: if you (or teachers) expect a certain outcome, it will happen, just because you expected it.

Travel

Whenever you feel bummed out, take a trip — for a month or week or day — or at least walk around the block or watch TV or read a newspaper or book. When you see other people acting out their own lives and ignoring yours, you'll realize your momentary personal crisis is unimportant in the grand scheme of life.

If a close acquaintance thinks badly of you, so what? Billions of other people in the world don't care, don't have any opinion of you, know nothing about what you've done, and don't care about it. All they care about is that you act like a nice person now.

Act nice, and the world will grow to love you. If your little world temporarily hates you and you don't want to deal with it, explore a new world: take a trip!

Worry

It's good to consider what might go wrong, so you can prepare for a possible disaster. Then prepare, as best you can.

But don't let that worry totally consume you, so you spend all your time just worrying without accomplishing anything. Don't let your worry make you a nervous wreck who's immobile, unable to accomplish anything at all.

Erma Brombeck said:

Worry is like a rocking chair:
it gives you something to do but never gets you anywhere.

Suicide

More suicides occur on Sunday than any other day of the week. That's because Sunday's the only day when Americans have enough time to ponder how meaningless their lives are.

The best cure for suicidal thoughts is: Monday! Go back to work, get reinforced every hour for your accomplishments, and keep yourself busy enough to avoid introspection.

Every day, I think about killing myself, but the main thing stopping me is curiosity. I'm a news junkie with a sci-fi bent: I want to know what will happen to the world tomorrow, and if I kill myself I won't find out!

The old news anchors — Peter Jennings, Tom Brokaw, and Dan Rather — saved my life. They gave me a reason for living:

to find out what stupid things they'd be forced to say the next day. Now they're gone, along with the relevance of broadcast TV news, so I get my life force by reading newspapers and Internet news feeds.

When I see the daily newsreels of horrors around the world, I remember why God created evil: to make us feel better by knowing that other people are even worse off and we're so lucky not to be them!

Learn from your miseries and become a better person.

If your travails are long and tough
And your rewards are few,
Remember that the mighty oak
Was once a nut like you.

But if you nevertheless decide to kill yourself, here's a suggestion about the best way to do it:

A local newspaper here ran an article whose headline said "Police kill suicidal man." The police in Henniker NH got a call saying a relative (a man in his 40's) was depressed (because he was fired from a bookstore) and seemed suicidal (judging from what he phoned to his 5-year-old estranged daughter), so the police went to his house. Nobody responded to their knocks, so they forcibly entered and found him. They asked him if he was okay. Instead of replying, he walked near a rifle, picked it up, and aimed it at a policeman, so they shot him in self-defense. Since his gun was loaded, the police were exonerated.

Hey, that's a clever way to commit suicide: get the police to do the killing for you! But plan carefully, to make sure you don't accidentally shoot the police when they shoot you.

Neurotransmitters

Scientists discovered that just 4 things give a person pleasure:

discovery, pride, hugs, relief

Okay, I confess, that's an oversimplification. Here are the details.

Just 4 chemicals give your brain pleasure by transmitting signals from your nerves to your brain. The 4 chemicals are:

dopamine gives you joy when you **discover** something new
serotonin gives you joy when you're **proud** of yourself
oxytocin gives you joy when you give or receive **hugs**
endorphins give you joy when your **pain goes away**

Let's dig deeper...

Dopamine gives you joy when you **discover** something. For example, maybe you finally understand something you've been studying, or you discover something new in your neighborhood, or you have a wild experience you never had before, or you take an illegal drug (such as **cocaine**) that makes you feel high. After you've taken an illegal drug that makes you feel wonderful, the drug eventually wears off, makes you desperately hungry to get that effect again, and turns you into an addict. **Marijuana** makes you feel relaxed but also makes your body create dopamine.

Serotonin gives you joy when you're **proud** because other people praise you or because you've accomplished something. Normally, your body contains a moderate amount of serotonin, so you feel contented. If you don't get enough serotonin, you feel depressed; you feel you're a worthless jerk, wonder why you're still on this planet, wonder why bother living, and want to commit suicide.

After a nerve transmits a big hit of serotonin to a nerve closer to the brain, the first nerve takes back (**reuptakes**) the excess serotonin, so not as much serotonin gets to the second nerve and the brain. To feel happier, take an **antidepressant drug** called a **selective serotonin reuptake inhibitor (SSRI)**, which stops the reuptake. The most famous SSRI antidepressant drugs are **Prozac**, **Paxil**, and **Zoloft**.

Oxytocin gives you joy when you **hug** or cuddle. It's called the **cuddle chemical**. You get it when you feel bonded to another person. You get it when you kiss, since your lips have lots of nerves in them. If you're a woman who wants to make a man love you and feel bonded to you, the best way is to have kisses with

him. During the sex act itself (penis in vagina), the woman's brain receives lots of oxytocin (so the woman feels bonded to the man), but the man's brain receives dopamine instead, so the man feels he's having a high but does *not* feel bonded to the woman. That's why men tend to be less faithful than women — unless the sex act is accompanied by lots of hugging & kissing. A woman's brain receives lots of oxytocin during hugging, cuddling, kissing, and sex but also during pregnancy & breastfeeding. Comedian Kate Quigley reveals (and exaggerates) the difference between male & female sexual pleasures in this video:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=ruQljbYJ64](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ruQljbYJ64)

Endorphins give you the **relief** you feel when pain goes away. Examples:

A bite of spicy food makes your tongue hurt for a moment, but then the endorphins come and make you feel great, so you want to do it all over again and take another bite.

An acupuncture needle stuck into your skin makes you wince for a moment, but then the endorphins come and make you feel great, so you want more needles!

When you athletically jog or run, and push yourself to do it as fast as you can, you feel tired & strained at first, but then the endorphins kick in and make you feel great, so you get a **runner's high**, want to keep going, and want to do it again tomorrow.

When you laugh, you release a lot of tension, so the endorphins kick in.

The word "endorphins" means "naturally-in-your-body morphines." **Opioid drugs** (such as **opium**, **morphine**, **codeine**, **heroin**, **fentanyl**, **carfentanil**, **thebaine**, **oxycodone**, and **hydrocodone**) imitate endorphins: they make pain go away. Most opioid drugs are illegal, but some are used medically, during & after surgery, to reduce pain. Brand-name drugs that include oxycodone are **OxyContin** and **Percocet**. Brand-name drugs that include hydrocodone are **Vicodin** and **Norco**.

Those 4 chemicals (dopamine, serotonin, oxytocin, and endorphins) give you all your pleasures. They transmit pleasure signals from your neurons to other neurons and finally to your brain, to motivate you to repeat those activities. Since they transmit from neuron to neuron, they're called **neurotransmitters**.

Your body contains other neurotransmitters also, whose purpose is *not* pleasure or joy.

The most famous neurotransmitter is **adrenaline** (which is also called **epinephrine**). Its purpose is to give you energy to deal with an emergency. For example, if a wild animal is about to eat you, adrenaline gives you the energy to either fight the animal or run away, so adrenaline is called the **fight-or-flight chemical**. It makes you act like Superman, briefly.

Though adrenaline is created when you have a threat (such as a wild animal), it's also created by any excitement, noise, bright lights, and heat.

Adrenaline is made by the **adrenal glands**, which sit atop the kidneys. To manufacture adrenaline (epinephrine), the adrenal glands oxidize **dopamine** to create **norepinephrine**, which is then modified to create **epinephrine**.

The illegal drug called **MDMA** (nicknamed "**ecstasy**") mainly increases serotonin; but it also acts as an SSRI, so you feel doubly happy, dangerously so. It also increases dopamine and norepinephrine.

Hormones

Hormones travel to the brain through your liquids (such as your blood) instead of through nerves. Here are the most famous hormones:

ghrelin (pronounced "grel-in") makes you feel **hungry**
leptin makes you feel "unhungry," **full**

testosterone makes you act **male** (females produce less testosterone)
estrogen makes you act **female** (males produce less estrogen)
progesterone makes you act **pregnant**

Dementia

When you get old, your brain might have trouble working

properly: you'll lose your memory, be senile, act demented. The most common form of dementia is **Alzheimer's disease**, where you forget the purpose of things.

Elderly people are scared that they might be getting demented. Here are some quick tests:

If you forget where your keys are, that's normal; but if you forget what your keys are *for*, you're demented.

If you were ironing your clothes but forget where you put your iron, that could be normal; but if you put your iron in the freezer, that's demented.

If you put clean dishes into the dishwasher, you're probably either demented or Chinese. (The Chinese often use their dishwashers just as storage racks.)

British researchers have discovered this quick test for **pre-Alzheimer's** (having an Alzheimer-damaged brain even though you don't act crazy yet): within one minute, name as many fruits & vegetables as you can think of. (You can name fruits or vegetables or a mix.) If you're normal, you'll name at least 20; if you have pre-Alzheimer's (or Alzheimer's), you'll name no more than 15 (because your mind will repeatedly mull over the first 15 and have difficulty breaking loose to go beyond them). As for myself, I score about 17, so I guess I'd better be careful!

One reason why the elderly seem demented is they struggle to focus on the task at hand. My crazy relative passed me this e-mail from the Internet:

Do you have AAADD?

They've finally found a diagnosis for my condition. Hooray! I've recently been diagnosed with AAADD — Age-Activated Attention-Deficit Disorder. Here's how it goes....

I decide to wash the car; I start toward the garage and notice the mail on the table. Yeah, I'm going to wash the car; but first I'd better go through the mail. I lay the car keys on the desk, discard the junk mail, and notice the garbage can is full. I'd better take it out; but since I'm going to be near the mailbox anyway, I should pay these bills first. Where's my checkbook? Oops, there's just one check left. My extra checks are in my desk. I'd better get them.

Oh, there's the Coke I was drinking. I'll look for those checks; but first I must put my Coke farther from the computer — or maybe I'll pop it into the fridge to keep it cold awhile. As I head towards the kitchen, flowers catch my eye: they need water. I set the Coke on the counter and... Oh! There are my glasses! I was looking for them all morning! I'd better put them away first. I fill a container with water, head for the flowerpots, and... Aaaaaagh! Someone left the TV remote in the kitchen. We'll never think to look in the kitchen tonight when we want to watch TV, so I'd better put it back in the family room where it belongs. I splash some water into the pots and onto the floor, throw the remote onto a cushion on the sofa, head back down the hall, and try to figure out what I was going to do.

End of day: the car isn't washed, the bills are unpaid, the Coke is still on the kitchen counter, the flowers are half-watered, the checkbook still has just one check in it, and I can't find my car keys!

When I try to figure out why nothing got done today, I'm baffled because *I know I was busy, all day long!* I realize this is a serious condition and I'll get help, but first I think I'll check my e-mail....

Please send this to everyone you know because *I don't remember whom I've sent this to!* But please don't send it back to me, or I might send it to you again!

Quick thoughts

Here are quick thoughts about getting psyched.

The 2/3 solution During the 1960's, when I was learning to be a clinical psychologist, the professor told us that 2/3 of all psychological problems resolve themselves, without help — though a nudge helps!

Tough times When life becomes difficult, just try harder to succeed. The Marines say:

When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

In *Up the Down Staircase*, the school's principal told the teacher:

Let it be a challenge to you.

Grow up?

Bored people grow up.

Fascinating people grow down: they reconnect with their inner child.

Paranoid Warning:

Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're *not* out to get you.

Habits In a psych lecture about habits, the professor said he knew a bishop who dispensed advice to priests. To the question, "Is it okay to kiss a nun?" the bishop replied:

It's okay to kiss a nun once in a while, but don't get in the habit.

Emotion-logic test

Psychologists invent ways to test your personality. Here's my own test: are you more like me (Russ) or my wife (Donna)? Are you a "Donna" type (emotional) or a "Russ" type (logical)?

Donna eats whatever tastes good.

At home, Russ eats just what's "healthy" (but indulges at restaurants).

When offered chicken, Donna chooses dark meat (because it's tastier). Russ chooses white meat (because it's healthier, since it has less fat).

To figure out how to install and use a new product, Donna guesses. Russ reads the instructions.

Donna likes to take photos (to preserve the memories). Russ doesn't bother.

Donna is warm to relatives and loves to spend time with them. Russ has less time for relatives; he's under time pressure from work.

In the summer, Donna likes to turn the air conditioner on, for comfort. Russ likes to turn the air conditioner off, to save money.

In the winter, Donna likes to turn the furnace on, for comfort. Russ likes to turn the furnace off, to save money.

Donna sees doctors and dentists just when things hurt. Russ gets regular checkups (though just occasionally, to reduce expense).

Donna takes cars to repair shops just when cars break. Russ maintains cars regularly (according to schedule).

Donna believes the elderly should dye their hair (to look younger). Russ believes in letting the gray show (to look natural and truthful).

Donna rushes through most tasks, to dispose of them quickly. Russ does things more carefully — and finishes them too late.

Donna gets up early, to start her day energetically. Russ stays up late to finish things, because he's always behind.

Donna believes in being tactful, even if that means fibbing a little. Russ believes in being frank, even if that means breaking a secret.

Donna says doctors should hide bad news from patients, to preserve hope. Russ says doctors should tell the truth, so patients can act wisely.

Donna believes in alternative medicine, such as herbs. Russ believes in traditional medicine, just pills approved by the A.M.A.

Donna throws out newspapers immediately, to reduce clutter. Russ hoards newspapers, to avoid losing information.

Decide whether you're more like Donna or Russ. **Then invent your own test**, containing your own name and a friend's.

According to the Donna-versus-Russ test, Donna differs from me (Russ) in many ways. We stay married because our differences are smaller than what we have in common:

similar tastes in music, movies, furniture, clothing
enjoy keyboard instruments more than guitar
skilled at math, logical reasoning, and teaching
love reading & studying, explore different cultures
like cultural cities more than quiet countryside
kind of cheap, don't pursue luxury or name brands
like to eat at inexpensive restaurants
naively trust people, get surprised & upset at cheating
sex is not a priority
not very optimistic; a little stubborn

What do *you* and *your* friends have in common? List the reasons you stay friends. Share that list with your friends: you'll appreciate each other even more!

Loretta LaRoche

Now yesterday is history.
 Tomorrow is a mystery.
 Today is God's great gift to you:
 That's why it's called "the present."

That's the closing poem in *The Joy of Stress* (a PBS special by funny therapist Loretta LaRoche). The poem means this:

Don't fret about the past, for you can't change it.
 Don't fret about the future: can't explain it!

So calm down and savor the moment you're in.
 It's God's little favor: come taste every flavor!

Now Loretta has a new presentation, called *Stop Global Whining*.

Test about life

Here's a multiple-choice test about life.

Laugh, and the world laughs *with* you. Cry, and....

Which completion is most correct?

Cry, and you cry alone.
 Cry, and you get a loan.
 Cry, and the world laughs *at* you.
 Cry, and your dad says to shut up.
 Cry, and you win the Academy Award.
 Cry, and you get on a Jerry Springer talk show.
 Cry, and your lover pities you and marries you.

Mr. Stupid

Why do people act strangely?
 Sometimes it's because their strangeness makes them feel unique & powerful.

They call me Mr. Stupid
 Because I am so cool!
 I put my pants on backwards —
 Just *love* to break the rules!

I fall in love with any girl
 Who dares to tell me "no,"
 Since any girl who dislikes *me*
 Must really be a show!

Though I'm called Mr. Stupid,
 I never really mind,
 Since I know how behind my back
 They whisper I'm so fine!

Sticks and stones may break my bones
 But names will never hurt.
 Though maybe stupid, I'm unique.
 The *other* folks are dirt.

Folks do not mind my joyous brags.
 In fact, they even laugh.
 Each time I tell a dirty joke,
 They offer me a bath.

Stupidity is wonderful
 When I am in control.
 I may be just a character,
 But on *my* bridge, the troll!

Christmas stress

Cartoonist Glenn McCoy says Christmas celebrities get stressed:

Rudolph the Reindeer: "All the other reindeer laugh and call me names!"
Santa Claus: "I don't believe in *myself*!"
An elf: "I'm trapped in a dead-end job!"
Frosty the Snowman: "I think I'm bipolar!"

What's *your* stress?

The Internet recommends these Christmas carols for the psychologically challenged:

Diagnosis

Multiple-personality disorder
 Amnesia
 Narcissist
 Paranoid
 Tourette's syndrome
 Seasonal-affective disorder
 Schizophrenic
 Depressed
 Agoraphobic
 Alzheimer's disease
 Social-anxiety disorder
 Passive/aggressive

Bipolar disorder, manic episode

Obsessive-compulsive disorder

Autistic

Borderline personality disorder

Borderline personality disorder 2

Antisocial-personality disorder

Oppositional-defiant disorder

Oppositional-defiant disorder 2

Attention-deficit disorder

Attention-deficit disorder 2

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity

Song title

We 3 queens disoriented are
 I (think) I'll be home for Christmas?
 Hark the herald angels sing about me
 Santa Claus is coming to town to get me
 Chestnuts... grrr! roasting on... bite me!
 Oh the weather outside is frightful, so frightful
 Do you hear what I hear: the voices, the voices?
 Silent night, holy night, all is calm, all is pretty lonely
 I heard the bells on Christmas Day but wouldn't leave my house
 Walking in a winter wonderland, miles from my house, in my bathrobe
 Have yourself a merry little Christmas while I sit here and hyperventilate
 On the first day of Christmas, my true love gave to me then took it all away, so I pouted for a week to teach that ass a lesson
 Deck the halls and walls and house and lawn and streets and stores and office and town and cars and buses and trucks and trees and fire hydrants...
 Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle bells...
 Jingle bell rock and rock and rock and rock...
 You better watch out, I'm gonna cry, I'm gonna pout, maybe say why
 Thoughts of roasting in an open fire
 Thoughts of roasting you on an open fire
 "You better not cry" "Oh yes, I will" "You better not shout" "I can if I want to" "You better not pout" "Can if I want to" "I'm telling you why" "Not listening" "Santa Claus is coming to town" "No, he's not!"
 I saw Mommy kissing Santa Claus, so I burned down the house
 We wish you... hey look! It's snowing!
 Silent night, holy... oohh, look at the froggy! Can I have a chocolate? Why is France so far away?
 All I want for Christmas is everything, and I want it now!

Slogans

Zulily.com sells clothes (especially T-shirts) with emotional slogans written on them. Examples:

Well, that did NOT go how I planned it. — My life story
 I used to be a PEOPLE PERSON, but people ruined that for me.
 SORRY, I can't talk. I talked to 2 people yesterday.
 They call me π because I'm irrational and don't know how to stop.
 I had a lot to do today. Now I have a lot to do tomorrow.

I'm not lazy. I'm energy-efficient.
 I'm not weird. I'm eccentrically gifted.
 I'm not bossy. I'm just aggressively helpful.
 I'm not bossy. I just know what you should be doing.
 I'm not practicing social distancing, I just don't like you.
 I'm not a one-in-a-MILLION kind of girl. I'm a once-in-a-LIFETIME kind of woman.
 I'm not feeling very WORKY today.
 I don't always have time to get my shit together, but when I do, I don't.

Don't study me. You won't graduate.
 I like my coffee how I like myself: strong, sweet, and too hot for you.
 She wears black but has the most colorful mind.
 Cookie tester, reporting for duty.
 A well-read woman is a dangerous creature.
 I'm a lady with the vocabulary of a well-educated sailor.
 Careful, or you'll end up in my novel.
 Underestimate me. That'll be fun.

Thou shalt not try me. — Mood 24:7
 I had my patience tested. It was negative.
 SORRY I called you an IDIOT. I thought you already knew.

Once in a while, someone amazing comes along... and here I am.
 Having a weird mom builds character.
 "He's made everything beautiful in its time." — Ecclesiastes 3:11

I NEED A HUGE amount of money.
 Dear Santa, I've been really good this year. Mostly. Sometimes. Never mind, I'll buy my own presents.
 The first rule of the passive-aggressive club is... You know what. Never mind, it's fine.

For young kids:

Future teenager.
You can't scare me. I have sisters.
Yes, I'm a boy. No, I'm not cutting my hair.
I prefer to call myself "delightfully difficult."
Dance with fairies. Swim with mermaids. Run with unicorns. Chase rainbows.

A Zulily coffee mug says:

You and I are SISTERS. Always remember: if you fall, I'll pick you up (after I finish laughing).

These are from other Websites (such as [CatalogFavorites.com](#) and [LegitAve.com](#)):

The dream is free. The hustle is sold separately.
Cremation is my last chance for smoking hot body.
If you're happy and you know it, it's your meds.
Sometimes I meet people and feel bad for their dog.
What if the Hokey Pokey really IS what it's all about?
Day 12 without chocolate. Lost hearing in my left eye.
Sorry I'm late. I didn't want to come.
Don't rush me. I'm waiting for the last minute.

My doctor asked if anyone in my family suffers from mental illness. I said: "No, we all seem to enjoy it."

At my funeral, take the bouquet off my coffin and throw it into the crowd, to see who's next.

Understanding what a woman wants is difficult, like trying to figure out what color the letter 7 smells like.

Mental-illness ditty

Mental illness strikes us all, eventually. During one of my bouts, I wrote this ditty to cheer myself up:

I'm mentally ill.
My mind's made of swill.
I'm king of the hill
When humping.

I hope that someday
Life turns out okay,
But now I'm in bed
And thumping.

Just wish I were dead.
Please come shoot my head.
What happens? I dread
I'm nothing.

Take me away

The most famous song about mental illness is *They're coming to take me away*, recorded in 1966 by Jerry Samuels (whose stage name is Napoleon XIV). I've recast it here as a poem:

Remember when you ran away?
Upon my knees, I begged "Don't leave
Or else I'll go berserk."

You left me anyhow, and then
The days got worse and worse, and now
I've lost my mind. You jerk!

So now they're taking me away
To farms (with beauty all the time
And men in clean white coats).

When I said losing you would make
Me flip my lid, you thought it was
A harmless joke. You laughed.

You *know* you laughed. I *heard* you laugh.
You *laughed and laughed*, and then you left;
And now I've gone quite mad.

So now they're taking me away
To Happy Home with trees and birds,
Where people twiddle thumbs.

In movie-making courses, students create movies using Jerry's original recording as the scary soundtrack. Here's an example:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=C0rgeQ0QD-o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C0rgeQ0QD-o)

Be grateful

Marcel Proust (the French novelist) said:

Let's be grateful to the people who make us happy;
they're the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.

Chemists

Chemists are mixed up.

Puzzles

How good are you at chemistry? To find out, see how long you take to solve these chemistry puzzles:

1. A chemist noticed a certain reaction took 80 minutes whenever he was wearing a green necktie, and the same reaction took an hour and twenty minutes whenever he was wearing a purple necktie. Why?
2. If you drop a steel ball, would it fall faster through water at 20 degrees Fahrenheit or water at 60 degrees?

To torture kids, ask *them* those puzzles. If you can't solve those problems yourself, ask your friends, until you find a friend smart & kind enough to tell you the answers — or read the answers here:

1. 80 minutes is the same as an hour and twenty minutes.
2. At 20 degrees Fahrenheit, water is ice, which would slow the ball.

The first puzzle comes from Martin Gardner's book, *Mathematical Puzzles*. The second puzzle is in many sources, such as S. Harold Collins' book, *Mastering the Art of Substitute Teaching*. To have more fun, get those books!

DHMO

Many people worry that our food contains too many chemicals. They say our food should contain no chemicals at all.

With that worry in mind, concerned chemists have created a Website called [DHMO.org](#), which warns about the dangers of a chemical called **DHMO**, which is **dihydrogen monoxide**. Examples of DHMO's dangers:

Many people have died from imbibing too much DHMO. Even just a thimbleful, up your nose, can kill you!

Unfortunately, DHMO is very prevalent. It's the main component in acid rain. DHMO spreads very easily. Many evil industries pour DHMO into rivers & streams.

DHMO is used in the distribution of pesticides. Trying to wash off your fruits & vegetables doesn't remove the DHMO. The cells of most plants and animals are now full of DHMO — and so is your food! Horribly, DHMO is added to many junk foods!

DHMO can be a solid, liquid, or gas. Your skin can get badly burned by contact with solid or gaseous DHMO. Your whole life can disappear — you die! — when you're immersed in liquid DHMO.

DHMO can destroy electrical circuits. It can even render ineffective your car's brakes!

DHMO is used by many criminals, for many purposes. To make matters worse, DHMO is highly addictive: to get access to a hit of DHMO, cultures around the world have gotten so desperate that they've even resorted to violence & wars. Whole communities have been destroyed by being flooded with DHMO.

DHMO can sneak up to you without warning, since it's odorless and colorless. The atomic chemicals that make up DHMO are in many other deadly substances, such as explosive nitroglycerin and poisonous cyanide.

Few laws limit DHMO. In 2002, a radio news show reported that Atlanta's water system was contaminated with DHMO, but Atlanta's water department replied that Atlanta's water contained no more DHMO than permitted by law.

When told of DHMO's dangers, 86% of Americans believe the U.S. government should ban DHMO.

DHMO (dihydrogen monoxide) is also known as dihydrogen oxide, hydrogen hydroxide, hydronium hydroxide, and hydric acid. Dihydrogen monoxide's chemical symbol is H_2O . That chemical is also called water.

That Website's purpose is to laugh at Americans who fear anything that sounds chemical. Look again at those examples of DHMO's dangers, and see how they're true about the dangers of... water!

Administratium

In April 1988, William DeBuvitz wrote about the discovery of **administratium**. Here's a summary of what he and later researchers have reported:

Chemists have finally discovered the heaviest element known to science. The element, **administratium**, has no protons or electrons, so its atomic number is 0; but it has 1 neutron, 125 assistant neutrons, 75 vice-neutrons, and 111 assistant vice-neutrons, giving it an atomic mass of 312. These 312 particles are held together by a force involving the continuous exchange of meson-like particles (called **morons**) and surrounded by vast quantities of lepton-like particles (called **peons**).

Administratium is inert (since it has no electrons) but can be detected chemically, since it impedes every reaction it contacts: a tiny amount of administratium can make a reaction take 4 days that would normally take less than a second.

Administratium has a half-life of 3 years, after which it doesn't decay but instead undergoes a reorganization in which assistant neutrons, vice-neutrons, and assistant vice-neutrons exchange places. Administratium's mass increases over time, since each reorganization makes some morons become neutrons, forming new isotopes, called **isodopes**. The moron promotion makes chemists think administratium forms spontaneously whenever morons reach a certain concentration, called a **critical morass**.

Administratium occurs naturally in the atmosphere but concentrates at certain points (such as government agencies, large corporations, and universities). It usually appears in buildings that are new, fancy, and well-maintained.

Since administratium is toxic at *any* concentration level, it destroys any productive reaction. We're trying to control administratium, to prevent irreversible damage. Help stop this deadly element from spreading!

Zulili.com sells a T-shirt saying this summary:

The universe is made of protons, neutrons, electrons, and MORONS.

Hell's heat

Back around 1950, chemists tried to prove heaven's hotter than hell. The proofs gradually got more sophisticated. A 1972 article in *Applied Optics* gave this argument:

Revelations 21:8 says **hell** is a "lake burning with fire & brimstone," so hell's temperature is below the boiling point of brimstone (sulfur), which is **444.6°C**.

Isaiah 30:26 says **heaven** is full of intense *light*, which generates lots of heat energy, **525°C** according to our calculations.

So heaven is hotter than hell.

The full article is at LhuP.edu/~dsimanek/hell.htm.

This bonus question appeared on a chemistry test:

Is hell *exothermic* (giving off heat) or *endothermic* (absorbing heat)? Prove your answer.

The professor expected the students to use Boyle's law (which says compressing a gas makes it hotter). According to the tale, the top student gave this answer:

First, we must discover how hell's mass is changing, so we need to know how fast souls enter hell and how fast they leave.

Once a soul gets to hell it won't leave, but how many souls *enter* hell? According to most religions, if you're not a member of that religion, you go to hell. Since there are many religions but no single person belongs to more than one, all people and their souls go to hell; so in light of birth & death rates, the number of souls in hell will increase exponentially.

Boyle's Law says that for hell's temperature and pressure to remain constant, hell's volume must expand proportionately as souls are added. That gives two possibilities....

#1: If hell expands *slower* than souls enter hell, hell's temperature and pressure will increase until all hell breaks loose.

#2: If hell expands *faster* than souls enter hell, hell's temperature and pressure will drop until hell freezes over.

So which is it?

If we accept the postulate given me by Teresa during my freshman year that "It will be a cold day in hell before I sleep with you" and realize I slept with her last night, hell's already frozen over, so *hell is exothermic* and #2 is true. Since hell's frozen over, it isn't accepting more souls and is extinct, leaving just heaven, thereby proving the existence of a divine being, which explains why last night Teresa kept shouting "Oh my God!"

Elements

In 1959 Tom Lehrer wrote a song called **The Elements**, where he sang the names of the 102 chemical elements discovered so far, to the tune of the *Major-General's Song* from Gilbert & Sullivan's *Pirates of Pinzance*. Here are 3 videos about it:

Tom sings, with element photos: [YouTube.com/watch?v=SmwlzwGMMwc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SmwlzwGMMwc)
Tom sings, with periodic table: [YouTube.com/watch?v=zGM-wSKFBpo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zGM-wSKFBpo)
Harry Potter's Daniel Radcliffe sings: [YouTube.com/watch?v=SAaiYKF0cs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAaiYKF0cs)

Warning: for the first video's Web address, the letter after w is a lower-case L.

An improved song, called **The New Periodic Table Song**, gives 118 elements listed in correct order (by atomic number), sung to the tune of Jacques Offenbach's *Gaité Parisienne*. It's at:

Fast version: [YouTube.com/watch?v=VgVQKcfnwU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VgVQKcfnwU)
Slow version: [DailyMotion.com/video/x2q1nnr](https://www.dailymotion.com/video/x2q1nnr)

Those singers also made a song about **which scientist to become**: is it better to be a physicist, chemist, biologist, or mathematician? Here they sing their arguments at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=LTXTeAt2mpg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LTXTeAt2mpg)

Jokes

Chemists react — with humor.

Chemists do it on the table, periodically.

Don't trust atoms. They make up everything.

According to the chemistry, alcohol is a solution.

What do you do with a dead chemist? Barium.

Want to hear a joke about nitrogen oxide? NO?

Old chemists never die. They just stop reacting.

What kind of dogs do chemists have? Laboratory retrievers.

What did one charged atom say to the other? I've got my ion you.

If H_2O is the formula for water, what's the formula for ice? H_2O cubed.

Why do chemists like nitrates so much? They're cheaper than day rates.

Why are chemists so great at solving problems? They have all the solutions.

What's the chemical formula for candy?

Carbon-Holmium-Cobalt-Lanthanum-Tellurium, or $CHoCoLaTe$.

A neutron walked into a bar. He asked, "How much for a beer?"

The bartender replied, "For you, no charge."

At the end of a chemistry class, the teacher asked, "What's the most important thing you learned in the lab?" A student replied, "Never lick the spoon."

Activists say, "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem."

Chemists say, "If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the precipitate."

An optimist sees the glass half full.

A pessimist sees the glass half empty.

A chemist sees the glass completely full: half liquid, half gas.

Teacher: "What's the formula for water?"

Student: "HIJKLMNO."

Teacher: "No."

Student: "But you said the formula for water is H to O."

Helium is used in balloons. Its symbol is **He**.

A chemist was reading a book about helium, but he just couldn't put it down. What does a chemist say when he enjoys seeing a balloon rise? HeHeHe.

Potassium's symbol is K.

Oxygen went on a date with potassium. It went OK.
Why is potassium a racist element? Because when you put 3 of them together, you get KKK.

Iron's symbol is Fe.

Superman, Batman, and Spiderman are all men. Why is Ironman a woman?
Because she's a Female.

Sodium's symbol is Na.

What fish is made from 2 sodium atoms? 2 Na.
Know any more jokes about sodium? Na.

Gold's symbol is Au.

Silver walked up to Gold in a bar and said, "Au, get outta here!"

Cesium's symbol is Cs.

What TV show do cesium and iodine love watching together? CsI.

Sodium chloride is the plain salt you sprinkle on food.

A man was stopped for having sodium chloride and a 9-volt in his car.
He was booked for a salt and battery.

Sulfuric acid is H_2SO_4 .

Susan was in chemistry,
But Susan is no more.
What she thought was H_2O
Was H_2SO_4 .

Hydrogen peroxide is H_2O_2 .

H_2O is water. H_2O_2 is hydrogen peroxide. What is H_2O_4 ? It's 4 drinking.
Two chemists walked into a chemistry bar. The first chemist said, "I'll drink H_2O ." The second chemist say, "I'll drink H_2O too." He died.

In chemistry, **Avogadro's constant**, which is also called a **mole**, is a huge number, about 6.02×10^{23} .

How many guacs are in a bowl of guacamole? Avocado's number.
What do you call a tooth in a glass of water? A 1-molar solution.

Why was the mole of oxygen molecules excited when he left the singles bar?
He got Avogadro's number.

The Tonight Show had Jay Leno read this classified ad:
"Do you have mole problems? If so, call Avogadro at 602-1023."

Finally:

I apologize for not having more chemistry jokes, but I add them just periodically.
This is the last chemistry joke, because all the good ones argon.

Physicists

Physics is phunny.

Physics for poets

To help liberal-arts students understand physicists such as Newton and Einstein, physicists teach a course called "Physics for Poets." The whole course is summarized in 4 sentences:

Physics rule	Poetic meaning
Newton's theory of gravitation	The earth sucks.
Newton's third law of motion	Every jerk creates his equal opponent.
Einstein's $E=MC^2$	A small matter can mushroom into a big whoopee.
Einstein's theory of relativity	Your views are influenced by your relatives.

Einstein song

In the 1700's, the British invented a song called "Oh, dear, what can the matter be?" In the 1900's I invented this updated version, thanks to Einstein:

Oh, dear, what can the matter be?
Oh, dear, what can the energy
Be, dear? Einstein will tell us
"It's E equals M C squared."

Dear musical physicists: could you please contribute more verses?

Physicist versus mime

Which is better: to be a physicist or a mime?

In 1931, Albert Einstein (physicist) said to Charlie Chaplin (mime):

What I admire most about your art is your universality. You don't say a word, yet the world understands you!

Charlie Chaplin replied:

True, but your fame is even greater! The whole world admires you when nobody understands you.

(That's according to one memoir. Other memoirs have slightly different phrasings.)

Why study physics?

Physicist Richard Feynman, who won the Nobel prize, said:

Physics is like sex: sure, it may give some practical results, but that's not why we do it.

Electricity

Physicists study electricity. So do electricians.

Why did the electrician marry his colleague? He couldn't resistor.
If you spend too long thinking about electricity, your head hertz.
A battery and a firework were arrested. One was charged, the other let off.

Barometer test

Back in 1958, *Reader's Digest* published a tale by Alexander Calandra about a barometer test. Later, he and others embellished the tale, to create fictional versions that are more fun, such as this:

A physics test said to "Find a height of a tall building by using a barometer." The professor considered the correct answer to be "Use the barometer to measure the air pressure at the building's top and the building's bottom, then analyze the difference."

But one student gave this cleverer answer: "Put the barometer at the end of a rope, lower the rope from the top of the building, and measure the rope's length plus the barometer's length. Or throw the barometer from the top of the building and measure how long the barometer takes to fall. Or compare the length of the building's shadow to the length of the barometer's shadow. Or walk up the stairs while you mark, on the walls, how many barometer-heights you had to climb. Or attach the barometer to a rope, swing it like a pendulum, and measure how the swing time at the building's top differs from the bottom."

The professor demanded, "Don't you know the *simplest* answer?"

The student replied, "Sure! Tell the building's superintendent you'll give him the barometer if he tells you the building's height! That's the simplest answer. I'm fed up with you professors telling me how I *should* think!"

Language

Humans use English and many other languages. I'll analyze how to write American English well then explain many alternatives!

How to write

The written word can be artistic.

Writing can be frustratingly easy. Gene Fowler (a sportswriter, newspaper manager, and screenwriter) said:

Writing is easy: just sit staring at a blank sheet of paper until drops of blood form on your forehead.

A similar thought was expressed by Walter "Red" Smith, who won a Pulitzer Prize (for writing comments about baseball):

There's nothing to writing. Just sit down at a keyboard and open a vein.

Authors say they're "writing" but forget to put an "h" after the "t": they're writhing, in pain.

Beginning

To become a successful writer, you must learn many secrets. But here's the first and most important secret:

Begin!

The main reason why good books don't get written is:

They were never begun.

If you've said to yourself, "I could write a book," do it! Take a pen and paper (or a word processor) and start writing your thoughts, even if they're still muddled. Once you've started writing your ideas, even if they're still half-baked or disorganized, you've overcome the major barrier to success: not having started.

If you have trouble writing the book's beginning, write the middle instead. You can write the "beginning" afterwards.

Too many writers think the beginning should be profound. They get hung up in a fruitless attempt to create profundity and atmosphere.

Scott Meredith, a famous literary agent, said he followed this rule when reading a manuscript from a new author: skip the first 100 pages! The first 100 pages are usually boring crap, such as "She looked in the mirror while she combed her auburn hair." After page 100, the dialogue finally gets worthwhile; that's when characters start arguing with each other about love and beyond, and you get sentences such as:

She spat at him and pulled the trigger.

If you're writing a technical manual that contains lots of charts and examples, begin by writing the charts and examples. Later, you can go back and add the introductory sentences that bind them together.

If you're a school kid writing one of those boring compositions about "What I did last summer" (or a more inspiring composition about "What I wish I'd done last summer"), start by describing the most exciting moment. Fill in the boring stuff later.

Rush

Assume your reader is busy and rushed. Don't waste the reader's time.

After writing your first draft and making minor edits (for spelling and grammar), ask yourself:

Is this crap I wrote worth reading?

Probably some part of it is worth reading. If you find that part and cut away the rest, you've mined your gem.

Then your reader will praise you for being a fascinating writer instead of a time-wasting hack.

Get emotional

When writing on a technical topic, get emotional about it. Tell the reader how you feel. If something you're writing about fascinates you, explain why. If you're forced to write about a topic that's yucky, gripe about its yuckiness and tell the reader how to de-yuckify it.

Showing your emotions will humanize the topic, help the reader relate, and make the topic and you both memorable.

Why poetry?

Here's what The Dead Poet's Society says (as edited by me):

We don't read & write poetry because it's cute. We read & write poetry because we're members of the human race, and the human race is filled with passion.

Medicine, law, business, and engineering are noble pursuits and necessary to sustain life; but poetry, beauty, romance, and love are what we stay alive for.

Scared to be a poet?

If you're writing poetry, don't worry so much about exposing your privacy. Many of your friends probably wouldn't recognize your private parts anyway.

I recommend you be brave and use your own name.

But if you're super-worried about privacy, go be a chicken-head: publish under a pseudonym. For example, you can call yourself "Lo-ann Li," so you'll be known as the Lo-ann Li poet.

Nothing's stopping you from using 2 pseudonyms, for 2 kinds of poems. For example, you could do lighter verse under the name "Ha-pi," so you'd also be known as the Ha-pi poet.

But the best choice is to merge the two. Cry, then step back and giggle. For example, Robert Frost's poem called "New Hampshire" goes on for 10 pages about how beautiful New Hampshire is, but then comes his last line: "I live in Vermont." You could write a poem full of pathos and bathos then end with, "On the other hand...."

The challenge is to put a *mix* of emotions into a poem, to make a poem *rich*, without making the poem seem accidentally disjointed.

The typical inventor (or poet) makes the mistake of hiding the invention (out of fear of being copied). That deprives him of the opportunity to get feedback on how the invention could be improved. Show your writing to friends and poets, ask what they dislike about your poems, and use that feedback to improve your work. To grow, you must learn to be hard on yourself.

Advice from famous writers

Robert Louis Stevenson said:

It takes hard writing to make easy reading.

E.L. Doctorow said:

Writing's an exploration. You start from nothing and learn as you go.

James Michener said:

I love writing. I love the swirl and swing of words as they tangle with human emotions.

Ernest Hemingway (a novelist famous for simple sentences) said this about William Faulkner (a novelist famous for complex sentences):

Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words? He thinks I don't know the ten-dollar words. I know them all right. But there are older and simpler and better words, and those are the ones I use.

Jack Maxson said:

When writing, pause after each paragraph and read aloud. Do you keep stumbling over certain words or phrases? If so, it needs rewriting. Does it flow smoothly and easily? If not, rewrite. After all, if you can't read your own stuff, who can?

William Saroyan said:

The most solid advice for a writer is: try to breathe deeply, really taste food when you eat, and when you sleep really sleep. Try to be wholly alive with all your might. When you laugh, laugh like hell. When you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You'll be dead soon enough.

It's fun to add a few extra paragraphs to your writing. It's less fun to edit what you've written and remove what's bad, but you must! Antoine de Saint Exupéry said:

Perfection's attained not when there's nothing more to add, but when there's nothing more to remove.

Jim Lehrer was famous for being a news anchor, not a writer, but his comment applies to both worlds:

It's fairly easy to produce heat but very tough to produce light.

In other words, it's easy to excite people but hard to inform them.

Writing as a career

Here are surprising truths about trying to write for a living.

Copyright You don't have to "copyright" what you write, since modern copyright law says that anything you write is copyrighted automatically. To *prove* you wrote it before somebody else, you can use many techniques, such as sending a copy to the Library of Congress or sending a copy to yourself by registered mail. On your manuscript's first page, it's helpful to put your city, year, copyright policy ("Don't copy without author's permission"), and a way for the reader to reach you (your street address, phone number, e-mail address, or Website).

Packaging your poetry If you're writing poetry, your poems might not be long enough to fill a book. That depends on how long your poems are and how your publisher packages them. If the book's pages are tiny and the poems are long, you might succeed; otherwise, add bulk by creating some prose (such as comments about the poems) or artwork.

Hard work, low pay To create a good poem, you must spend lots of time thinking, writing, and editing — without much pay.

It takes a heap o' writin'
To make a poem come home,
To beautify each little phrase
So critics do not groan.

It takes a heap o' writin'
To make a poem work out.
Ya gotta keep on tryin'
To clean out all the grout.

Don't expect to get rich by writing — especially if you're writing poetry. Poetry pays less than all other forms of writing. If you decide to marry the poetry muse, marry for love, not money. The famous poet Robert Graves said:

There's no money in poetry, but there's no poetry in money either.

Poetry can give you fame (through public readings and lectures) if you're lucky — though trying to become a "lucky poet" is nearly as hopeless as trying to become a "famous basketball player."

Low self-esteem Poets usually feel nervous about themselves. The famous poet W.H. Auden made this comment:

A poet can't say, "Tomorrow I'll write a poem and, thanks to my training and experience, I know I'll do a good job." In the eyes of others, a man's a poet

if he's written one good poem; but in a poet's own eyes, he's a poet just at the moment when he's making his last revision to a new poem. The moment before, he was just a *potential* poet; the moment after, he's a man who's ceased to write poetry, perhaps forever.

When you finish writing a book and you've done your final edits on it, you'll be sad at having to stop the fun of diddling with it. Truman Capote said:

Finishing a book is just like you took a child out in the back yard and shot it.

Teaching Writers don't get paid much, but as a writer you might be able to make a living by teaching others how to write, through courses, tutoring, consulting, or speeches.

Beyond fame As a writer, your chance of becoming famous is about the same as your chance of becoming a famous basketball player: a writer's life is a lottery where the usual result is "You lose." It's fun to try playing, though; and the game improves your mind, which is your most important asset. It also lets you express your individuality. Don Delillo said:

Writing's a form of personal freedom. It frees us from the mass identity we see around us. In the end, writers will write not to be outlaw heroes of some under-culture but mainly to save themselves, to survive as individuals.

Which words to use

Since your reader's in a rush and frowning, make each sentence be quick, punchy, fun. To be brief, use words that are short:

Too long, too formal, too stuffy **Shorter, cheerier, better**

I will	I'll
I am	I'm
I have	I've
I would	I'd
large	big
utilize	use
somebody	someone
everybody	everyone
upper-left corner	top-left corner
the beginning of the book	the book's beginning
Jack, president of the club, said	The club's president, Jack, said
This report's purpose is to explain taxes.	This report explains taxes.
The following examples show how:	These examples show how:
, as shown in the following examples:	. Here are examples:
The reader should press the Enter key.	Press the Enter key.
You should press the Enter key.	Press the Enter key.

To improve the word "only," change it to "just" (which is shorter to say) and move it *after* the verb (to clarify that it modifies the object, not the verb):

Bad: I only drink tea.
Better: I just drink tea.
Best: I drink just tea.

Don't use the word "very": it's boring, much more boring than the adjective it modifies. Delete "very." Mark Twain gave this advice:

Substitute "damn" every time you're inclined to write "very"; your editor will delete it and the writing will be just as it should be.

Hey, you! Don't say "the reader"; instead say "you," which is more direct and avoids the problem of whether "the reader" is a "he" or a "she."

So to avoid any "he"-versus-"she" problems, say "you."

Wrong because sexist: a policeman should keep his ID in his pocket.
Wrong because stuffy: a police officer should keep his/her ID in his/her pocket.
Right: if you're a police officer, keep your ID in your pocket.

Short paragraphs

Keep your paragraphs short. The ideal paragraph has 2, 3, or 4 sentences. If a paragraph has more than 4 sentences, the reader will get tired, lost, and bored: divide the paragraph into shorter ones.

A one-sentence paragraph is okay if the neighboring paragraphs are longer. But if a one-sentence paragraph comes after another one-sentence paragraph, your writing is too choppy: combine paragraphs to form longer ones.

Lists

Don't begin a sentence with a list. Instead, put the list at the sentence's *end*, after you've explained the list's purpose.

Wrong: Red, blue, and yellow are the primary colors.
Right: The primary colors are red, blue, and yellow.

Wrong: Jack Smith, Jean Jones, and Tina Turner are the leaders.
Right: The leaders are Jack Smith, Jean Jones, and Tina Turner.

How to write "real good"

At Dartmouth College during the 1960's and 1970's, students and faculty passed around a cynical list of rules about how to write. Each rule was purposely written badly, so it violates itself. The list was particularly popular among science students, who love to ponder self-contradictions. The list gradually grew, as many people added their own rules.

In March 1979, George Trigg published the list in a physics journal.
In October 1979, William Safire wrote a *New York Times* column saying he was making his own list and thanking Philip Hendersen for contributing some rules. In November 1979, he wrote a longer list. In 1990, he wrote a whole book based on those rules, which he called "Fumble Rules."
Later, improved versions were posted on the Internet at many Web sites, such as sites run by PBS and the National Institute of Health.

Here's my improved collection:

Punctuation

Don't overuse "quotation marks."
Don't overuse exclamation points!!!
Don't use commas, that aren't necessary.
Just Proper Nouns should be capitalized.
Don't use question marks inappropriately?
It's important to use apostrophes in the right places.
Don't write a run-on sentence you've got to punctuate it.
Use hyphens in compound-words, not just where two-words are related.
In letters, compositions, reports, and things like that use commas to keep a string of items apart.

Vocabulary

Don't abbrev.
Profanity sucks.
Avoid misspellings.
Puns are for children, not groan readers.
Don't use contractions in formal writing.
Proofread carefully to see if you any words out.
A writer must avoid sexist pronouns in his writing.
Always avoid annoying, affected, awkward alliteration.
Never use totally cool, radically groovy, outdated slang.
No sentence fragments! Complete sentences: important!
Use words correctly, irregardless of how others use them.
The bottom line is to bag trendy locutions that sound flaky.
Never use a big word where you can utilize a diminutive one.
In the case of a report, check to see that jargonwise, it's A-OK.
Foreign words and phrases are the reader's bete noir and not apropos.
Eschew obfuscation. Employ the vernacular. It behooves us all to avoid archaic expressions.

Verbs

Don't verb nouns.
One-word sentences? Never!
The passive voice is to be avoided.
Remember to never split an infinitive.
Writing carefully, dangling participles must be avoided.
If any word is improper at a sentence's end, a linking verb is.
Watch out for irregular verbs that have crept into our language.
Lay down and die before using a transitive verb without an object.

Adverbs

The adverb always follows the verb.
Hopefully, you won't float your adverbs.
Be carefully to use adjectives and adverbs correct.

By observing distinctions between adjectives and adverbs, you'll treat readers real good.

Conjunctions

Join clauses good, like a conjunction should.
And don't start a sentence with a conjunction.

Plurals

Make sure your verb and subject is in agreement.
Each pronoun should agree with their antecedent.
Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in their writing.

Objects

Just between you and I, case is important.
Don't be a person whom people realize confuses *who* and *whom*.

Comparisons

Even if a mixed metaphor sings, it should be derailed.
Mixed metaphors are a pain in the neck and ought to be weeded out.

Negation

Don't use no double negatives.
Don't make negative statements.
Never contradict yourself always.
Don't put sentences in the negative form.

Reasoning

Be more or less specific.
One should never generalize.
Who needs rhetorical questions?
Generalizations must always be eliminated.
Eliminate quotations. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "I hate quotations. Tell me what you know."
If I've told you once, I've told you a thousand times: exaggeration is a billion times worse than understatement.

Lengthy sentences

A writer must not shift your point of view.
A preposition isn't a good thing to end a sentence with.
Parenthetical remarks (however relevant) are superfluous.
Parallel structure will help you in writing more effective sentences and to express yourself more gracefully.
Place pronouns as close as possible, especially in long sentences, as of 10 or more words, to their antecedents.
Don't string together too many prepositional phrases, unless you're walking through the valley of the shadow of death.
Stamp out and eliminate redundancies. Never, ever use repetitive redundancies. If you reread your work, you'll find, on rereading, lots of repetition can be avoided by rereading and editing.
Never go off on tangents, which are lines that intersect a curve at just one point and were analyzed by Euclid, who lived before Christ in Greece, which got conquered by the Romans but later hosted the 2004 Olympics.
Avoid those run-on sentences that just go on, and on, and on; they never stop, they just keep rambling, and you really wish the person would just shut up, but no, they just keep going; they're worse than the Energizer Bunny; they babble incessantly; and these sentences, they just never stop: they go on forever, if you get my drift.

Phrases

Always pick on the correct idiom.
As far as incomplete constructions, they are wrong.
Go out of your way to avoid colloquialisms, ya' know? Go around the barn at high noon to avoid colloquialisms.
Last but not least, even if you have to bend over backward, lay off clichés like the plague: they're old hat, so seek viable alternatives.

Are you smart enough to find the error in each of those sentences? After you've found the error, how would you correct it?

Try correcting those sentences! Afterwards, look at these corrected (and boring) versions of those sentences:

Punctuation

Don't overuse quotation marks.
Don't overuse exclamation points.
Don't use commas that aren't necessary.
Just proper nouns should be capitalized.
Don't use question marks inappropriately.
It's important to use apostrophes in the right places.
Don't write a run-on sentence; you've got to punctuate it.
Use hyphens in compound words, not just where two words are related.

In letters, compositions, reports, and things like that, use commas to keep a string of items apart.

Vocabulary

Don't abbreviate.
Profanity is disgusting.
Avoid misspellings.
Puns are for children, not adults.
Do not use contractions in formal writing.
Proofread carefully to see if you left any words out.
A writer must avoid sexist pronouns.
Don't use awkward alliteration.
Never use outdated slang.
Don't write sentence fragments! Completing sentences is important!
Use words correctly, regardless of how others use them.
Don't use faddish expressions.
Never use a big word where you can use a small one.
In the case of a report, check to see that it's free of jargon.
Foreign words and phrases are the reader's nightmare and not appropriate.
Don't complicate. Use colloquial speech. Avoid archaic expressions.

Verbs

Don't turn nouns into verbs.
Never have one-word sentences.
Avoid the passive voice.
Remember: never split an infinitive.
To write carefully, avoid dangling participles.
Don't end a sentence with a linking verb.
Watch out for irregular verbs that have crept into our language.
Lie down and die before using a transitive verb without an object.

Adverbs

The adverb follows the verb, always.
I hope you won't float your adverbs.
Be careful to use adjectives and adverbs correctly.
By observing distinctions between adjectives and adverbs, you'll treat readers really well.

Conjunctions

Join clauses well, as a conjunction should.
Don't start a sentence with a conjunction.

Plurals

Make sure your verb and subject are in agreement.
Each pronoun should agree with its antecedent.
Everyone should be careful to use a singular pronoun with singular nouns in writing.

Objects

Just between you and me, case is important.
Don't be a person who people realize confuses *who* and *whom*.

Comparisons

Even if a mixed metaphor sings, it should be shushed.
Mixed metaphors are a pain in the neck and ought to be massaged out.

Negation

Don't use double negatives.
Avoid negative statements.
Never contradict yourself.
Avoid putting sentences in the negative form.

Reasoning

Be specific.
Avoid generalizing.
Rhetorical questions are unnecessary.
Generalizations should usually be eliminated.
Eliminate quotations: tell me what *you* know.
As I've said before, exaggeration is much worse than understatement.

Lengthy sentences

As a writer, you must not shift your point of view.
A preposition isn't a good thing with which to end a sentence.
Parenthetical remarks are superfluous.
Parallel structure will help you write more effective sentences and express yourself more gracefully.
Place pronouns as close as possible to their antecedents, especially in long sentences, as of 10 or more words.
Don't string together too many prepositional phrases, unless you're walking through the valley of death's shadow.
If you reread your work, you'll find lots of repetition to edit out.

Never go off on tangents.
Avoid sentences that ramble.

Phrases

Always pick the correct idiom.
As far as incomplete constructions go, they are wrong.
Make an effort to avoid colloquialisms.
Avoid clichés: they're stale, so seek fresh alternatives.

Warring editors

When you take a course about how to write, your teacher will probably give you rules about how to write correctly. The typical teacher neglects to mention that different editors believe in different rules.

A set of writing rules is called a **style**. Let's look these 7 different styles for writing American English:

Many newspapers belong to a collective called **The Associated Press (AP)**, whose style is explained in *The Associated Press Stylebook* and called **AP style**. When newspapers submit articles to AP, the articles must be written in AP style.

Many newspapers dislike some details of AP style. For example, *The New York Times* uses its own style, explained in *The New York Times Manual of Style and Usage* and called **New York style**. Articles that appear in *The New York Times* are written in New York style. (Afterwards, when *The New York Times* offers those articles to AP for other newspapers to use, the articles must be rewritten into AP style.)

Many book publishers use the style invented at the University of Chicago Press, explained in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, and called **Chicago style**.

Many colleges make students write research papers in a style invented by the **Modern Language Association (MLA)**, explained in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers* and called **MLA style**.

All those styles were invented by modern committees, but many editors instead prefer using styles that are more personal, such as **Margaret style** (explained by Margaret Nicholson in her 1957 book *American English Usage*, which updates Fowler's 1926 book *Modern English Usage*) or **Theodore style** (explained by Theodore Bernstein in his 1965 book *The Careful Writer*) or **Russ style** (explained here by me, Russ Walter, and used in my books, *The Secret Guide to Computers* and *Tricky Living*).

Here are examples of how those 7 styles differ...

Comma before "and" When a sentence includes a list of at least 3 items, should you put a comma before "and"? Which of the following is better?

I saw Joe, Mary, and Sue.	(comma before "and")
I saw Joe, Mary and Sue.	(no comma before "and")

The comma before "and" (or before "or") is called the **serial comma** or **Oxford comma** (or **Harvard comma**).

Russ, Margaret, MLA, and Chicago put a comma before "and."
AP and New York omit that comma, unless the omission would cause confusion. For example, it would be confusing to omit the last comma from this sentence:

I admire my parents, Mother Teresa, and God.

If you omit that comma, the reader will think your parents are Mother Teresa and God. It would be even more confusing to omit the last comma from this sentence:

I love my parents, Lady Gaga, and Humpty Dumpty.

But you could eliminate the confusion by rearranging the sentence:

I love Lady Gaga, Humpty Dumpty and my parents.

It would also be confusing to omit the last comma from this sentence:

For breakfast I ate sausage, ham, and eggs.

If you omit that comma, the reader will think you ate 2 things ("sausage" and "ham and eggs"); then the reader will wonder why you didn't put "and" before "ham."

Theodore gives no advice about that comma.
A comma must be added to this sentence:

They interviewed his 2 ex-wives, Kris Kristofferson and Robert Duvall.

More examples are at:

wikipedia.org/wiki/Serial_comma
grammarly.com/blog/what-is-the-oxford-comma-and-why-do-people-care-so-much-about-it

Quotation marks At the end of a quotation, should the quotation mark come before or after other punctuation (such as a period, comma, colon, semicolon, question mark, or exclamation point)? Which of the following is better?

He called her "wonderful". (period after the quotation mark)
He called her "wonderful." (period before the quotation mark)

AP, New York, Chicago, MLA, and Margaret say:

Put a period or comma *before* the quotation mark.
Put a colon or semicolon *after* the quotation mark.
Put a question mark before the quotation mark just if what's quoted is a question. Put an exclamation point before the quotation mark just if what's quoted was exclaimed.

Russ says:

Put a colon or semicolon *after* the quotation mark.
Put a question mark before the quotation mark just if what's quoted is a question. Put an exclamation point before the quotation mark just if what's quoted was exclaimed.
If you're typing a typical document, follow this rule: put a period or comma *before* the quotation mark (to look pretty). But if your document is about "how to punctuate" or "how to type" or "how to write a computer program," put a period *after* the quotation mark (to make sure the reader doesn't think you want a period typed).

Theodore gives no advice about quotation marks.

Numbers spelled out In the middle of a sentence, should numbers be written as digits (such as "12") or spelled out (such as "twelve")? Which of the following is better?

I have 12 friends. (number as digits)
I have twelve friends. (number spelled out)

Here's the general rule (though there are many exceptions when writing about math, science, numbered lists, etc.):

Russ spells out just the numbers zero and one.
AP and New York spell out the numbers up through nine, except that the age of a person or animal is never spelled out.
MLA spells out the numbers up through one hundred, plus any other number that can be expressed in two words (such as "fifteen hundred").
Chicago spells out all the numbers up through one hundred, plus any big number that looks rounded because it can be expressed in hundreds, thousands, hundred thousands, or millions (such as "forty-seven thousand" and "two hundred thousand").

Margaret and Theodore give no advice about which numbers to spell out.

Those rules are for a number in the sentence's *middle* or *end*. But what about a number at the sentence's *beginning*? Which of the following is better?

12 friends came here. (number as digits)
Twelve friends came here. (number spelled out)

Some editors think "Twelve" looks better than 12, because "Twelve" begins with a capital letter, showing the reader that a new sentence is starting. Other editors disagree. Here's the general rule about a number at a sentence's beginning:

At a sentence's beginning, New York, Chicago, and MLA spell out any number. At a sentence's beginning, AP spells out any number except a year (such as 2006). But instead of putting a big number at a sentence's beginning, all those editors (at New York, Chicago, MLA, and AP) recommend rearranging the sentence, to put the big number elsewhere.

At a sentence's beginning, Russ normally spells out just the numbers zero, one, and two; but if the preceding sentence (in the same paragraph) ends in digits, Russ spells out any number up through twelve.

Percent sign Instead of writing the word "percent," should you write the symbol "%"? Which is best?

He got 99.8 percent of the money. (the word "percent")
He got 99.8 per cent of the money. (the words "per cent")
He got 99.8% of the money. (the symbol "%")

Here are the rules:

MLA and Russ write the symbol "%".
AP writes the word "percent."
New York usually writes the word "percent" but writes the symbol "%" instead in tables, graphs, and headlines.
Chicago usually writes the word "percent" but writes the symbol "%" instead if the page is mainly about science or statistics.
In their old books, Margaret and Theodore wrote the words "per cent," but if they were writing today they'd probably switch to "percent," since "per cent" has become rare.

United States Should you shorten "United States of America" to "United States" or "U.S.A." or "U.S." or "US"?

Here are the rules:

Russ writes "U.S."
Margaret writes "U.S." (but writes "US" in reference books where there's not enough room to include the periods).
AP writes "United States" (but writes "U.S." if used as an adjective).
MLA writes "United States" (but writes "US" in citations, such as footnotes, endnotes, bibliographies, and parenthetical comments).
Chicago writes "United States" (but writes "U.S." if used as an adjective or citation in a normal book, "US" if used as an adjective or citation in a science book).
New York writes "United States" (but writes "U.S." in headlines, tables, charts, picture captions, names of interstate highways, and where "U.S." is part of an organization's official name).

Theodore gives no advice about the United States.

State abbreviations When you mention a city with its state (but no street), should you abbreviate the state's name? How? Which of the following is best?

He came from Oakland, California, by bus. (full name)
He came from Oakland, Cal., by bus. (traditional abbreviation)
He came from Oakland CA by bus. (2-letter abbreviation)

Here are the rules:

MLA and Chicago write the state's full name (such as "California").
Russ writes the state's 2-letter abbreviation (such as "CA").
New York writes the full name for Alaska, Hawaii, Idaho, Iowa, Ohio, and Utah but writes traditional abbreviations for all other states (such as "Cal.").
AP writes the full name for Alaska, Hawaii, and states whose names are short (Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Ohio, Texas, and Utah) but writes traditional abbreviations for all other states (such as "Cal.?).

Margaret and Theodore give no advice about states.

Famous American cities When you write a sentence about Cleveland, must you remind the reader that Cleveland is in Ohio, by writing "Cleveland, Ohio," or can you write just "Cleveland" and assume the reader knows where Cleveland is?

AP omits the state for these 30 famous American cities:

Atlanta, Baltimore, Boston, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Dallas, Denver, Detroit, Honolulu, Houston, Indianapolis, Las Vegas, Los Angeles, Miami, Milwaukee, Minneapolis, New Orleans, New York, Oklahoma City, Philadelphia, Phoenix, Pittsburgh, Salt Lake City, San Antonio, San Diego, San Francisco, Seattle, St. Louis, Washington

When describing events at the United Nations headquarters, AP says just "United Nations" (without mentioning that the headquarters is in New York).

Russ agrees with AP.

New York style (used by *The New York Times*) omits the state

for those same 30 cities (and the United Nations) and for these 18 extra cities —

Albuquerque, Anchorage, Colorado Springs, Des Moines, El Paso, Fort Worth, Hartford, Hollywood, Iowa City, Memphis, Miami Beach, Nashville, New Haven, Omaha, Sacramento, St. Paul, Tucson, Virginia Beach

and for these 6 cities (which are in New York state) —

Albany, Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, White Plains, Yonkers

and for these 4 cities (which are in New Jersey):

Atlantic City, Jersey City, Newark, Trenton

MLA, Chicago, Margaret, and Theodore give no rules about cities.

Famous foreign cities When you write a sentence about Beijing, must you remind the reader that Beijing is in China, by writing “Beijing, China,” or can you write just “Beijing” and assume the reader knows where Beijing is?

AP omits the country for these 27 famous foreign cities:

Beijing, Berlin, Djibouti, Geneva, Gibraltar, Guatemala City, Havana, Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Kuwait City, London, Luxembourg, Macau, Mexico City, Monaco, Montreal, Moscow, New Delhi, Ottawa, Paris, Quebec City, Rome, San Marino, Singapore, Tokyo, Toronto, Vatican City

Russ agrees with AP.

New York style omits the country for those same 27 cities and these 39 extra cities:

Algiers, Amsterdam, Athens, Bangkok, Bombay, Bonn, Brasília, Brussels, Budapest, Buenos Aires, Cairo, Calcutta, Cape Town, Copenhagen, Dublin, Edinburgh, Frankfurt, Glasgow, The Hague, Istanbul, Johannesburg, Lisbon, Madrid, Manila, Milan, Oslo, Panama, Prague, Rio De Janeiro, San Salvador, Shanghai, Stockholm, Tehran, Tel Aviv, Tunis, Venice, Vienna, Warsaw, Zurich

(Since Baghdad’s been in the news a lot recently and most Americans know it’s in Iraq, I expect the New York stylebook’s next edition will include Baghdad in that list.)

Capital after colon After a colon, should you capitalize the next word? Which of the following is better?

Here’s what I think: Love conquers all. (capital after colon)
Here’s what I think: love conquers all. (no capital after colon)

Here are the rules about capitalizing the word after a colon:

AP and Theodore capitalize if the word begins a sentence (such as “Love conquers all”).

MLA capitalizes just if the word begins a sentence that’s a rule or principle (such as “Love conquers all”).

Chicago capitalizes just if the word begins a list of sentences (at least two sentences).

Russ capitalizes just if the word begins a new paragraph (so it’s on a new line); and in that case, Russ draws a box around the new paragraph (like the paragraph you’re reading now).

New York capitalizes just if the phrase before the colon (“Here’s what I think”) just introduces the sentence after the colon.

Margaret gives no advice about capitalizing that word.

Capitalizing a.m. Which of the following is best?

9:30AM (capitals, no periods, no spaces)
9:30 a.m. (a space and periods, no capitals)

AP, New York, Chicago, and MLA say “9:30 a.m.” Russ says “9:30AM.” Margaret and Theodore give no advice about time.

“An” before “historic” Before the word “historic,” should you put “a” or “an”? Which of the following is better?

It’s an historic event. (“an” before “historic”)
It’s a historic event. (“a” before “historic”)

AP, New York, Chicago, Margaret, and Theodore put “a” before “historic” (because “h” has a consonant sound). Russ puts “an” before “historic” (because that “h” is nearly silent, if your accent is British or sophisticated American). MLA gives no advice about “historic.”

Quick wits

Here are 3 masters of quick wit.

Dorothy Parker said:

I hate writing. I love having written.
I’ll stay the way I am, ’cause I don’t give a damn.
Men seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses.
Lips that taste of tears, they say, are the best for kissing.
It serves me right for putting all my eggs in one bastard.
All I need is room enough to lay a hat and a few friends.
I don’t care what is written about me, so long as it isn’t true.
Take me or leave me; or, as is the usual order of things, both.
Ducking for apples — change one letter and it’s the story of my life.
Friends come and go, but I wouldn’t have thought you’d be one of them.
This wasn’t just plain terrible, it was fancy terrible. It was terrible with raisins in it.

What’s the difference between an enzyme and a hormone?
You can’t hear an enzyme.

If all the girls attending the Yale prom were laid end to end,
I wouldn’t be surprised.

Love is like quicksilver in the hand:
leave the fingers open and it stays; clutch it and it darts away.

I wish I could drink like a lady.
I can take 1 or 2 at the most.
3 and I’m under the table.
4 and I’m under the host.

Oh, life is a glorious cycle of song,
A medley of extemporanea;
And love is a thing that can never go wrong;
And I am Marie of Romania.

If you have any young friends who aspire to become writers, the second greatest favor you can do them is to present them with copies of *The Elements of Style*. The first greatest, of course, is to shoot them now, while they’re happy.

If you try to be as witty as her, don’t just wisecrack. She warned:
Wit has truth to it. Wisecracking is just calisthenics with words.

Who said:

The cure for boredom is curiosity. There’s no cure for curiosity.

Some folks thought it was Dorothy Parker, but it was probably **Ellen Parr**. Details are at:

QuoteInvestigator.com/2015/11/01/cure

Steven Wright said:

Hermits have no peer pressure.
What a nice night for an evening!
What’s another word for *thesaurus*?
I intend to live forever. So far, so good.
I bought batteries, but they weren’t included.
I got powdered water. I don’t know what to add.
You can’t have everything. Where would you put it?
I was trying to daydream, but my mind kept wandering.
Many people are afraid of heights. Not me. I’m afraid of widths.
I think it’s wrong that just one company makes the game Monopoly.
There’s a fine line between fishing and standing on the shore like an idiot.

A friend sent me a picture postcard of the earth. The back said, “Wish you were here.”

If it’s a penny for your thoughts and you put in your 2 cents worth, then someone somewhere is making a penny.

Babies don’t need a vacation, but I still see them at the beach. That pisses me off. I’ll go over to a little baby and ask, “What are you doing here? You haven’t worked a day in your life!”

2 babies were born on the same day at the same hospital. They lay there and looked at each other. Their families came and took them away. 80 years later, by bizarre coincidence, they lay in the same hospital, on their deathbeds, next to each other. One looked at the other and said, “So, what did you think?”

Here's how **Pauline Phillips**, who wrote under the pen name "Abigail Van Buren" and called herself "Dear Abby," answered questions about love:

- Q: Which is better: to go a school dance with a creep or sit home?
A: Go with the creep, and look over the crop.
- Q: My boyfriend's going to be 20 next month. I'd like to give him something nice for his birthday. What do you think he'd like?
A: Never mind what he'd like. Give him a tie.
- Q: I've been going with a girl for a year. How can I get her to say yes?
A: What's the question?
- Q: I've been going steady with a man for 6 years. We see each other every night. He says he loves me, and I know I love him; but he never mentions marriage. Do you think he's going out with me just for what he can get?
A: I don't know. What's he getting?
- Q: What's the difference between a wife and a mistress?
A: Night and day.
- Q: I know boys will be boys, but my "boy" is 73 and still chasing women. Any suggestions?
A: Don't worry. My dog's been chasing cars for years; but if he ever caught one, he wouldn't know what to do with it.

Here's how she answered other questions:

- Q: I want to have my family history traced but can't afford to pay for it. Any suggestions?
A: Run for public office.
- Q: About 4 months ago, the house across the street was sold to a "father and son" — or so we thought. Later we learned it was an older man about 50 and a young fellow about 24. This was a respectable neighborhood before this "odd couple" moved in. They have all sorts of strange-looking company: men who look like women, women who look like men, blacks, whites, Indians. Yesterday I even saw 2 nuns go in there! These weirdoes are wrecking our property values! How can we improve the quality of this once-respectable neighborhood?
A: You could move.

The top-rated **witty poem** is *The Rich Man*, written by Dorothy Parker's mentor (Franklin Pierce Adams) in 1909, when just the rich had cars & fancy cigars. The main verses are:

The rich man has his motor car,
His country and his town estate.
He smokes a 50-cent cigar
And jeers at fate.

But though my lamp burns low and dim,
Though I must slave for livelihood,
Think you that I would trade with him?
You bet I would!

For youngsters who can't understand him, here's my updated version (inspired by Lindsay Lohan and other actresses spiraling downhill toward their deaths):

The actress has her in-car bar,
Her L.A. and New York estates.
She snorts coke from a 10-pound jar
And jeers at fates.

Yet though I'm but an unknown blur,
Though I must slave for livelihood,
Think you that I would trade with her?
You bet I would!

— Except my doctor said I should
Not kill myself as that girl would.

When Lindsay complains she snorts *less* than 10 pounds, I reply:

Coming soon to the theater that's you!

Replies

Here's how famous people wittily replied. (I edited these slightly.)

Dorothy Parker:

- "I can't bear fools."
Dorothy Parker: "Apparently your mother could."
"A journalist requests an interview."
Dorothy Parker: "Tell him I'm too fucking busy, and vice versa."
"Use 'horticulture' in a sentence."
Dorothy Parker: "You can drag a horticulture, but you can't make her think."
"Do you think Katharine Hepburn is a great actress?"
Dorothy Parker: "She runs the gamut of emotions from A to B."
"Calvin Coolidge died."
Dorothy Parker: "How can they tell?"

Other writers:

- "I enjoyed reading your book. Who wrote it for you?"
Ilka Chase: "I'm so glad you liked it. Who read it for you?"
"Since you're autographing things, why don't you autograph my penis?"
Truman Capote: "I don't know if I can autograph it, but perhaps I can initial it."
"Did you go to the funeral?" Mark Twain: "I didn't attend the funeral, but I sent a nice letter saying I approved of it."
"What do you think of her?" P.G. Wodehouse: "She looked as if she'd been poured into her clothes and forgotten to say 'when.'"
"What do you think of Richard Nixon?" James Reston: "He inherited some good instincts from his Quaker forebears. But by diligent hard work, he overcame them."

Winston Churchill:

- "Must you fall asleep while I'm speaking?"
Winston Churchill: "No, it's purely voluntary."
Lady Astor: "If you were my husband, I'd put poison in your coffee."
Winston Churchill: "If you were my wife, I'd drink it."
"You're drunk!" Winston Churchill: "You're right. And you're ugly. But tomorrow morning, I'll be sober, and you'll still be ugly."
Playwright George Bernard Shaw: "I've reserved you 2 tickets for opening night. Come and bring a friend — if you have one!" Winston Churchill: "Impossible to come first night. Will come second night — if you have one!"

Presidents:

- "You're 2-faced." Abraham Lincoln replied: "If I had 2 faces, do you think I'd be wearing this one?"
"I've bet against a fellow who said it's impossible to get more than 2 words out of you." Calvin Coolidge replied: "You lose."

Other politicians:

- "What do you think of Western civilization?"
Mohandas Gandhi: "I think it would be a wonderful idea."
"What do you think of America?"
King Edward 8: "The thing that impresses me most about America is the way parents obey their children."
"You shouldn't have said half the cabinet are asses."
Benjamin Disraeli: "I withdraw my statement. Half the cabinet are *not* asses."
"Take a drug test."
Fritz Hollings: "I'll take a drug test if you'll take an IQ test."
"I'd rather be right than be President."
Thomas Brackett Reed: "You need not trouble yourself. You'll neither be either."
"What do you think of Lyndon Johnson?"
Dean Acheson: "A real centaur: part man, part horse's ass!"

Musicians:

- "Is Ringo Starr the best drummer in the world?"
John Lennon: "He's not even the best drummer in the Beatles."
"Did you like the opera I composed?"
Ludwig van Beethoven: "I like your opera. I think I'll set it to music."

Others:

"Why do I have 10 kids? Because I love my wife." Groucho Marx: "I love my cigar, but I take it out of my mouth once in a while."

A singer: "I insured my voice for \$50,000." Miriam Hopkins: "That's wonderful. And what did you do with the money?"

Noel Coward: "You look almost like a man." Edna Ferber: "So do you."

"You made more money than President Herbert Hoover." Babe Ruth: "Maybe, but I had a better year than he did."

"Did you read my book?" Moses Hadas: "Thanks for sending me a copy of your book. I'll waste no time reading it."

For more examples — and more details about those quotes & people — view the slideshow at:

<https://rewind.topix.net/slideshow/20423>

Weird writing

I've explained how to write normally. Here's how to write weirdly.

Tongue twisters

Write something that's hard to pronounce. Here are famous examples; try to say them out loud, fast! They're good to practice, especially if you have a speech impediment or you're a foreigner trying to speak English or you're training to be a news announcer.

The hardest short sentence to say is:

The 6th sick sheik's 6th sheep's sick.

If you master that, try this longer version:

The 6th sick sheik's 6th sheep's sick, so 6 slick sheiks sold 6 sick sheep 6 silk sheets.

The hardest phrases to say 10 times fast are:

"sixish"
"toy boat"
"big whip"
"3 free throws"
"mixed biscuits"
"cheap ship trip"
"Peggy Babcock"
"selfish shellfish"
"Irish wristwatch"
"unique New York"
"black bug's blood"
"inchworms inching"
"red blood, blue blood"
"good blood, bad blood"
"shredded Swiss cheese"
"6 short slow shepherds"
"caution: wide right turns"
"11 benevolent elephants"
"the myth of Miss Muffet"
"the epitome of femininity"
"quick-witted cricket critic"
"Tim, the thin twin tinsmith"
"Mrs. Smith's fish-sauce shop"
"9 nice night nurses nursing nicely"
"6 simmering sharks, sharply striking shins"

Try saying these sentences 10 times fast:

"Ed had edited it."
"Please pay promptly."
"Chop shops stock chops."
"Whistle for the thistle sifter."
"Sure, the ship's shipshape, sir."
"A noisy noise annoys an oyster."
"Betty better butter Brad's bread."
"Is this your sister's 6th zither, sir?"
"Friendly Frank flips fine flapjacks."
"The 2:22 train tore through the tunnel."
"Sam's shop stocks short spotted socks."
"Can a clam cram in a clean cream can?"
"Which witch wished which wicked wish?"
"Many an anemone sees an enemy anemone."
"When does the wristwatch-strap shop shut?"
"Fred fed Ted bread, and Ted fed Fred bread."
"Which wristwatches are Swiss wristwatches?"
"They both, though, have 33 thick thimbles to thaw."
"Mrs. Smith's fish-sauce shop seldom sells shellfish."
"Give papa a proper cup of coffee in a copper coffee cup."

These poems are fun to try saying:

Don't pamper damp scamp tramps
That camp under ramp lamps.

6 sick hicks
Nick 6 slick bricks
With picks and sticks.

If 2 witches were watching 2 watches,
Which witch would watch which watch?

She sells seashells on the seashore.
The shells she sells are seashells, she's sure.

Ruby Rugby's brother bought and brought her
Back some rubber baby-buggy bumpers.

A skunk sat on a stump
And thunk the stump stunk,
But the stump thunk the skunk stunk.

A flea and a fly, I fear, flew to a flue.
Said the flea to the fly, "Let us flee!"
Said the fly to the flea, "Let us fly!"
So they flew through a flaw in the flue.

If you stick a stock of liquor in your locker,
It's slick to stick a lock upon your stock.
A stickler who is slicker
Could stick you of your liquor
If you don't lock your liquor with a lock.

How much wood would a woodchuck chuck
If a woodchuck could chuck wood?
He'd chuck, he would, what a woodchuck could
If a woodchuck could chuck wood.

Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.
Did Peter Piper pick a peck of pickled peppers?
If Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers,
Where's the peck of pickled peppers
Peter Piper picked?

A bitter biting bittern
Bit a better brother bittern,
But the bitter better bittern
Bit the bitter biter back.
The bitter bittern bitten
By the better bitten bittern said,
"I'm bitter, badly bit! Alack!"

You've no need to light a nightlight
On a light night like tonight,
For a nightlight's light a slight light,
And tonight's a night that's light.
When a night's light (like tonight's light),
It is really not quite right
To light nightlights with their slight lights
On a light night like tonight.

A tree toad loved a she-toad
Who lived up in a tree.
He was a 2-toed tree toad;
A 3-toed toad was she.
The 2-toed tree toad tried to win
The 3-toed she-toad's heart.
The 2-toed tree toad loved the ground
The 3-toed tree toad trod.
The 2-toed tree toad tried in vain.
He couldn't please her whim,
For from her tree-toad bower
With finest 3-toed power
The she-toad vetoed him.

Betty Botter bought some butter.
"But," said she, "This butter's bitter.
If I bake it in my batter,
It'll make my batter bitter;
But a bit of better butter's
Bound to make my batter better!"
So she bought some better butter
(Better than the bitter butter),
And she baked it in her batter,
So her batter was not bitter!

Naughty twisters Try to say this poem fast:

I slit a sheet. A sheet I slit.
Upon the slitted sheet I sit.

Can you say it fast — without accidentally saying the naughty word "shit"?

Try to say this poem fast:

I'm not the pheasant plucker. I'm the pheasant plucker's mate.
I'm only plucking pheasants 'cause the pheasant plucker's late.
I'm not the pheasant plucker. I'm a pheasant plucker's son.
I'm only plucking pheasants till the pheasant pluckers come.

Can you say it fast — without accidentally saying "pleasant fucker"?

Personals

Just for fun, try to write "personal" ads that summarize your real-or-imaginary life & desires in a single sentence, like this:

Men seeking women

Man with big nose on swelled head seeks swelled woman.

Women seeking men

Woman hating men seeks sorcerer to change her mind.
Woman having period seeks man knowing how to comma.
Woman with child seeks man who isn't latter.
Looking for a guy with a sense of humor, to laugh at.

Non-specific

Brain without body seeks both.
Idiot seeks savant.
Smart seeks dumb for fun times in sign language.
Want a partner who's *normal*, 'cause I'm not.
If you're square, I'll be your square root.
My life's a mess so you can play in my mud.
Tired of my ex: seek XXX.
My pie is fulfilling but needs your spice.
Let's study each other to hit high marks on exam.
My spirit is willing when the flesh is in the oven.

But be careful! A woman in Zurich sent this proposal letter to the famous playwright George Bernard Shaw:

You have the greatest brain in the world, and I have the most beautiful body, so we ought to produce the most perfect child!

He wrote back:

What if the child inherits my body and your brains?

6-word stories

Ernest Hemingway wrote famous stories that are short. Here's a legend about him: when lunching with other authors, he bet he could write a complete story (with a logical beginning, middle, and end) that was just 6 words long. He won the bet by writing this story on a napkin...

For sale: baby shoes, never worn.

Inspired by that legend (whose truth is unknown), many authors have tried to write complete stories — and even complete life memoirs — that are very short: just 6 words long. Can you use just 6 words to tell a complete tale — or summarize your whole life? English teachers tell their students to try.

Thousands of 6-word stories are collected at SixWordStories.net and SmithMag.net/sixwords. Many other Websites have further examples: to find them, do a Google search for "six words."

Lizzie Widdicombe, in *The New Yorker* magazine, wrote an article about 6-word stories. To be ironic, every sentence in her article is 6 words long. You can read her article at:

NewYorker.com/talk/2008/02/25/080225ta_talk_widdicombe

Here are some famous attempts:

6-word thought

	Author
I loved. I lost. I'm sorry. Longed for him. Got him. Shit. Failed SAT. Lost scholarship. Invented rocket.	"SlashChick" Margaret Atwood William Shatner
Womb. Bloom. Groom. Gloom. Rheum. Tomb. Started small. Grew. Peaked. Shrunk. Vanished.	Blake Morrison George Saunders
Found true love. Married someone else. Great sex. Broken heart. Worth it?	Dave Eggers "Dec C."
Revenge is living well, without you. Three words. Never spoken. Always regretted. Without thinking, I made 2 cups. After Harvard, had baby with crackhead. Gave commencement address, became sex columnist.	Joyce Carol Oates Gabriella Deitch Alistair Daniel Robin Templeton Amy Sohn
He was home. He was lost. For sale: halves of a bed. Across the street, the generations repeat.	Gore Vidal "Dennis" Carol Smith
Vibrator found! Roommate's. Mike's my roommate. Mom snorted our child-support money. Magician's saw table: used just once. Canoe guide, only got lost once.	"JM" Parker Lanting "Matilda" Taylor Stump
I lost my virginity on 9/11. Liars, hysterectomy <i>didn't</i> improve sex life!	Laura Garcia Joan Rivers
I'm hopelessly romantic and equally unwanted. Woman seeks men — high pain threshold. Never made it to med school. Older now, I draw myself better.	"JulieD" Yin Shih "Jeannie" Peter Arkle
Tequila made her clothes fall off. They danced alone in her room. Walking home, she regained her virginity. Boys liked her. She preferred books.	Susanne Broderick "Gaurav" Jim Lyon Anneliese Cuttle
Bang postponed. Not big enough. Reboot. Easy. Just touch the match to	David Brin Ursula K. Le Guin
Well, I thought it was funny. Not quite what I was planning... Everything I touch turns to mold.	Stephen Colbert Summer Grimes Lisa Anne Auerbach
Bipolar, no two ways about it. Alzheimer's: meeting new people every day.	Jason Owen Phil Skversky
Craves intelligent conversation with someone kissable. Felt dorky with my thick-rimmed glasses. Acting is not all I am. Fix a toilet, get paid crap.	Olena DeLeeuw "DanceNerd 2013" Molly Ringwald Jennifer James
Hope is stronger than dope, kids!	Lizzie Widdicombe

Brevity: a good thing in writing.
Me see world! Me write stories!
Told you I'd be published someday!

Lizzie Widdicombe
Elizabeth Gilbert
Kacie Adams

Here's my own:

Trump thumped. Got bumped. Hmmm... Humph!

Mini-syllable poems

Try this challenge: write a poem where each line contains just 2 syllables, and each pair of lines sound almost the same. Try saying these examples out loud:

Decline	Intake	Love
I'm old.	Like eggs.	Love you.
I'm mold,	Like kegs.	Love view.
A soul,	Love oats.	Won tin.
Asshole.	Love votes.	Want in.
Wipeout?	Icing?	Dad's crude.
Why pout?	I sing!	Dad screwed.
You're in	Have ice?	
Urine.	Have vice!	
Puppy?	Can dice	
Pup pee?	Canned ice.	
Have fart?	Vaccine?	
Have art!	Vac seen?	

3 syllables:

Death	Intake	Love
I can rot,	I'm meeting?	Do miss you!
Icon rot!	I'm eating!	Doom is you.
Know myself.	Not warm milk.	I'm in love,
No mice, elf!	Not war: milk!	Hymen love!
	Lettuce spray.	I see you,
	Let us pray.	Icy you,
	Yes, I sang.	ICU.
	Yes, ice: hang!	

Epitaphs

When you die, the stone above your grave is called your **gravestone** or **tombstone** or **headstone**. The writing on that stone is called your **epitaph**.

Here's a famous one:

As you are, I was.
As I am, you'll be.

It means:

As you are, I was: alive!
As I am, you'll be: dead!

Life consists of trying to overcome obstacles.

Here lies the kid.
Could not be saved.
He tried to shave
A hand grenade.

I wrote that because it applies to me: often in my life, I've tried to shave a difficult problem (such as an interpersonal relationship), not realizing it would blow up.

Here are more epitaphs I wrote for myself, in case I ever get stoned:

Here lies a man
Who tried not to lie.
He was cream of the crop
Until cremated.
He was morose.
Now have more Oh's!
Now you can talk behind my back,
Since I'm not coming back.

Mystery subjects

To have fun, write about a subject but don't reveal the subject's identity until the very end. Example:

I'm going to tell you about a drink so amazing that men devoted their lives to finding it and fighting wars about it.

This amazing liquid consists of such pure goodness that doctors worldwide recommend it as a cure for most ills. This refreshing tonic has no bad side effects: the ideal drink, it's sodium-free, fat-free, alcohol-free, preservative-free, and non-carcinogenic.

One gulp of this stuff can make men scream with delight. Its godly beauty has made this elixir praised by poets and songwriters worldwide. Some towns even dispense this wonderful elixir to their citizens, free, in special parks.

Discovered thousands of years ago by ancient heroes, it's a mysterious wonder of the universe and analyzed every day by scientists and other public servants trying to decipher its amazing properties. It's saved many lives and been the subject of sweetest dreams.

Yes, water is truly wonderful.

This example goes further:

I confess: I'm an addict! The drug that's been sweeping the nation has gotten to me, too!

I can't resist this powerful drug, which takes over my entire life. Late at night, when my weary body wishes to sleep, this hypnotic drug seduces me into partaking of it for many hours, a late-night turn-on controlling my mind and soul throughout the night. This mind-numbing drug, invented in secret labs, makes visions dance before my eyes (visions far wilder than anything created by primitive drugs such as LSD) and accompanied by sounds giving me the strangest out-of-body experiences.

This drug is so powerful that the U.S. government has declared it a controlled substance and controls its distribution. The biggest companies in America and around the world have all become involved in packaging this drug and changing its nature, but nobody can stop it. It's been the subject of many congressional hearings.

Each day in offices across America, employees whisper about how they experienced the drug during the previous evening. They even brag about who had the most outrageous experiences with it. Teachers complain that the quality of American education has greatly declined because students do this drug instead of homework.

To prevent impurities, the U.S. government funds the distribution of a "public" version of this drug, but most Americans get a bigger kick from "private" versions.

Unfortunately, advertising this nefarious drug is still permitted in many locales. Billboards lure innocent American adults and kids into partaking of this drug. According to psychologists, people who spend too much time doing this drug turn into vegetables and become "potatoes" or worse.

Yes, TV is amazingly addictive — and now smartphones!

This example is the most provocative:

I'm going to tell you about a certain feeling a male has, a feeling so strong that the average woman can't comprehend it.

This male feeling, arising in a certain part of the man's body, creates such a burning desire to stroke it that it can drive a man nearly insane and make him want to rip off his clothes to satisfy his craving itch. In high schools across the country, health teachers (and even gym teachers!) warn young men about these urges, but the flames of passion are irrepressible.

Yes, athlete's foot sure is tough.

This example is the most optimistic:

I'm a babe magnet! Whenever I walk out of my house, I'm immediately surrounded by females who've been lying in wait for me, stalking me. They're all thrilled to see me!

They fly to my side, to hug me, as they long to caress me. They all kiss me, passionately! If I try to run away, they chase me because they love me so much. Their luscious lips, so succulent, give me an unexpected thrill that lingers in my bod for many hours.

Yes, I attract female mosquitos. Ouch!

Elided sentences

Here are two boring sentences:

I love you. You are beautiful!

To have more fun, combine them to form this super-sentence:

I love YOU are beautiful!

Here's an extended example:

I gaze into YOUR EYES pierce MY SOUL is putty in YOUR HANDS caress MY EVERY MUSCLE cries out for YOUR TOUCH can make me MELTING in your arms, I proclaim my love FOR YOU I'll do ANYTHING is possible IN LOVE with you, I'm DELERIOUSly delicious raspberry sundae!

Palindromes

A **palindrome** is a word (or sentence or phrase) that reads the same backwards as forward.

For example, here are palindrome words:

3-letter: mom, dad, eve

5-letter: madam, civic, kayak, level, rotor, refer

7-letter: racecar, deified, reviver

9-letter: redivider

The word "**NOON**" is an amazing palindrome: it reads the same backwards but also if you read it upside-down (by turning the paper upside-down).

Here are palindrome names:

3-letter: Bob, Eve, Ava

4-letter: Anna, Otto

6-letter: Hannah

Here are famous palindrome sentences....

The pet-store owner warned customers:

Step on no pets!

Adam told Eve when he met her:

Madam, I'm Adam.

When he got more long-winded, he said:

Madam, in Eden, I'm Adam.

When Napoleon lost the war and was exiled to the island of Elba, he thought:

Able was I, ere I saw Elba.

The engineer who invented the Panama Canal bragged:

A man, a plan, a canal — Panama!

He could have pushed a cat into the canal:

A man, a plan, a cat, a canal — Panama!

He could have pushed more into the canal:

A man, a plan, a cat, a ham, a yak, a yam, a hat, a canal — Panama!

He could have pushed even more:

A man, a plan, a canoe, pasta, heros, rajahs, a coloratura, maps, snipe, percale, macaroni, a gag, a banana bag, a tan, a tag, a banana bag again (or a camel), a crepe, pins, Spam, a rut, a Rolo, cash, a jar, sore hats, a peon, a canal — Panama!

In that example, "heros" is the correct spelling of the plural of a "hero" sandwich, even though the correct spelling of the plural of a "hero" person is "heroes." If that bothers you, change the example to "Heros" (which is a kind of fish) or "hero's rajahs." A protester against Panama complained: "A man, a plan, no canal — Paraguay!"

Here's a palindrome about anger:

Dammit, I'm mad!

Here's a palindrome about German pride:

I, man, am regal: a German am I!

Here are palindrome questions:

Borrow or rob?

No x in Nixon?

Do geese see God?

Never odd or even?

Was it a car or a cat I saw?

Here's a long palindrome passage:

Straw? No, too stupid a fad. I put soot on warts.

Mathematician Peter Hilton wrote even longer:

Doc, note: I dissent. A fast never prevents fatness. I diet on cod.

Jon Agee wrote books of palindromes, illustrated with his cartoons. The titles of his first 3 books are these palindromes:

Go hang a salami! I'm a lasagna hog!
Sit on a potato pan, Otis!
So many dynamos!

Samples in his books include:

Mr. Owl ate my metal worm.
Lee has a racecar as a heel.
No way a papaya won!
No, son.

His 4th book adds shorter palindromes, such as:

Pull up!
Tip it!
Toot!
Hah!
Huh?

Critics praising him said —

Wow!

and if you disagree:

Sue us!

He invented a new word, meaning fear of palindromes:

aibofobia

On February 2, 2020, the whole world celebrated Global Palindrome Day, because that date is a palindrome in all the world's cultures. If your culture writes the month number first (format MM/DD/YYYY), that date is written:

02/02/2020 or 02-02-2020 or, more briefly, 02022020

If your culture begins by writing the day number instead (format DD/MM/YYYY), that date is still written:

02/02/2020 or 02-02-2020 or, more briefly, 02022020

If your culture begins by writing the year (format YYYY/MM/DD or YYYY/DD/MM), that date is still a palindrome:

2020/02/02 or 2020-02-02 or, more briefly, 20200202

The next Global Palindrome Day will be 12/12/2121, which will probably be after you're dead.

Weird Al Yankovic wrote a song called "Bob," imitating the style of Bob Dylan's song "Subterranean Homesick Blues," but where every line's a palindrome! Hear it at:

YouTube.com/watch?v=JUQDzj6R3p4

More palindrome info is at:

wikipedia.org/wiki/Palindrome
quora.com/What-is-the-most-awesome-palindrome

Pig Latin

Try writing in **Pig Latin** (English modified to sound like Latin).

To convert English to Pig Latin, do this:

If the word begins with a vowel, just add "way" to the end of the word. For example, "art" becomes "artway."

If the word begins with a consonant or a bunch of consonants, move such stuff to the end, then add "ay." For example, "fart" becomes "artfay."

For example, "drink up" becomes "inkdray upway."

Notice that "ill" and "will" both become "illway." Yes, "ifelay isway osay ambiguousway."

Try singing *The Star Spangled Banner* in Pig Latin. Here's how it begins:

Oway aysay anca y ouyay eesay

The definition of "vowel" versus "consonant" is phonetic. For example, "yes" becomes "esyay" (since that "y" sounds like a consonant), but "Ypsilanti" becomes "Ypsilantiway" (since that "y" sounds like a vowel).

If you say or write Pig Latin, you'll look sophisticated, like a classic scholar. "Uckfay ouyay!" is classier than "Fuck you!"

If you're studying computer programming, try this challenge: program the computer to translate English to Pig Latin.

Asian English

Instead of imitating Latin, imitate Asian languages (such as Japanese & Chinese) and **how a partly trained Asian immigrant to the U.S. speaks & writes**.

The rules are complicated, and I haven't invented them all yet, but here are the fundamentals:

Write "oo" as "u." Write "ee" as "i." Write "th" as "d."

Never put a consonant at the end of a word.
(Omit the consonant or combine the word with next word.)

Never put 2 consonant sounds together.
(Omit the second consonant or put the vowel "a" between them.)

Make each word have at least 2 syllables.
(To do that, combine words that don't need pauses between them.)

English example to translate:

I had a good sleep. Now I'll take a shower. Then I'll cook some food.

Redone in Asian English:

Ayada gusali. Nawa takashawa. Denai kufu.

Political correctness

Instead of using simple words that are emotional, governments encourage people to use long-winded phrases that are less offensive. Those long phrases are called **circumlocutions** or **euphemisms** or **evasive language** or **obfuscations** or **politically correct speech**. George Carlin complains they take "the life out of life." He mentions these:

Candid term	Euphemism
deaf	hearing-impaired
blind	visually impaired
crippled	physically challenged
poor	economically disadvantaged
stupid	has a learning disorder
ugly	has a severe appearance deficit
old	a senior citizen
false teeth	dental appliances
toilet paper	bathroom tissue
constipated	has occasional irregularity
your medicine	your medication
doctor	healthcare-delivery professional
hospital	wellness center
car crash	automobile accident
die	pass away
motel	motor lodge
room service	guest-room dining
call information	call directory assistance
slum	inner-city substandard housing
the dump	the landfill
used car	pre-owned transportation
sneakers	running shoes
lie to the enemy	engage in disinformation
kill the enemy	depopulate the area

He expects these to come soon:

Candid term	Euphemism
rape victim	unwilling sperm recipient
vomit	involuntary personal-protein spill

What do you call freaked-out veterans? He noticed the term kept lengthening and getting less personal, though the disability was the same:

War	Name for the disability
World War 1	shell shock
World War 2	battle fatigue
Korean War	operational exhaustion
Vietnam War	post-traumatic stress disorder

To see his complete list of euphemisms and sadly funny rave about it, go to:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=vuEQixrBKCC](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vuEQixrBKCC)

Going beyond him, here's how to criticize people politely:

He's not a **criminal**, just **ethically deprived**.
 He's not **irresponsible**, just a **free spirit**.
 He's not **violent**, just **assertively animated**.
 He's not **greedy**, just **dollar-addicted**.
 He's not **procrastinating**, just **delay-seeking**.
 He's not **slow**, just **unaccelerated**.
 He's not **useless**, just **unpurposed**.
 He's not **lecherous**, just **drooling**.
 He's not **an asshole**, just **rear-ended in front**.
 He's not **evil**, just **challenging**.
 He's not **unkempt**, just **natural**.
 He's not **bald**, just **follicularly impaired**.
 She's not **ugly**, just **of bounded beauty**.

If you're a student, the Internet recommends you use these politically correct terms to describe your situation:

You're not too **tall**, just **vertically enhanced**.
 You're not too **talkative**, just **abundantly verbal**.
 You're not **shy**, just **conversationally selective**.
 You're not **lazy**, just **energetically declined**.
 You're not **failing**, just **passing-impaired**.
 You didn't get **detention**, just **exit-delayed**.
 You're not **late**,
 just **having a rescheduled arrival time**.
 You didn't **get grounded**,
 just **hit a social speed-bump**.
 In class, you weren't **sleeping**,
 just **rationing consciousness**.
 Your homework isn't **missing**,
 just **having an out-of-notebook experience**.
 You don't have **smelly gym socks**,
 just **odor-retentive athletic footwear**.
 Your locker isn't **overflowing**,
 just **closure-prohibitive**.
 Your bedroom isn't **cluttered**,
 just **passage-restrictive**.
 You don't think the cafeteria food is **awful**,
 just **digestively challenged**.
 You're not **having a bad-hair day**,
 just **suffering from rebellious follicle syndrome**.
 You weren't **gossiping**,
 just **providing speedy transmission of near-factual information**.
 In class, you weren't **passing notes**,
 just **participating in the discreet exchange of penned meditations**.
 You weren't **sent to the principal's office**,
 just **went on a mandatory field trip to the administration sanctum**.

Best-man speech

At weddings, the "best man" is supposed to give a speech that ribs the groom then wishes him luck. According to *The Wall Street Journal*, some folks make a living by ghost-writing such speeches. They charge \$100 per speech or \$5 per line.

YouTube includes a video of a wonderful speech by Aaron Goodhoofd; here's my abridgement of it:

I must go to the bathroom, so I'll keep this short.
 Alan said, "I don't want you to speak at my wedding, but you're the only brother I have."
 Glad we could have this day, with so many friends from around the world. It's amazing how far people will travel for a free meal.
 Alan, I'm honored to be part of this army you call a wedding party. That's a big table!
 It's awesome we're here today, considering Alan had kidney stones just a few days ago. He was in pain. It seemed today might not happen, but I knew he wouldn't let anything get in the way of marrying Michelle, since we're Dutch and everything had been paid for.
 Let me tell you about my relationship with him. We met in the 80's. Our rivalry intensified, and he grew bigger than me. In old family photos, he looked like a child bodybuilder; I looked like mom never fed me. Even now she says, "Alan needs his protein," so we just starve.
 Because of his physique, I avoided confronting him physically. Instead, I tried to outsmart him. My favorite tactic was giving him hard objects (such as marbles). Then I'd stand before glass objects (mirrors, windows, and pictures) and insult him. He, a big guy not knowing his strength, would hurl the marble at me. I'd duck. The glass would break. I loved every second of it.
 In later years, I thought the rivalry died down, a friendship began, but I was mistaken. On my birthday, he sent an email saying, "Happy birthday. Mom made me send this."
 Now he's married. Today's about him and the love of his life: his MacBook Pro.
 Some folks procrastinate, leaving everything to the last minute, like myself and this speech. But then there's Alan. Look at the planning that went on for today: he had his wedding Website up even before he met Michelle.
 Michele, you look amazing today. Alan, you didn't even shave!
 I'll never forget the day he got engaged, because he videotaped his proposal. What a creep!
 Alan's proud to show off his new ring and new wife. Ugh!
 Michelle, ever since we met you, we knew you're a keeper. I liked you from the start, because you laughed at my jokes, even though Alan shook his head and called me an idiot. You're beautiful inside & out, kind, compassionate, genuine, smart, and caring. Most important, you make my brother happy in a way I never could.
 Michelle — or should I say "Mitch"? — welcome to the family. There are many Michelles in this world but just one "Mitch."
 Our family calls Michelle "Mitch." Why? Once I called her that, and the name stuck. Herb misunderstood me, because he sometimes calls you "Mitchel." Don't worry about that: he sometimes calls me "Kayla."
 I couldn't ask for a better sister-in-law, and I apologize for the horrible last name you must use from now on. I told Alan he should have used *yours*.
 When I went to pick up my tux, they said, "Last name, please?" I said "Goodhoofd." They said, "What?" That's the struggle you'll have to deal with every day.
 Alan & Michelle, I wish you 2 the best, in your life together.
 I love you both. Mom made me say that.

View the whole speech at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=J9ZQcJJbmj4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J9ZQcJJbmj4)

If you want to give a dangerous speech, be brave: say the following speech but pause at each "..." to let the audience imagine what the missing word should be:

I wish my best friend lots of luck
 While doing things that end in "uck,"
 Like holding hands then try to...
 Take out trash and other muck.
 I'm sure his wife will get a kick
 When looking at his great big...
 Sick lips giving his thermometer a lick.
 But after wedding and "I love you,"
 They'll honeymoon and want to...
 Croon, "You're the one for me. I knew."

Through woods

Robert Frost wrote these poems about being confused when traveling through the woods:

The Road Not Taken

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;
Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,
And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.
I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I —
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Stopping By Woods on a Snowy Evening

Whose woods these are I think I know.
His house is in the village though;
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his woods fill up with snow.
My little horse must think it queer
To stop without a farmhouse near
Between the woods and frozen lake
The darkest evening of the year.
He gives his harness bells a shake
To ask if there is some mistake.
The only other sound's the sweep
Of easy wind and downy flake.
The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Those poems are pretty but not realistic. To be realistic, they should reveal this sad choice —

Walking through woods on a snowy evening,
I tripped,
Bumped my head on a tree,
Got covered with blood,
Broke my leg,
Lay helpless 3 days in snow until was found,
Spent 3 months in the hospital,
And vowed never to again be
Walking through woods on a snowy evening.

or this conservative choice —

Walking through woods on a snowy evening,
Two paths diverged.
One had less dung underneath,
And that made all the difference,
Since I'm Republican.

or this practical choice —

While walking through woods
in snow, I got tired
From trying to reach
what you desired.

I got to a fork.
Knew not what the fuck
To do, so turned round,
went home. On firm ground,
Got pizza by phone.
“Let pizza boy moan.”
His horse knew the way
to carry the sleigh
Through white, drifting snow.
Beats “pizza to go!”
I gave him a tip.
I've pizza on lip.

or this tech choice:

Walking through woods on a snowy evening,
Two paths diverged,
So I grabbed my iPhone
And got directions.

Can you think of other poems to rewrite to be realistic?

What if Robert Frost, instead of being a great poet long ago, were instead a typical speaker on today's comedy-club stage? The “Rhymes with Orange” cartoon (by Hillary Price on 11/14/2021) gives this version of “The Road Not Taken”:

So I'm on this road in these yellow woods,
And the road literally does this “Y,”
So dang... I gotta decide!

Google maps says *this* way,
I ignore it...
Changed my life.

5th - line rhymes

The typical nursery rhyme has 4 lines, but adults can add a 5th line to reveal what happened afterwards:

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Couldn't put Humpty together again,
So they ate him.

Old Mother Hubbard went to her cupboard
To get her poor dog a bone.
But when she got there, the cupboard was bare,
And so her poor dog got none.
He bit her.

Jack Sprat could eat no fat.
His wife could eat no lean.
And so between the both of them,
They licked the platter clean.
She died first.

There was a little girl who had a little curl
Right in the middle of her forehead.
And when she was good, she was very, very good,
But when she was bad, she was horrid.
She married Trump.

Nonsense poems

To have fun, write a poem that's total nonsense. Here are famous examples.

Moon:

Hey, diddle-diddle! The cat and the fiddle!
The cow jumped over the moon.
The little dog laughed to see such sport,
And the dish ran away with the spoon.

Details about that poem are at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hey_Diddle_Diddle

Grasshopper:

Way down south, where bananas grow,
A grasshopper stepped on an elephant's toe.
The elephant said, with tears in his eyes,
“Pick on someone your own size!”

Fight:

One fine day, in midst of night,
2 dead men got up to fight.
Back-to-back they faced each other,
Drew their swords, and shot each other.

One was blind, the other couldn't see,
So they chose a dummy referee.
A blind man went to see fair play.
A dumb man went to shout “Hooray!”

A paralyzed donkey, passing by,
Kicked the blind men in the eye,
Knocked them through a 9-inch wall
And dry ditch, which drowned them all.

A deaf policeman heard the noise.
He went to arrest the two dead boys.
Don't believe this lie is true?
Ask the blind man: *he saw it too!*

Susanna: the song “Oh! Susanna” (by Stephen Foster) includes some racist verses but also this innocent nonsense:

It rained all night the day I left.
The weather? It was dry.
The sun so hot I froze to death.
Susanna, don't you cry.

Jabberwocky is a poem in *Through the Looking Glass* (Lewis Carroll's novel, written in 1871, as a sequel to *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*). That poem includes these underlined words, which sound English but didn't exist then: he invented them!

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

“Beware the Jabberwock, my son!
The jaws that bite, the claws that catch!
Beware the Jubjub bird, and shun
The frumious Bandersnatch!”

He took his vorpal sword in hand:
Long time the manxome foe he sought—
So rested he by the Tumtum tree,
And stood awhile in thought.

And as in uffish thought he stood,
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,
Came whiffing through the tulgey wood,
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!
He left it dead, and with its head
He went galumphing back.

“And hast thou slain the Jabberwock?
Come to my arms, my beamish boy!
O frabjous day! Callooh! Callay!”
He chortled in his joy.

'Twas brillig, and the slithy toves
Did gyre and gimble in the wabe;
All mimsy were the borogoves,
And the mome raths outgrabe.

Inspired by that poem, “chortled” and “galumphing” have now become part of the English language and dictionaries. Details about that poem are at:

wikipedia.org/wiki/Jabberwocky

The French translation in 1931 sounds better. It includes this line:

Garde-toi du Jaseroque, mon fils!

Puns

Here are some famous old puns:

1. A trader sailed to an island, met the king, and told him, “I notice you have no throne.” The king asked, “What’s a throne?” The trader replied, “I’ll show you.” On his next trip, the trader brought a throne. The king liked it, bought it, and ordered another. On his next trip, the trader brought the second throne. The king got excited about thrones and started buying more of them, until they filled his grass hut, and he had to build a second floor to hold all the thrones. But one day, the second floor collapsed, and all the thrones fell, killing the king. Moral: **people who live in grass houses shouldn’t stow thrones.**

2. In a zoo, some dolphins seemed to live forever by dining on dead seagulls. One day, the zookeeper tried to carry seagulls to the dolphins, but a lion sat on the bridge and blocked his way. He stepped over the lion but got arrested for **transporting gulls across a staid lion for immortal porpoises.**

3. A dentist noticed that in his patient’s mouth, a metal plate was corroding. The dentist asked, “Have you been eating anything unusual?” The patient replied, “My wife learned to make great Hollandaise sauce, so I’ve been putting it on all my food.” The dentist replied, “The lemon in the sauce must be corroding the metal. I’ll replace the metal with chrome.” The patient asked, “Why chrome?” The dentist replied, “**There’s no plate like chrome for the Hollandaise.**”

Note to foreigners and youngsters: some Americans find those tales funny because the bold words, when pronounced with a foreign accent or speech impediment, sound like these popular American expressions:

1. People who live in glass houses shouldn’t throw stones.
2. transporting girls across a state line for immoral purposes
3. There’s no place like home for the holidays.

A friend passed me this list of newer puns:

1. A vulture tried to board an airplane. He carried 2 dead raccoons but was stopped by stewardess who said, “**I’m sorry, sir, just one carrion allowed per passenger.**”

2. Two boll weevils grew up in South Carolina. One went to Hollywood and got a part in a movie. The other stayed behind in the cotton fields, never amounted to much, and became known as **the lesser of two weevils.**

3. Two Eskimos in a kayak got chilly, so they lit a fire in the kayak, but it sank, because **you can’t have your kayak and heat it, too.**

4. In the Old West, a 3-legged dog walked into the saloon, slid up to the bar, and announced “**I’m looking for the man who shot my paw.**”

5. A Buddhist getting a root canal refused Novocain because he wanted to **transcendental medication.**

6. In a hotel lobby, chess players were discussing their victories, but the hotel’s manager made them leave because he couldn’t stand **chess nuts boasting in an open foyer.**

7. A woman had twins but gave them up for adoption. One of them went to a Spanish family who named him “Juan.” The other went to an Egyptian family who named him “Amahl.” Years later, Juan sends his photo to his birth mother. She told her husband she wished she had a picture of Amahl too; but he replied, “They’re twins! **If you’ve seen Juan, you’ve seen Amahl.**”

8. Friars were behind on their belfry payments, so they opened a florist shop to raise funds. Everyone liked to buy flowers from the men of God, but a rival florist thought the competition unfair. He begged the friars to close down; but they refused, so he hired Hugh, the roughest thug in town, to “persuade” them to close. Hugh beat up the friars, trashed their store, and said he’d return if they didn’t close. Terrified, they did so, proving that **Hugh, and only Hugh, can prevent florist friars.**

9. Since Mahatma Gandhi walked barefoot, his feet got big calluses. Since he ate little, he was frail. His odd diet also gave him bad breath. That made him a **super-calloused fragile mystic, hexed by halitosis.**

10. A person sent ten puns to a friend and hoped at least one pun would generate a laugh. Unfortunately, **no pun in ten did.**

The puns are based on these popular American expressions:

1. I’m sorry, sir, just one carry-on allowed per passenger.
2. the lesser of two evils
3. You can’t have your cake and eat it too.
4. I’m looking for the man who shot my pa.
5. transcendental meditation
6. chestnut roasting in an open fire
7. If you’ve seen one, you’ve seen ’em all.
8. You, and only you, can prevent forest fires.
9. supercalifragilisticexpialidocious
10. no pun intended

Death riddles

It’s fun to make jokes about death. When I was a kid, the hot topic was “dead baby” riddles, such as these:

What’s blue and jumps up and down?
A baby in a cellophane bag.

How do you make a dead baby float?
Seltzer water and 2 scoops of baby.

Here’s the ultimate death riddle (found on the Internet):

What’s greater than God and more evil than the devil? The rich need it, and the poor have it; but if you eat it, you die!

The answer is the word “nothing,” because:

Nothing is greater than God. Nothing is more evil than the devil.
The rich need nothing. The poor have nothing. If you eat nothing, you die.

Ask your friends that riddle and see whether they can figure out the answer. When they get frustrated, start giving them Zen-like hints, such as these:

If you want the answer, I can tell you *nothing*.
When you discover the answer, you’ll have discovered *nothing*.
While you’re seeking the answer, *nothing* can bother you.
The answer has 7 letters, but it’s *nothing*.

But the biggest hint of all is:

Most kindergarteners know the answer to the riddle, but most college graduates do not. Focus on the first question: what’s greater than God? Most kindergarteners know the answer to that question. If you ask a kindergartener “What’s greater than God?” what will the kindergartener answer?

Ready for a different riddle? Figure out what fits this description:

It’s of no use to the person who makes it. It’s of no use to the person who buys it. And the person who uses it doesn’t know he’s using it.

The answer:

A coffin!

Here’s another puzzle about death:

A woman shoots her husband, then holds him under water for over 5 minutes, then hangs him. But 5 minutes later, they go out together and enjoy a wonderful dinner together. How can that be?

Answer:

She’s a photographer. She shot a picture of her husband, developed it, and hung it up to dry.

Try this death choice:

You’re condemned to death and must choose from 3 rooms. The first is full of raging fires; the second is full off assassins with loaded guns; the third is full of lions that haven’t eaten in 3 years. Which room is safest for you?

Answer:

The third. Lions that haven’t eaten in 3 years are dead.

Dual-answer riddles

This riddle has 2 answers:

If you have it, you want to share it. If you share it, you don't have it.

The standard answer is:

A secret!

The alternative answer is:

Virginity!

That alternative answer was posted by GraffixPhoto on Reddit.com.

Here's another:

If my name is spoken, I'll be gone. Who or what am I?

The standard answer is:

Silence!

But RocketMan00000 posted this pessimistic answer on Reddit.com:

Dad?

Here's another:

I'm the beginning of everything, the end of everywhere. I'm the beginning of eternity, the end of time & space.

The standard answer is:

The letter e

But when Bret Turner (an elementary-school teacher from Albany, California) posed that riddle to his first-grade students, a kid invented a deeper answer:

Death

Here's a variant about the letter e:

What starts with e, ends with e, and has just one letter in it?

The answer is:

envelope

Alphabetical sentences

Try to write a sentence whose first word begins with A, second word begins with B, third word begins with C, and so on.

My first attempt started nicely but ran downhill:

A better child does everything for God, happy in just knowing love may now offer prayers quite rich, so that upon vowing, weird xylophones yank zombies.

Donna tried her hand, which after my editing became this:

A boy can do every fraudulent gangster hobby if judges kill lonely maidens near ocean ports, quickly recording sins to used vehicles while x-raying your zipper.

Lili Timmons tried this:

Any bear can dance every favored gavotte, having it just kept lively, maintaining natural oblong patter quickly round, stepping to ultimate victory, weaving X's, yielding zeal.

At WordFreaks.Tribe.net, "Unsu" contributed this:

After being completely drugged eating frozen, gelatinous hemp (including jelly), Karen listed many notes (on paper) questioning reality states, tempting uninvited visitors, worrying xenophobic young zookeepers.

But "Karen" isn't a word.

So far, the winner is Darren Needham (a British software developer), who wrote this on Quora:

Another brave child dances energetically, forever gaining heroic independence, jubilantly kissing ladies, men, neighbors, or people quietly resting, slowly turning unfriendly villagers (with xenophobic yokels) zealous.

Then he went a step further, by writing reverse-alphabetically:

Zany young xylophonists, whilst vaguely understanding time signature, repeat quite precisely ordinary notes, masterfully linking knowledge just imbibed, happily going further, ever dreaming, creating beautiful art.

Can you do even better?

Phonics

Here's how 8 organizations use different symbols for American English sounds:

the American Heritage Dictionary (AH) uses traditional phonics symbols
the Dictionary.com Website (Dict) uses notation found in most newspapers
the Random House Dictionary (RH) resembles AH but uses fewer symbols
the Walter System 1 (W1), by Russ Walter, uses simplified spelling
the Walter System 2 (W2) uses W1 but gets shorter by using capitals
the New Oxford American Dictionary (Oxford) uses AH modernized
the Americanist Phonetic Alphabet (APA) is used by American linguists
the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), Wikipedia version, is most precise

For consonants, all 8 organizations agree on how to pronounce these letters:

b, d, f, g, h, k, l, m, n, p, r, s, t, v, w, z

For other consonant sounds, here's how the organizations differ:

English sound	AH & Dict	RH	W2	W1	Oxford	APA	IPA
"ng" in "thing"	ng	ng	ng	ng	NG	ŋ	ŋ
"sh" in "ship"	sh	sh	sh	sh	SH	ʃ	ʃ
"ch" in "church"	ch	ch	ch	ch	CH	č	tʃ
"th" in "thin"	th	th	th	th	TH	θ	θ
"th" in "this"	th	th	TH	dh	TH	ð	ð
"si" in "vision"	zh	zh	zh	zh	ZH	ʒ	ʒ
"j" in "judge"	j	j	j	j	j	ǰ	dʒ
"y" in "yes"	y	y	y	y	y	y	j
"wh" in "which"	hw	hw	w	w	(h)w	hw	hw

Comments:

Look at the line about the "sh" in "ship." Oxford capitalizes the SH, to emphasize the sound is not the "s" sound followed by the "h" sound. APA and IPA write a fancy "s." AH, Dict, RH, W2, and W1 write simply "sh," since an "s" sound followed by an "h" sound would be indicated by separate syllables; for example, "asshole" is written as "as-hohl" in Dict, "as-hOI" in W2, "as-hoal" in W1, ǰs'höl' in AH & RH.

For the "th" in "thin," APA and IPA use the Greek letter θ, which is theta.

For the "th" in "this," APA and IPA use the Old English letter ð, which is eth. W1 consonants are restricted just to letters that resemble English spelling and are easy to type on a standard keyboard (can't use italics, underlines, capitals, special symbols, or accent marks), so as a last resort W1 uses "dh" instead, which approximates a Brooklyn accent; W2 permits capitals so uses "TH."

For the "si" in "vision," IPA uses the letter ʒ, which is ezh.

To say the "j" in "judge," IPA says to pronounce the "d" sound followed by the sound of the "si" in "vision."

To say the "wh" in "which," most of those systems say to begin by saying the "h" sound, but Oxford is less sure, so it puts the "h" in parentheses. The parentheses mean "maybe, depending on which American regional dialect you have." W2 & W1 say just "w" instead of "hw" and don't bother typing the "h," since most Americans are too deaf to hear the "h" anyway.

Short vowels:

English sound	AH	RH	W2 & W1	Dict	Oxford	APA	IPA
“a” in “cat”	ă	a	a	a	a	æ	æ
“e” in “let”	ĕ	e	e	e	e	ɛ	ɛ
“i” in “pit”	ĭ	i	i	i	i	ɪ	ɪ
“o” in “pot”	ŏ	o	o	o	ä	a	ɒ
“u” in “cut”	ŭ	u	u	uh	ə	ʌ	ʌ
“a” in “about”	ə	ə	u	uh	ə	ə	ə
“e” in “butter”	ə	ə	u	e	ə	ə	ə
“a” in “father”	ä	ä	o	ah	ä	a	ɑ:

Comments:

AH puts a curve (smile) over most of the short vowels. The other 7 systems don't bother.

Dict says the “e” in “butter” sounds like the “e” in “let” and its symbol is “e.” The other 7 systems say the “e” in “butter” sounds more like the “a” in “about,” it's a very brief grunt, and for most systems its symbol is ə, which is schwa.

W2 & W1 & Oxford say the “a” in “about” sounds like the “u” in “cut.” The other 5 systems disagree.

W2 & W1 & Oxford & APA say the “a” in “father” sounds like the “o” in “pot”. The other 4 systems disagree.

IPA says the “a” in “father” takes longer to say. The “:” means “say longer.”

Long vowels:

English sound	AH & RH	Oxford	W2	W1	Dict	APA	IPA
“ay” in “day”	ā	A	ae	ey	e(y)	ɛɪ	ɛɪ
“ee” in “see”	ē	E	ee	ee	i(y)	i:	i:
“y” in “by”	ī	I	ie	ahy	ay	aɪ	aɪ
“o” in “no”	ō	O	oe	oh	o(w)	oʊ	oʊ

Comments:

APA says the first 3 of those long vowels usually end in a y sound, and the “o” usually ends in a “w” sound.

IPA detects that the “ee” in “see” takes a long time to say. The “:” means “say for a long time.”

W1 is influenced by AH & RH & Oxford but isn't allowed to use accent marks, so W1 uses an “e” instead of an accent mark. W1's “ie” looks a bit awkward, but it's okay because of words such as “die,” “tie,” “pie,” “lie,” “vie,” and “fie.” Foreigners might prefer writing “ai” instead, which is used by Chinese pinyin and in “chai,” “tai chi,” “Thailand,” and “Bali Hai.” W2 avoids that awkwardness by using capital letters: the symbol “A” is the sound of the letter “A” when you recite the alphabet; the symbol “I” is the sound of the letter & word “I.”

Hatted vowels (which usually come before “r”):

English sound	AH	RH	Oxford	W2	W1	Dict	APA	IPA
“ai” in “hair”	â	â	e(ə)	A	ae	ai	ɛ	ɛ(ə)
first “e” in “here”	î	ē	i(ə)	E	ee	ee	ɪ	ɪə
“augh” in “caught”	ô	ô	ô	au	au	aw	ɔ	ɔ:
“o” in “word”	û	û	ə	u	u	u	ə	ɜ:

Comments:

W2 & W1 say the “ai” in “hair” sounds like the “ay” in “day.” The other 6 systems disagree.

RH & W2 & W1 & Dict say the first “e” in “here” sounds like the “ee” in “see.” The other 4 systems disagree.

For the “augh” in “caught,” W2 & W1 wanted to imitate Dict but can't use consonants in the middle of a vowel sound, so can't use “w,” so use “u” instead.

Oxford & APA say the “o” in “word” sounds like as the “a” in “about.” The other 6 systems disagree.

Fancy “o”:

English sound	AH & RH & Oxford	Dict	W1	W2	APA	IPA
“oo” in “soon”	ō		oo	oo	oo	u(w) u:
“iew” in “view”	yō		yoo	yoo	U	yu ju:
“oo” in “took”	ō		oo	eu	eu	u ʊ
“ou” in “tour”	ō		oo	oo	oo	u ʊə
“oi” in “noise”	oi		oi	oi	oi	ɔy ɔɪ
“ou” in “out”	ou		ou	ou	ou	aw aʊ

Comments:

For the “oo” in “took,” Walter can't use accent marks or italics or special symbols, so W2 & W1 use the French “eu” instead, which sounds somewhat similar.

Most of those systems say the “ou” in “tour” sounds like the “oo” in “took,” but IPA detects that the “ou” in “tour” adds a schwa sound afterwards, and Walter thinks the “ou” in “tour” sounds more like the “oo” in “soon”.

APA says the “oi” in “noise” sounds like the “augh” in “caught” plus a “y” sound. The other 7 systems disagree.

Which syllable should be stressed (said the loudest)? Here's how to say stress the “a”:

English sound	AH & RH	Oxford & IPA	W2 & W1	Dict	APA
primary stress	a'	'a	ā	a	á
secondary	a'	,a	a	a	à

Comments:

W2 & W1 & Dict don't mark secondary stress.

Complete sentence:

English:	Let cats out soon.
Dict & W1:	Let kats out soon.
W2:	let kats out soon.
RH:	Let kats out soon.
Oxford:	let kats out soon.
AH:	Let kâts out soon.
IPA:	lɛt kæts aʊt su:n
APA:	lɛt kæts awt su(w)n

Comments:

In W2 & Oxford, how a letter is pronounced can depend on whether the letter is capitalized, so you can't simply “begin every sentence with a capital.”

In IPA and APA, a period can be pronounced, so you can't simply “end every declarative sentence with a period.”

Here's a nursery rhyme in W2 & W1:

W2	W1
mArE had u lɪtʌl lam.	Mæree had u lɪtʌl lam.
its flEs wuz wɪt az snO,	Its flees wuz wɪet az snœ,
and evrEwAr THat mArE went	and evrœwær dhæt Mæree went
THu lam wuz shur too gO.	dhu lam wuz shur too goe.

More details about some of those systems are at these Websites:

InternationalPhoneticAlphabet.org/ipa-sounds/ipa-chart-with-sounds
en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pronunciation_respelling_for_English

Acronym game

An acronym is a bunch of capital letters that stand for something. What they stand for depends on your mood:

Acronym What it can stand for

AA	Alcoholics Anonymous, American Airlines, Alcoa
ABC	American Broadcasting Company, Australian Broadcasting Corp., American-Born Chinese
ACA	Affordable Care Act, American Chiropractic Association, Adult Children of Alcoholics
AD	Anno Domini, After Death, Alzheimer's Disease, Active Duty, Athletic Director
ADA	American Dental Association, American Diabetes Association, Americans with Disabilities Act
AMA	American Medical Association, American Music Awards, Ask Me Anything
AP	Associated Press, Advanced Placement, Accounts Payable, Asia-Pacific, Asshole President
AB	Artium Baccalaureus, ALBERTa, AlBania, AntiBody, Anheuser-Busch, Adult Baby
BA	Bachelor of Arts, Bad Ass, Bullshit Artist, Batting Average, British Airways, Boeing Airplanes
BBC	British Broadcasting Company, British Beer Company, Baptist Bible College
BC	Before Christ, British Columbia, Boston College, BeCause
BS	Bachelor of Science, BullShit, Bernie Sanders, Britney Spears, Blood Sugar, BahamaS
CD	Certificate of Deposit, Compact Disc, Civil Defense, Change Directory, Cross Dresser
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency, Culinary Institute of America
CO	Carbon monOxide, Correction Officer, Compliance Officer, COlorado, COlumbia
CRT	Cathode-Ray Tube, Critical Race Theory, CRediT, Cardiac Resynchronization Therapy
DC	District of Columbia, Doctor of Chiropractic, Direct Current, Da Capo, Detective Comics
DDS	Doctor of Dental Surgery, Department of Driver Services, Department of Developmental Services
DE	Desktop Environment, Differential Equation, DElaware, DEutschland, DEere
DMD	Doctor of Medicine in Dentistry, Duchenne Muscular Dystrophy
DNC	Democratic National Committee, Do Not Call, Dick No Condom, Dilation 'N Curettage
ED	Erectile Dysfunction, Emergency Department, Emotionally Disturbed, EDucation, EDit
ERA	Equal Rights Amendment, Earned-Run Average, Electronic Realty Associates
FR	For Real, Federal Republic, FRance, FRanc, FatheR, FRiar, Fuckin' Retard
GI	Government-Issue, Gastro-Intestinal, Glycemic Index, Galvanized Iron, GIbraltar
GF	GirlFriend, Good Friend, GoldFish, Gluten-Free, Ground Floor, Go Figure, Good Fight
HMU	Hit Me Up, Hook Me Up, Help Me Understand, Hair & MakeUp, Hanoi Medical University
HP	Hewlett-Packard, HorsePower, Harry Potter, Home Page, Health Plan, Harvard Pilgrim
ID	IDentification, IDaho
IRA	Individual Retirement Account, Irish Republican Army, Internet Research Agency
JFK	John F. Kennedy, Just For Kicks, Jerk From Kentucky, Just Fucking Klansman
LA	Los Angeles, LouisiAna, Lost Angel, Louis Armstrong, Little Ass
LTO	Limited-Time Offer, Lettuce & Tomato & Onion, Linear Tape-Open, Lift-Truck Operator
MA	Master of Arts, MAssachusetts, Major Ass, Maybe Alcoholic, MAmA
MC	MasterCard, Master of Ceremonies, Memory Clear, Merry Christmas
MD	Medicinae Doctor, Medical Doctor, Muscular Dystrophy, Mountain Dew, MarylanD
ME	Master of Engineering, Middle English, Millennium Edition, Medical Examiner, MainE
MIA	Missing In Action, Miami International Airport, Minneapolis Institute of Art
MS	Multiple Sclerosis, Master of Science, Middle School, MicroSoft, MiSsissippi
MT	MounT, Mountain Time, MonTana, Manual Transmission. MegaTon, Massage Therapist
NB	New Brunswick, Nota Bene, New Balance
NE	New England, NorthEast, NEbraska
NEA	National Education Association, National Endowment for the Arts
NP	Nurse Practitioner, Nail Polish, No Problem, Not Possible, No Parking, No Penis
NRA	National Rifle Association, National Restaurant Association, Not Really Adult
NRN	No Reply Needed, No Response Necessary, Not Right Now, Network Routing Number
NSA	National Security Agency, No Strings Attached, Nice Sexy Ass, No Sugar Added
NSF	National Science Foundation, National Sanitation Foundation, Not So Fast, Non-Sufficient Funds
NSW	New South Wales, Not Safe for Work, Naval Special Warfare, Not So Wonderful
NT	New Technology, Northwest Territories, New Testament, New Taiwan, No Thanks, No Trump
OD	OverDose, Optometry Doctor, Oculus Dexter, Outside Diameter, Once Daily, OverDrive
OA	OsteoArthritis, Overeaters Anonymous, Original Angel, Office Automation, OverAll
OS	Operating System, Oculus Sinister, Oh Shit, Out of Stock
PA	Professional Association, Public Address, Physician Assistant, PennsylvAnia
PC	Personal Computer, Politically Correct, Pretty Crappy, Professional Corporation
PCP	Primary Care Physician, Primary Care Provider, PhenCylidine Psychedelic
PD	Police Department, Public Defender, Pupillary Distance, Parkinson's Disease, PaiD
PDA	Public Display of Affection, Personal Digital Assistant, Pennsylvania Dental Association
PI	Private Investigator, Principal Investigator, Personal Injury, Politically Incorrect, 3.14
POV	Point Of View, Privately Owned Vehicle, Peak Operating Voltage, Porn On Video
PR	Public Relations, Press Release, Puerto Rico, Pakistan Railways, PayRoll, PaiR, PRick
PRC	Postal Regulatory Commission, People's Republic of China
PSA	Public-Service Announcement, Prostate-Specific Antigen, Pot Smokers of America
RD	Registered Dietician, Reader's Digest, Remove Directory, Research & Development, Road
SA	South Africa, South America, Saudi Arabia, Sexaholics Anonymous, Sex Appeal
SD	Secure Digital, Standard Deviation, Single Density, Standard Definition, South Dakota
SE	SouthEast, Standard Edition, Special Edition, Stock Exchange, Sex Education, SwEden
SF	San Francisco, Santa Fe, Single Female, Science Fiction
STD	Sexually Transmitted Disease, STanDard, STandard Deviation, Sacred Theology Doctor
TS	Tough Shit, TranSexual, Top Secret, ThunderStorm, Twisted Sister, Tool Shed
TV	TeleVision, TransVestite, TransVaginal, Tunnel Vision, Top View, True Value, TuValu
VA	Veterans Administration, VirginiA, Vagina or Ass
VC	Venture Capital, Venture Capitalist, Vatican City, VietCong, Vacuum Cleaner
XYZ	eXamine Your Zipper

To have fun with your friends, **hide that table's right-hand column**, then y'all guess what those acronyms stand for. Get a point for each guess that happens to match what's in the table.

That game isn't fair, but it's fun.

Quora chat

Quora.com lets people chat in many groups, free! In the typical chat, a person asks a question, then other members answer.

Here are some questions I answered about American English. If you think you're expert at American English already, try this fun experiment: think how *you'd* answer a question, then see how I answered it differently. Some of my answers are serious, others joking. I've edited them here, to make you happier. Enjoy!

Alphabet

How many characters are in the alphabet?

In the United States, kids are taught the alphabet has 26 letters (ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ), so "26" is the simplest answer. But the true answer depends on how you define "alphabet."

If you count lower-case letters separately, there are 26 more (abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz), making the total be 26+26, which is 52, a pleasant number, since it's also how many weeks are in a year!

English borrows words from other languages. Some of those words look better with accents on them. The most popular accented letter is é. (It's not on the U.S. keyboard, but you can type it by holding down the Alt key while typing "130" on the numeric keypad. Microsoft Word and smartphones provide easier ways to type it.) That letter is especially popular when using words borrowed from French, especially the noun "résumé," which has a totally different meaning than the verb "resume." It's also useful in some words borrowed from Spanish, such as "olé" (which the Spanish borrowed from Arabic). Some typists are too lazy to type the é and type just e.

Other accents are borrowed from French, Spanish, German, and Swedish.

Older English had ligatures, especially an "a" rubbing against an "e," but modern American English doesn't use them. The oldest English had other special characters, borrowed mainly from German.

If you capitalize "alphabet," so the question becomes "How many characters are in the Alphabet," the answer is "many thousands," because "Alphabet" is the name of the company that includes Google and over 140,000 employees, many of whom are strange "characters"!

Vocabulary

What's this word when unscrambled: AAUCDMSS?

The first thing that comes to my mind is "C A D U M A S S," which is a good description of anyone who tries hard to answer the question.

Which is correct: "Please call when it's convenient" or "Please call at your earliest convenience"?

"Please call when it's convenient" means
"Hey, call when you're in the mood, no rush."
"Please call at your earliest convenience" means
"Gimme a call, and I'd appreciate it if you hurry the fuck up!"

How does "decease" differ from "demise"?

A person is "deceased" means the person is "dead."
The noun "demise" is vaguer: it could mean "death" or anything that resembles death. For example, a candidate who loses has "met his demise," though he didn't die physically; it means, somewhat cynically, the candidate "sorta died, so you can weep for him, boo-hoo." For example, when Trump became president, some analysts felt the rational wing of the Republican Party "met its demise." Separately, in law, "demise" refers to a transfer of an estate or sovereignty.

The online Merriam-Webster Dictionary gives 5 definitions of the *noun* "demise" ("death," "a cessation of existence or activity," "a loss of position or status," "the conveyance of an estate," or "transfer of the sovereignty to a successor") but fewer popular definitions of the *verb* "demise." Details are at Merriam-Webster.com/dictionary/demise.

Nouns Why is it "username" and not "user name"?

In English, 2 words tend to gradually merge, becoming 1. For example, instead of writing "You're an ass hole," people write now "You're an asshole."

How does "loop" differ from "loupe"?

A loop resembles a circle or oval but can be bumpy.
A loupe is a small magnifying glass, used by jewelers and watchmakers.

What's the differences between "miles" and "mileage"?

The usual word is "miles."
"Mileage" is used in these sentences:
"The car gets good mileage" (means "the car gets many miles per gallon")
"That car has a lot of mileage" (means "that car's been driven many miles")
"You put on a lot of mileage yesterday!" (means "you traveled far yesterday")
"Your face shows a lot of mileage" (means "your face shows many wrinkles")
"That joke got a lot of mileage" (means "many people reacted to that joke")
"That joke got a lot of smilage" could mean "that joke created many smiles"
Don't confuse "mileage" with "my ledge": "I'm gonna jump off my ledge."

What do "kind of" and "sort of" mean?

They both mean "somewhat." Examples: "you're kind/sort of ugly"; "you're kind/sort of beautiful." That comment is usually followed by a suggestion, such as "Let me fix your hair and get a prettier dress" or "To look even uglier, make blood drip from your mouth."

The reply to "Come to the party!" can be "Sorry, but I sort of don't want to go," which is softer than saying just "I don't want to go." It means "I'm reluctant, but maybe you can talk me into it, by giving me more reasons to go."

Where I come from (Northeast U.S.), we don't bother pronouncing the "f" in "sort of": we pronounce "sort of" like "sort uh," which we write as "sorta." The same applies to "kind of": we don't pronounce the "f," so we pronounce "kind of" like "kind uh." We could write that as "kinda," but that confuses people who think we mean "kindergarten," so writing "kinda" is less popular than "sorta."

Why do people say the heart broke rather than the brain broke?

Long ago, people thought emotions came from the heart. Now we know they come from the brain, but "from the heart" is a cute tradition to maintain. On Valentine's Day, it's cuter to give people pictures of hearts than pictures of brains, because brains look yucky.

When you're in love, you can feel your heart beat faster. You probably also have a headache, but that's not romantic.

Have you ever confused 2 words?

When I was in 7th grade, we had to talk about how to create the perfect town. I didn't know "creamery" differs from "crematorium." I thought a "crematorium" made cream, but it burns corpses instead.

Your kid's in grade 3. You want to know his vacation time before grade 4. Can you ask "When are you on summer break?"

Where I come from (Northeast U.S.), we don't say "summer break." We say "summer vacation." So we'd ask, "When's your summer vacation?" or, more likely, "When does your school's summer vacation begin?" or, even more likely, "When's the last day of school, before summer vacation?"

But the kid's probably unsure when vacation begins and especially when it ends, so ask the school instead!

Can I say "I will make a note of it in my diary?"

Say "I'll note it in my diary" or "I'll record it in my diary" or "I'll include it in my diary/autobiography/memoir."

Those answers assume you mean a "diary" of what happened. If instead you mean a list of things to do, don't say "diary"; instead say "I'll put it on my to-do list" (or "I'll put it on my calendar" or "I'll jot myself a reminder to do it" or "I'll stick a reminder on my fridge" or "I'll tell my lover to yell at me tomorrow if I haven't finished it by then.")

How does "women" differ from "woman"?

"Woman" is pronounced "woo man" and singular: "I saw a woman."
"Women" is pronounced "wim en" and plural: "I saw 3 women."

Which is correct: "I want to know the meaning of the lyric" or "I want to know the mean of lyrics"?

Instead of "lyric," most people say "lyrics." Before "lyric" or "lyrics," put "the." Say "the meaning" (which means "the definition"), not "the mean" (which means "the nasty" or "the statistical average"). So say "I want to know the meaning of the lyrics" or, better yet, just "I want to know what the lyrics mean."

Which is correct: “Middle east’s countries are 18 in the count/numbers”?

Write “There are 18 countries in the Middle East” or “There are 18 Middle East countries,” because those choices are short and “Middle East” should have both words capitalized.

If you’re forced to choose between just the 2 long versions: “in the numbers” is wrong, “in the count” is better but still awkward, “in number” is even better and sometimes said, but best are the short sentences I typed above.

Why must I change “Gold is more precious than all metal” to “Gold is more precious than any other metals”?

Gold is a metal. You can’t say “Gold is more precious than all metal,” because gold isn’t more precious than itself.

Is this English natural: “My mom called out to me for not turning the tap off and leaving it running”?

Better: “My mom yelled at me for leaving the tap running” or “My mom yelled at me for not turning off the tap.”

But best & most common: “My mom yelled at me for leaving the water running.” That’s because Americans don’t say “tap” much, except when talking about beer (“What beer is on tap?”) or body parts (“He tapped me on the shoulder”) or jobs (“I got tapped to do that awful job”).

Verbs Which is better: “I will/shall be late this evening”?

“Will” and “shall” differ in tone. “You will eat your dinner” is a prediction. “You shall eat your dinner” is stronger: it’s a command.

“I will be late for dinner” is a prediction. “I shall be late for dinner” is stronger: it means I’ve *decided* to be late for dinner (because I dislike the dinner or prefer doing something else first).

“I will be late this evening” probably means I’ll *arrive* late but might mean I’ll *stay* late. “I shall be late this evening” is stronger: it means I *decided* on that.

Summary: “will” is simple; “shall” is more forceful & commanding. That’s why God’s commands in the Bible say “you shall,” not “you will.”

“Shall” is an example of PA English (Pompous-Ass English): when you say it, you sound like a pompous ass. Americans think the British are PA but applaud the British for acting PA, because it’s so cute!

How does “I have to go” differ from “I got to go”?

These are strong: must, have to (=hafta), got to (=gotta)

This is gentler: need to

These are even gentler: should, ought to (=oughta)

Can I write “May I visit the toilet” instead of “May I go to the toilet”?

To go to the toilet’s room, we in the Northeast U.S. don’t mention “toilet.” In a home, we usually say “bathroom”; in a restaurant or office building, we usually say “restroom” (or “men’s room” or “ladies’ room”) but can still say “bathroom.” We can say “visit” for “restroom” but not for “bathroom.”

These expressions are the most common:

“Excuse me, I’d like to go to the bathroom/restroom.”

“Where is she? She’s in the bathroom/restroom.”

“Excuse me, I need to visit the restroom.”

Can I say “postponed” instead of “rescheduled”?

“Postponed” is vague. “Postponed” means “delayed,” but “rescheduled” means “delayed and a new time has been picked.”

If I don’t want to admit I’ll never attend such a meeting, I could be vague and write “I decided to postpone the meeting.” If I’m more honest, I’d put “postpone” in quotes, like this: I decided to “postpone” the meeting. Those quotation marks hint to my audience that “postpone” is just a euphemism, a polite way of saying “probably cancel.” If I’m saying that sentence verbally, I’d pause before and after each “postpone” syllable (long pause then say “post” then short pause then “pone” then medium pause); and at the beginning of each syllable I’d make two fingers on each hand (middle & index fingers) imitate falling quotation marks. That implies the word “postpone” shouldn’t be taken seriously and adds humor to my declaration, so my audience might laugh instead of curse me.

That’s how to politely lie! I mean: how to be “tactful!”

If your mom doesn’t understand tech and paid more for an iPhone than its usual price, is it natural to say “Mom, you’ve been ripped off” or “Mom, you’ve been conned”?

“Conned” means “cheated.”

“Ripped off” is vaguer: it can mean “cheated” or just “charged far too much.”

How do you use the word “pray” in a sentence?

The standard example is: “I pray to God.”

Another example is “I pray we win,” where “pray” means “hope.” The sentence means “I hope we win, and I might even pray to God about it.”

Another example is: “Pray tell, where the hell were you last night?” In that example, “Pray tell” means “Please tell me” but cynically: the person asking expects a disappointing or dishonest answer and is about to yell at the person but holds back the anger, to sound polite, the calm before the storm.

A variant is “Prithee, tell me where the fuck you went last night.” The word “prithee” is archaic, from Shakespeare’s time. It’s a short form of “I pray to thee,” so it means “please.” Nowadays, anybody who says “prithee” tries to be funny, *ridiculously* polite, the joke before the head bashing.

Can we say “Turn left at the 2nd intersection onto XYZ street”?

We Americans would say just “Take the 2nd left, onto XYZ Street.”

What’s the verb form of “whistle blower”?

If he’s the “whistle blower,” you can say “he blew the whistle.” For example, if he announced (or at least revealed) that Jack was doing illegal stuff, you can say “he blew the whistle on Jack.”

What verb, more general than “hear,” can be used for any way of receiving info (not just by ear)?

“Detect” something in your environs. “Acquire” info. “Learn” something new.

Define “open” in “I’ll open against John.”

The sentence can mean “In this series of tennis matches, I’ll start by competing against John. Later, I’ll compete against others (if I haven’t been eliminated yet).”

Which is best: “Emma seems a very nice person,” “Emma seems to be a very nice person,” “Emma seems like a very nice person”?

Usually, I recommend just “Emma is very nice” or “Emma seems very nice” or “Emma was very nice to us” or “Emma was great!” or “Emma was so helpful!” because they’re shorter. “Emma seems to be a very nice person” is longer but has this advantage: it generalizes about her whole personality.

In your sentences, the word “seems” means “probably is, but maybe is not; I won’t know for sure until I see her more often.” Here’s a more complete thought: “Emma may seem a very nice person, but actually she’s a dragon: I saw her breathe fire from her mouth. She can be a fire-breathing bitch.”

Adjectives Is the word “classical” overused so it’s lost its true meaning?

“Classic” can be used as a put-down, a euphemism for “old-fashioned” or “outdated” or “totally terrible.” Examples:

“Your classic reply is not what the world needs now.”

“Classical music? Ugh. Get with the times, man: rock!”

“Your hamburger toppings are classic but lack creativity.”

“You’re classical: your hat’s visor is in front — not in rear, which is cool now!”

“That’s classic! Further proof you’re an outdated asshole!”

“That woman is a classical c*nt.”

“You have hiccups? You’re class (hic!) all!”

In music, the word “classical” has 3 meanings. One meaning is “music from the era of Hayden & Mozart, not earlier (which is “baroque”), not later (“which is “from the romantic era” or “modern” or “contemporary”). A totally different meaning is “anything played by classical music stations & orchestras, including everything from Bach to Stravinsky and beyond.” Some 1950’s pop music is called “classic rock,” which is as simplistic as Hayden’s music (though with more of a beat); it’s less sophisticated than pop music from the 1940’s and 1960’s.

Which is better: “business older than 17 years old” or “more than 17-year-old business”?

These are all better: “business older than 17 years,” “business more than 17 years old,” “over-17-year-old business,” “business begun over 17 years ago,” “business that’s been around for more than 17 years,” “business for more than 17 years,” “business for over 17 years”

How does “reserved” differ from “aloof”?

“Reserved” implies “I’ll be quiet, tactful, not say much, be conservative, politely quiet until the conversation warms up later and I get to know you better. I want to make you happy by shutting up awhile. I *respect your desire* for me to shut up awhile. Maybe my quiet will make you curious, make you start a fascinating conversation about me. I’ll let *you* control the conversation and determine the flow of any future chat.”

"Aloof" implies "I'm better than you. I don't want involve myself in your shit. I stand above you. I'm upper-class, unlike you. I won't degrade myself by getting into your conversation or trying to be friendly to awful people like you."

So a person who acts *reserved* to you respects you, while a person who acts *aloof* thinks you're shit.

That's because "reserved" sounds like "respect" (meaning "I respect your desire for me to be quiet and *listen to you*"), and "aloof" sounds like "above" (meaning "I think I'm above you, because you act like a low piece of shit").

Calling someone "reserved" is a compliment; "aloof" is a negative.

How does "expensive" differ from "dear"?

Using "dear" to mean "expensive" is British but not American.

In both cultures, "dear" can mean "something I love so much and want to keep." For example, "she's a dear friend" and "that's very dear to me."

"Oh, dear!" is a polite upper-class way of saying "What the fuck happened! That's so terrible!"

Which is correct: "up-to-date" or "up-to-day"?

"Up-to-date" is okay. "Up-to-day" is wrong and never said. "Up to the day I die" (which includes "the" and omits hyphens) means "until the day I die."

Which is correct: "He bore my food expenses" or "He bore my fooding expenses"?

Say "food," not "fooding."

It would be more usual to say just "He paid for my food."

Adverbs What can I say instead of "very different"?

"Quite different" or, if you want to be stronger, "entirely different."

Some people avoid to word "very" because it's uncreative, boring, and unsophisticated. But I *like* "very," because it's very natural! If you say "quite" instead of "very," you sound like a snob, with your nose up in the air, like a terrifying professor or too-proud CEO.

When to say "apparently"?

"Definitely" means the probability is 100%.

"Apparently" means the probability is about 95%.

"Seemingly" (and "it seems that") mean the probability is about 75%.

"Probably" means the probability is greater than 50%.

Examples of "apparently":

"Apparently, you're going to graduate."

"Apparently, you made an error."

"Apparently, the thief is John."

How to use "currently" in a sentence?

"Currently" means "now," but put "currently" after "I'm" when you want to be an ass. Examples:

"I'm currently busy" means "I'm busy now, so go away."

"I'm currently unavailable" means "I'm unavailable now, so go away."

How can I improve "He loved her so hard"?

You could say "He loved her so much" or "He tried so hard to keep their love aflame" or "He tried so hard to make her love him more."

"He loved her so hard" dangerously implies his penis was hard. A hard penis is okay, but I doubt you want his penis to penetrate your chat.

How does "yes" differ from "okay"?

"Yes" is the answer to a question. For example, if a person asks "Do you want to go to the movies," reply "Yes" (or the opposite, which is "No").

"Okay" (which can be abbreviated as "O.K.") is the reply to a statement. It means "I have no objection." If a person says "Let's go to the movies," reply "Okay" (which means "I have no objection") or "Sure" or "Sounds good to me!" or the opposite ("I'd rather not").

If a person asks "Do you want to go to the movies," the simple reply is "Yes," but you can say "Okay" instead, which means you're replying to the unsaid statement "Let's go to the movies."

Which is better: "given only" or "only given"?

My 2 rules about "only":

1. Instead of "only," say "just" (which contains just 1 syllable so is faster).
 2. Delay saying "just" until the last moment (so it's clearer what "just" refers to).
- Following those rules, you should say "given just."

Exception to rule 1: in the phrase "if and only if" (which mathematicians & logicians say often), don't change "only" to "just." You'd get booted!

Which is better: "at most," "not greater than," or "less than or equal to"?

When writing a normal English sentence, write "at most," because it's the shortest. When discussing math equations, you can write "less than or equal to" but better to write its math symbol (\leq) because it's shorter. "Not greater than" is used rarely, so ignore it.

Say "no greater than" when you want to be pessimistic, such as "Your score is no greater than average." It resembles "no better" ("You're no better than an asshole"). Say just "Not greater" (without "than") when chatting, such as "Your score is just average. Not greater."

What's another way to write "It often is convenient to...?"

I prefer "It is often convenient to..." That puts the "is" before "often" (the verb before the adverb).

Better yet, use a contraction: "It's often convenient to..." The shorter, the better!

Better yet: "Often it's convenient to..." That gets "often" out of the way of the rest of the sentence, since "often" is the sentence's least important word.

Here are other options. Instead of "Often," you can say "Sometimes" or "Usually" or "Normally." Instead of "it's convenient to," say "it's helpful to" or "it's best to" or "you should" (because they're shorter and more motivating) Which option is *best*? That depends on *when* your advice is true! In *which* situations should your advice be followed? Which situations are *exceptions* to your advice? Examples:

"To solve $mx=b$, usually divide both sides by m , but there are 'issues' if m is zero."

"To solve $mx=b$, divide both sides by m (unless m is 0, which can cause 'issues')."

What's wrong with "I have still to meet a person who is perfectly satisfied with his job"?

It would be more common to say "yet" instead of "still," like this:

"I have **yet** to meet a person who is perfectly satisfied with his job."

When speaking, it would be more common to use a contraction:

"I have yet to meet a person **who's** perfectly satisfied with his job."

Shorten the sentence, by changing "have yet to meet" to "haven't yet met":

"I **haven't yet met** a person who's perfectly satisfied with his job."

Sound more natural, by changing "perfectly" to "totally":

"I haven't yet met a person who's **totally** satisfied with his job."

Include both sexes (and avoid being male-only sexist) by avoiding "his":

"I haven't yet met **any people** totally satisfied with **their** jobs."

That's the best!

How should you use "e.g."?

Instead of "e.g." write "for example," which can be understood by people who don't know "e.g." stands for "exempli gratia," which is Latin.

Pronouns How can I avoid writing "we" in research papers?

To discuss math, say "you" instead of "we," like this:

"You divide both sides of the equation by 7."

Or switch to the imperative (as if saying a prescription or rule), like this:

"Divide both sides of the equation by 7."

Improve "She was a criminal who's the investigators had been looking for a very long time."

I recommend:

Version A. "She was a criminal whom the investigators had been seeking a very long time." Here's why.

You want "whom" instead of "who's." (Some Americans are too lazy to say "whom," so they say just "who," which is becoming common but disliked by grammar purists.)

I'm annoyed by "looking for a very long time." It's correct if your mouth pauses after "for"; but if it accidentally pauses after "looking" instead, the phrase "for a very long time" confuses the listener.

If you don't like version A, try this instead, which forces a pause before "a very long time":

Version B. "She was a criminal whom the investigators had been looking for often, a very long time."

Conjunctions Define "tho".

When typing a text message on a cellphone, people who are too lazy to type "though" type just "tho."

Is it proper to use the word "and" in numbers?

When we Americans chat verbally & informally, we often pronounce 125 as "one hundred and twenty-five," because we think of 125 as "one hundred and a little bit more." But on checks, we must *not* write \$125 as "one hundred and twenty-five," because on checks the word "and" means "decimal point goes here." For \$125.37, we must write "One hundred twenty-five and 37/100."

Which is correct: "Please check your account if/whether you received funds"?

Say "Please check whether your account received the funds."

Also acceptable:

"Please make sure your account got the funds."

"Please make sure the funds got into your account."

"Look at your account, to make sure the funds got into it."

Instead of saying "account," better say *which* kind of account, such as "bank account" or "credit-card account" or "investment account" or "trust" or "Wells Fargo account."

Prepositions Which is correct: "in/on the last week of April"?

Most people say "during," not "in" or "on."

Which is correct: "Today is the happiest day in/of my life"?

"Of" is more common: "Today is the happiest day of my life."

If you prefer to write "in," say "in all": "Today is the happiest day in all my life." You can also say, "In all my life, I've never been as happy as today!"

Which is correct: "a lecture in/from 1999"?

"A lecture in 1999" just mentions that the year was 1999.

"A lecture from 1999" emphasizes that 1999 was a long time ago (so the lecture's contents might no longer be accurate or up-to-date, or the lecturer should be praised for expressing good ideas so early).

Which is correct: "go to/for lunch"?

"Let's go for lunch" means "let's go out for a fun meal."

"Let's go to lunch" emphasizes the trouble of traveling to lunch and the trouble of having a business meeting (or evaluating a potential sex partner) while eating lunch. It means "Let's discuss over lunch." Example:

"I'm thinking of quitting this company." "Hmm. Might not be a good idea. Let's go to lunch."

Should I say "get into" instead of "get in"?

"In" and "into" are both correct. Usually "in" is better, because it's briefer to write, say, and read, and it's more common.

But here's an example where "into" has a different meaning than "in." "Walk into the park" means "enter the park now," but "walk in the park" is vaguer and could mean "you're already in the park but should continue walking inside it awhile."

In an essay, can I use both "on" and "upon" interchangeably?

Say "on" usually, because it's briefer to write, say, and read, and it's more common, and consistency is good (don't keep switching back & forth).

Exceptions:

People say "once upon a time," never "once on a time."

A famous musical is titled "Once Upon a Mattress."

Jokers say "Once a pun, a thyme, you were spicy."

Which is correct: "in/at the center"?

All points inside a circle are "*in* the center." But the one point from which the radius comes is the only point "*at* the center." So "in the center" is vaguer than "at the center."

The same idea fits other shapes, such as a square room you're visiting: you're "*in* the center" is vaguer than "*at* the center," though both mean you're not near an edge (a wall).

Which is correct: "He applied at/to the bank for a loan"?

"He applied *at* the bank for a loan" usually means he *walked into* the bank for a loan (or at least went to a service area next to the bank's building).

"He applied *to* the bank for a loan" is vaguer: he applied by walked into the bank or by phone or mail or online.

Which is correct: "sanctions against/on a country"?

"Against" is clearer. "On" is vaguer. In American English, "to sanction" can mean either "to punish" or its opposite ("to approve"). By saying "against," you make clear you mean "to punish."

Correct this: "He asked from me if I was interested in a career in modelling."

Delete the word "from." "Modelling" is British; Americans write "modeling."

When crediting coauthors on a document, how does "Jane Doe, John Doe, and John Smith" differ from "Jane Doe with John Doe and John Smith"?

"By Jane Doe with John Doe and John Smith" means Jane Doe is the main author but a few paragraphs or details were contributed by John Doe and John Smith, who were Jane's assistants (or reporters stationed in different cities so could interview people far from Jane). To be more precise, some newspapers say "by Jane Doe, with contributions from John Doe and John Smith" or "by Jane Doe, with contributions from John Doe in Hong Kong and John Smith in Beijing." That means the article was written by Jane Doe, but she included info collected by John Doe and John Smith.

"By Jane Doe, John Doe, and John Smith" mean the 3 authors are of approximately equal importance and deserve approximately equal credit. But Jane is probably slightly more important than the other 2, since she got the privilege of being listed first.

An autobiography "by Jane Doe with John Smith" can mean the autobiography was dictated by Jane (who's famous) but then heavily edited by John.

The word "a" Should I say "notebook" or "a notebook" in "I picked up my statistics textbook, notebook, calculator, and a pen"?

Say "notebook" if you already owned the 4 items and picked them up in your home (or similar place), to bring to school.

Say "a notebook" if you're in a bookstore (or similar store), and by "picked up" you mean "grabbed the 4 items, to bring to the cashier." That's because "a notebook" implies the notebook is still blank, you haven't written in it yet, and so it probably isn't yours yet.

Politeness Can we call a principal "m'am" or "sir"?

The word should be spelled "ma'am." It's a contraction of "madam." It's popular especially in Southern U.S. restaurants when addressing elderly female customers. "Ma'am" is less common in the Northeast.

I say "sir" whenever I want to be respectful to any male. I can say that to an official (school principal, policeman, or mayor) but also to a regular person (salesman, customer, or repairman).

I often say "Yes, sir!" or "Thank you, sir!" or "Excuse me, sir," because my dad was in the army and I was in the Boy Scouts, where "sir" is a popular word of respect; but non-military folks say "sir" too.

Don't put "Sir" before a guy's name (such as "Sir John") unless he's a British knight.

Should I say "Thank you Mary" or "Thanks Mary"?

"Thank you, Mary" and "Thanks, Mary" are both correct (including a comma). But few people say "Thanks, Mary," because its style is contradictory: "Thanks" is informal but adding "Mary" is formal. Most people would be completely formal ("Thank you, Mary") or completely informal (be brief and say just "Thanks").

Should I say "Why thank you" or "Well thank you"?

Write a comma before "thank you." The expressions are said rarely and indicate surprise, like "wow" but milder, more polite. The "why" version is more popular when an old person talks to a youngster.

Both are said mainly in public, such as when a stranger surprisingly holds open a door for you or carries a bag for you. It's one step short of paying the person a tip, which would be inappropriate.

Most people are too lazy to say all that. They say just "Thank you." But to emphasize "Thank you," they say it loudly (and write it with an exclamation point afterwards) or say it slowly (to say it thoughtfully or to a young child).

Which is correct: "thank for a dinner" or "thank for the dinner"?

The most common is "Thanks for dinner." To make the statement stronger, add an exclamation point: "Thanks for dinner!" Especially in text messages, use an exclamation point (not a period) to show you're sincerely enthusiastic, not cynical. You can add a smiley, to show further you're happy.

If your friend falls on the ground, do you ask "Are you hurt?" or "Do you hurt?" or "Is your leg hurt?" or "Does your leg hurt?"

The most natural question is "Are you okay?" Don't ask "Are you hurt?" since the person obviously *did* get hurt: the only question is whether the hurt is minor (hardly noticeable), major (needs an ambulance), or moderate. "Are you okay?" gives the victim a chance to elaborate about pain & desires, without presupposing a particular answer. Probably the person can rise & walk, but slowly & painfully, so might want shorter traveling; to find out, ask "Are you okay?" and wait for reply.

Probability Does the word “assume” mean the probability is high, low, or neutral?

“I assume” means “I think the probability is over 50%.”
“You assume... but,” means:
“You think the probability is over 50%, but I think the probability is under 50%.”
“You’re assumed innocent until proven guilty” means “You’re probably guilty, but we don’t have enough evidence to prove that yet.”

Which is correct: “If you hurry, you may/might get there on time”?

“May” and “might” are both okay, but “might” is less optimistic. Success probability is about 40% for “might,” 60% for “may,” 80% for “could,” 100% for “can.” Those probabilities are if you don’t stress the word; but if you say “might” or “may” or “could” or “can” loudly (or capitalize it or italicize it or boldface it), it sounds more pessimistic (subtract 10% from the probability), because it sounds like you don’t believe the person will hurry *enough* or maybe there will be a traffic jam.

How does “a” affect the meaning of “There’s a little hope of his recovery”?

“There’s little hope of his recovery” means I’m **sad**, because he seems to be getting worse and will probably die.
“There’s a little hope for his recovery” means I’m **happy** because there’s new hope, since he’s getting better or the doctors thought of a new procedure that might work.

Excitement How does “wow” differ from “whoa”?

“Wow” is a **statement**, meaning “I’m excited, amazed, and surprised,” because something very good (or very bad) just happened.
“Whoa” is a **question**, meaning “What the fuck just happened?” It also means “That changes everything,” so we must rethink the future.
Old folks say “Wow” but rarely say “Whoa,” which has a **hippie flavor**, smelling of anti-intellectual young’uns who use drugs and are freewheeling.

Can we say “Have a blast at college”?

“Have a blast at college” means “have a great, fun time at college, a blast of joy” (but without explosive bombs, which would upset the police). Have an explosively great time using chemistry of great interpersonal relationships!

What does it mean when a woman’s “a notch on the bedpost”?

It means she’s “another woman I fucked.” A similar term is “a notch on the door.”
How does a Harvard man differ sexually from a Dartmouth man (from New Hampshire’s Dartmouth College)? I got degrees from both schools and confess the following tale is mainly true, usually said with heaving breathing at appropriate moments...
A Harvard man challenged a Dartmouth man to see who could take the most women to bed in one night. The Harvard man went to his dorm room, had sex with a woman, and put a mark on his door, like this:
|
Then he had sex with a 2nd woman, so he put a mark next the first mark. He had sex with a 3rd woman and put a third mark. Then he fell asleep, exhausted.
The next morning, the Dartmouth man dropped by and asked, “How did you do?” The Harvard man proudly pointed at the door:
|||
The Dartmouth man said, “A hundred and eleven? Beat me by one!”

Regrets How do you use “as much as”?

“As much as I love you, I shouldn’t marry you” means:
“Even though I love you very much, I shouldn’t marry you.”

Colloquial Why not use colloquial words when writing an academic text?

“You shouldn’t use colloquial words in writing an academic text, because people who edit academic texts are assholes.” That sentence is unacceptable in an academic text, because the editors fear people in other countries don’t know what assholes are. The editors also don’t like contractions, because they think the longer the academic paper is, the more outstanding it is.
So that sentence should be written, “You should not employ colloquial words in the construction of an academic text, because the editorial committee, whose duty consists of editing your research, has great concern about the appropriateness of letting your localized denigrated vocabulary infiltrate the minds of the global audience, whose duty is to admire and reference your article and imbue great praise upon its universality.”

Spelling

How many words don’t follow the “i before e” rule?

The traditional rule is:
i before e (except after c, or when sounded like A, as in “neighbor” or “weigh”).
That rule was disproved by “science,” which has i before e after c. It’s also disproved by Germanic words in science & math (such as “eigenvector”), “Einstein” (a German immigrant to the USA), “stein” (a German word that’s become an English word meaning “beer mug”, “Eileen” (a popular girl’s name) and “Eiffel Tower” (a popular girl’s place in Paris). Americans already know “Heil Hitler.” In all those examples, “ei” is pronounced like the capital letter I, so the traditional poem should be expanded to:
i before e, except after c,
or when sounded like A, as in “neighbor” or “weigh,”
or when sounded like I, as in “Eileen” or “Heil Hitler.”

Is a spelling or grammar mistake on a résumé/application a no forever?

Hey, Ana, I’m spelling your name wrong and making a mistakes here too, but will you hate me forever?
Gee whiz, girl, my mistrakes make it real hard to impress you and have you choose me to be your employee, teacher, boyfriend, or husband. But if I try real hard in the future to be nice and act smart, maybe I stand a chance?
Same with your résumé.

What spelling error is common?

Most people don’t know how to spell “raspberry.” They omit the “p.” Some people just give up: they write “razzberry,” which is how “raspberry” is pronounced. “Blow him a razzberry” or “give him a razz” or “give him a Bronx cheer” means “insult him by making a fart sound from your lips.” Details are at wikipedia.org/wiki/Blowing_a_raspberry

Can English be simplified?

English could be simplified in 3 ways.
Just 3 verb tenses To simplify English, I’d have just one past tense (using the word “did”) and one future tense (using the word “will”), like this: “I did go” (past), “I go” (present), “I will go” (future). Or use the Chinese system: “I go yesterday” (or “I go already”), “I go today,” “I go tomorrow.” (The Chinese word for “already” is “le.”)
Spell phonetically To explain how to pronounce a word, dictionaries rewrite the word in phonetics. My book compares 8 phonetic systems, each reasonable in its own way. Many non-English languages are easier to spell, especially Spanish and Asian languages (such as pinyin Chinese, which millions of kids are taught).
Internationalize Esperanto is an artificial language trying to combine the best features of each language, to create a universal simple language. But it was based on old European languages instead of English, which has become the international standard even for diplomacy (previously in French), though not yet for music (still in Italian) and not yet for biology & medicine (still in Latin). Oui, sayonara, the world still upgefukt ist!

Capitalization

Why not type emails in all caps?

Typing in all caps is considered shouting.
Also, people have a harder time reading all-caps than correctly capped writing. Experiments show: reading all-caps is slower than reading correctly capped, and typos in all-caps are harder to detect & fix than if correctly capped.
If you’re too lazy to correctly cap, type in all-lowercase instead. Many people do. It’s permitted in text messages & emails.

On a Website, are capitalized words easier to understand?

To emphasize a word or phrase, you can make it all capitals, italics, boldface, underlined, a different color, circled, or in a bigger font. But a whole sentence or paragraph, all written in capitals or italics, is harder & slower to read than when written traditionally with lower-case letters.

For the word “December,” why is “december” a misspelling but “DECEMBER” is not?

“December” is correct. “december” is wrong, because you must capitalize the first letter of all months (& countries, cities, family names, days of the week, etc.).
If you want to emphasize a word, you can highlight that entire word. To highlight, you can make the word be CAPITALIZED or **boldfaced** or *italicized* or underlined (or in a big font or a box or a different color or have a different colored background). For example, you can write:

"I already told you: I'll kiss you in **DECEMBER**, not sooner, not today!"
The EASIEST way to highlight a typed word is to CAPITALIZE. Especially when sending text messages, capitalizing is MUCH EASIER than boldfacing or italicizing or underlining. When scribbling a note using pen & paper, the easiest way to highlight is to underline. The SAFEST way to highlight a word is to italicize it, since italics are allowed even when you're writing a newspaper article, magazine article, or technical paper.

To highlight the most noticeably when writing a book, use **boldface**. When I publish books, I boldface often, especially when introducing a new term, like this:

He's totally **upgefukt**, which Germanically means "fucked up!"

Should mozzarella cheese be capitalized?

Capitalize adjectives if they refer to places (such as "French") or people (such as "Alfredo"). Wikipedia, which tells each adjective's history, says "mozzarella" means "cut a little," so it's *not* the name of a place or person and should *not* be capitalized.

If a food's adjective isn't on Wikipedia, check the Web to see what other restaurants do, but beware: some restaurants are lazy and capitalize nothing. Wikipedia is fussier, and so am I when I edit restaurant menus.

Exception: you can capitalize an adjective if it's a sentence's first word or part of a headline, like this:

Today's special: Pickles Mozzarella! Try our amazingly sour pickles coated with super-goopy melted mozzarella cheese! Unforgettable! Just 5 cents per pickle! (Vomit tray not included.)

Should the V and C be capitalized in "Vitamin C"?

Capitalize the C. Reputable sources capitalize the V just if "Vitamin" is a sentence's first word or in a headline or in the name on a pill bottle.

Should a foreigner's titles be capitalized?

Follow the same rules for foreign titles as for American titles, like this:

Mayor Smith
the mayor, Smith,
Smith, the mayor,
Smith, the mayor of Chicago,
Smith, Chicago's mayor,

Notice "Mayor" is capitalized in the first example but not in the other examples. The same habit applies to other titles, such as "President Trump," "King Alfred," and "Pope John."

Why capitalize "Opera"?

In general, *don't* capitalize "opera." For example, you can write "I went to the opera" or "I heard the opera."

If opera is part of a title, capitalize. The main example is "The Threepenny Opera."

"Opera" is also the name of a Web browser. It competes against Chrome, Firefox, Siri, Internet Explorer, and Microsoft Edge. Since it's a branded product, it must be capitalized. If I change my first name to "Opera" (or make "Opera" my nickname), I must capitalize too!

Is "The" capitalized in the Wall Street Journal?

Yes. The title at the top of the newspaper's front page is:

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Notice the capital T. Also notice the period after "Journal." Once, that newspaper forgot to include the period. I phoned the reporter who'd written about me, and I complained about the missing period. The next day's paper had the period again!

The version that comes out on Saturdays says this instead:

WSJ

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL WEEKEND

So every Saturday The Wall Street Journal misses its period — because that's when it's pregnant?

Pronunciation

Is the English first name "Joel" pronounced as 1 or 2 syllables?

Where I grew up (New York City and New Jersey), "Joel" is pronounced as 1½ syllables: the "e" is pronounced very quickly, so it almost disappears (like a schwa).

Is the word "vary" pronounced differently than "very"?

In the U.S. Midwest, "Mary" and "merry" and "marry" are pronounced almost the same as each other. But where I come from (New York City and New Jersey), they're pronounced differently from each other, and we laugh at people who pronounce them all the same.

To answer your original question: the "ar" in "vary" is pronounced the same as in "Mary"; the "er" in "very" is pronounced the same as in "merry." Whether "ar" sounds the same as "er" depends on which part of the U.S. you're from.

How do you pronounce "there," "their," and "they're"?

In most of the U.S., "there" and "their" and "they're" are all pronounced the same.

How do Americans usually say 2.15 miles: "2 point 15 miles" or "2 and 3/20th miles" or "43/20th of a mile"?

I'd say "2 point one five miles." But we Americans hardly ever talk about hundredths of a mile; we're usually cruder and say just "a little over 2 miles" or "a little over 2 point 1 miles."

What should I do to speak English like a native speaker?

Congrats on trying to speak English like a native! But many Americans *like* hearing foreign accents, which they are cute. Many Americans are attracted to foreign speakers and want to date or marry them.

Learn to speak like an American, since knowledge is power; but don't be surprised that many Americans admire you just the way you are!

Famous American & British actors try to adopt foreign accents so they can play characters who are comic or romantic. There are even courses in how to speak like a "foreigner."

Every birthday, my family sings "Happy Birthday" in a German accent, imitating our immigrant grandparents, because it's fun. In that accent, each "th" is pronounced as just "t," and each "h" is pronounced as a German or Hebrew "ch."

Many American men try to date Chinese immigrant women having Chinese accents, because they think those women need help and are subservient. Later, when those Chinese women get more experienced, those women become more self-reliant, confident, tougher, and less "cute."

Grammar

Here are issues about grammar.

Of Which is correct: "couple of years" or "couple years"?

"Couple of years" is most correct, but now many people have become lazy: they omit the "of" in speech & writing and even in respected newspapers! That laziness upsets me, but I realize language changes over time: Americans like to shorten grammar & spelling, so I put up with it. In your own writing, please keep the "of," so elderly readers don't vomit.

When do you say "smell of" instead of just "smell"?

"You smell of" means "You smell like you're made of."

"You smell of perfume" means "You smell like you're made of perfume, because you used too much perfume."

"You smell of whiskey" means "You smell like you're made of whiskey, because whiskey's on your clothes or body or in your breath."

In those examples, "of" means you're going to get an insult. To insult more successfully, change "smell" to "reek," which means "smell too strongly." For example, "You reek of perfume" means "You smell too strongly like you're made of perfume." "You reek of whiskey" means "You smell too strongly like you're made of whiskey";

"The cake smells of rum" means "The cake smells like it's made of rum, because rum is one of the cake's ingredients." That's a compliment if you like rum. "The cake reeks of rum" is definitely an insult: it means "The cake smells too strongly it's made of rum."

To In the sentence "Writers have been told never use adverbs," should "told" be "told to"?

This is better:

Writers have been told, "Never use adverbs."

This is even better:

Writers have been told: never use adverbs.

Some style sheets say "Capitalize after a colon," so they demand this capitalization (but I disagree):

Writers have been told: Never use adverbs.

To be cynical, write this:

Writers have been told insistently, dramatically, and very demandingly: never use adverbs.

Here's the truth about adverbs: the word "very" tends to be overused, so use it seldom. Instead of typing "very," make the next word be capitalized, italicized, or boldfaced. Other adverbs are useful sometimes; but if you have too many adverbs, your sentence gets too long to read before the reader falls asleep; so **use adverbs sparingly**.

In the sentence “You’ll arrive back where you set off,” should “back” be “back to”?

People usually say “set off” just in a race or long walk. Unless you’re talking about those things, it’s more common to say “You’ll arrive back where you started” or “You’ll arrive back where you began” or “You’ll return to where you started.”

Changes Do we still have changes in English grammar?

The 2 changes I notice most (in Northeast U.S.) are:
Instead of saying “a couple of,” people omit the “of.”
Instead of saying “whom,” people say “who.”
Both are examples of shortening. They annoy me.

That Should I omit “that” from “From then on, I decided that I loved Spanish”?

Write as briefly as possible, to waste less of the audience’s time and less paper. So omit the word “that.” Keep the word “that” just in sentences where omitting it might cause confusion.

When editing, my brain is on autopilot: each time I see the word “that,” I ask myself: is the word necessary or at least helpful? For *your* sentence, the answer is *no*.

Anyway, I don’t believe your sentence: I don’t believe you kept deciding, *repeatedly*, “from then on,” again and again, you loved Spanish. Maybe you meant one of these:

- “That class made me love Spanish.”
 - “At that moment, I began to love Spanish.”
 - “That class made me fall in love with Spanish.”
 - “That’s when my eternal love of Spanish began.”
 - “At that moment, my love affair with Spanish began.”
 - “That’s when Spanish stole my heart and I married it, forever!”
 - “That was when I decided Spanish would be my favorite language.”
 - “That’s when my love of Spanish began. I’ve been loving Spanish ever since!”
 - “My love of Spanish began then and never wavered. Wow! I still love Spanish *so much!*”
 - “That’s when I fell in love with Spanish. Forever after, that love flame has never faltered: it burns brightly still!”
- Go invent *your own* love letter to Spanish! Say *why* you love Spanish *so much!*

Which is correct: “One more thing, we currently have three issues, WHICH we are hoping to resolve soon” or “One more thing, we currently have three issues THAT we are hoping to resolve soon”?

I prefer “But 3 issues remain, which we hope to resolve soon.”
The shorter, the better! Don’t waste the reader’s time!

Verb tenses Which is correct: “Things didn’t go as I plan/planned”?

Since the sentence’s first part is in the past tense, the last part should be past tense also: say “planned,” not “plan.”

Which is correct: “I suggest that he go/goes there”?

“Go” is better than “goes.” I also recommend you omit the word “that,” so write “I suggest he go there.”

A more typical sentence, of the same ilk, would be “I suggested he go to Hell” or “I suggest you go to Hell” or “I suggest you go f*** yourself” or “Dear apprentice chef, I suggest you beat the eggs harder.”

Which is correct: “I have worked for 2 years” or “I have been working for 2 years”?

“I worked” means I worked in the past but not now.
“I have worked” is slightly vaguer: it means I worked in the past (and maybe now also, but we’re not chatting about the present).
“I have been working” means I worked in the past and *definitely now* also.
Examples:
“I killed 20 men when I was a kid.”
“I’ve killed 20 men. Don’t ask me when.”
“I’ve been killing more men, whenever I get a chance, and today’s your turn!”

Which is correct: “I joined in 2011” or “I join in 2011”?

To talk normally, say “I joined in 2011.”
When telling a long story, some people avoid the past tense altogether, since writing the past tense for each verb is tiring. They talk like this:
“For several years, I’m unemployed. Then my friend suggests I apply to FunCorp. So I apply. And wow, to my surprise, I get hired! I join in 2011. I’m happy! Then I get fired in 2012 for acting *too* happy! What a bummer! So for several years, I sulk. Then wow, I get rehired by FunCorp, because now they *do* want people who act happy!”

By writing that whole story in the present tense instead of the past, the story becomes more like an action-packed theater performance.

That use of the present tense is popular in jokes. For example, here’s a joke by a famous Jewish comedian:

“I have a pain, so I go to the doctor. I tell him, ‘It hurts when I do this.’ He says, ‘So don’t do that!’”

Which is correct: “you was” or “you were”?

“You were” is the standard answer.
But here’s a related phrase: “You what!?” Example:
Child: “Sorry, but I ate the whole birthday cake.”
Parent: “You what!?”
If the parent has a German-Jewish-Yiddish-NewYork accent, as many comedians do, the parent’s reply is pronounced “You vass!?” (typically followed by “Oy!”), because the German word for “what” is pronounced “vass” but written “was” (because in German a “w” is pronounced the same as the English “v”). So when I see “You was,” I think of “You vass!?” and laugh. That’s an example of how “wrong” grammar excites comedians.

A famous poem, using wrong grammar, is:
Spring has sprung.
The grass has riz.
I wonder where
The flowers is.
A similar famous poem, using wrong grammar, is:
The sun has riz,
The sun has set,
Yet here we is
In Texas yet.

Is it “she lied on her bed” or “she laid on her bed”?

“She lay on her bed.”
Don’t say “She got laid on her bed.” That would be too sexy.
Trump lied on TV.

Which is correct: “Harrison family is/are”?

We Americans usually say “the Harrison family is,” not “the Harrison family are.” Exception: instead of saying “The Harrison family’s members are all assholes,” we lazy Americans say just “The Harrison family are all assholes.” Democrats say “Trump” instead of “Harrison.”

Which is correct: “you who is/are reading this post”?

These are better because simpler:
“You, reading this post,…”
“If you’re reading this post,…”
“Since you’re reading this post,…”
“Hey, you! Yeah, you! Since you’re reading this post,…”
“The person reading this post…”
“Anybody reading this post…”

Is this correct English: “If you are going to get anything from us, you are going to earn it”?

I’m from Northeast U.S., where we’d say:
“If you’re going to get anything from us, you must earn it.”

Verb contractions Can I write “John’d eaten” instead of “John had eaten”?

You can write these contractions: I’d, you’d, he’d, she’d, we’d, they’d. But not “John’d”. Use contractions just with pronouns (I, you, he, she, we, they), not nouns (such as “John”).

When saying “John would,” sometimes I pronounce the word “would” briefly, omitting the “w” sound and shortening the “ou” sound, so “would” sounds like “ud.” But I don’t write that.

Exception: for the verb “fucked” (which is pronounced “fuckd”), a creative person might write “fuck’d,” but “f**k*d” is more common.

Superlatives What are the comparative and superlative of “loyal”?

Comparative: “loyaler” might exist, but most people say “more loyal” instead.
Superlative: “loyalest” might exist, but most people say “most loyal.”
Don’t write “loyalist,” which sounds the same as “loyalest” but has a different meaning: “a loyalist” is a member of a loyal group, especially a group loyal to a king.

Why do native English speakers make mistakes with comparatives and superlatives?

Sometimes we use wrong grammar purposely, to create humor about extremes. Examples:

“I may be wrong, but you’re wronger.”
“That food is delicious, but *this* food is delicious-er.”
“She’s beautiful, but you’re the most beautifullest!”
“Harvard’s a great school, but I’m the greatest.”

Here’s a tougher issue about comparatives: is it okay to say “I run fast”?
When I was young, I thought “fast” was just an adjective, not an adverb, so the sentence should be “I run quickly”; but modern dictionaries permit “I run fast.”

Negatives Which is correct: “There will not be any updates made to the system” or “There will be no updates made to the system”?

Both are correct, but shorter is better, so say:
“There will be no updates made to the system.”
Even shorter & better: “There will be no updates to the system.”
Even shorter & better: “There will be no system updates.”
Even shorter & better: “The system won’t be updated.”

Which is correct: “I don’t have any child/children”?

“I don’t have any children” is the usual sentence.
But you can say “I don’t have any child in the sixth grade” or “I don’t have any child who’s been arrested.” That’s when the attention is on a single weird child.

Word order Say “Google productivity extensions” or “productivity Google extensions”?

“Google productivity extensions” is correct.
“Productivity Google extensions” has the wrong word order.
If you mean productivity extensions invented by Google, this is clearer: “Google’s productivity extensions.” If you mean productivity extensions for Google’s Chrome browser, say “Productivity extensions for Chrome.” If you mean productivity extensions invented by others for use with Google searches, say “Productivity extensions for Google searches.”
Your question resembles this:
“Sue’s purple shoes” is correct, if her shoes are purple.
“Purple Sue’s shoes” has the wrong word order, unless Sue has purple skin.

How do you fix “His application was properly typed and accepted”?

Better to say “His application was typed properly and accepted.”
That insures “properly” modifies just “typed,” not “typed and accepted.”

How do you disambiguate this sentence: “Mom leaves kid outside a bar in the rain to drink beer”?

“Mom goes into bar to drink beer but leaves her kid outside in the rain.”
She’s an asshole! She could get arrested for child neglect and needs counseling for becoming an alcoholic.

How to rewrite “The frog died in water” to start with “Water”?

“Water is where the frog died” or, more naturally, “In the water is where the frog died.”
Alternatives:
“Water surrounded the frog when it died.”
“Water enveloped the frog when it died.”
“Water covered the dying frog.”
“Water became the locale of the frog’s demise.”
“Water — yes, waiter! — give me a glass of water, into which I’ll dump my dying frog.”

Improve “I had a cat, black dog and hamster.”

To avoid implying the hamster is black, put “hamster” before “black” (“I had a cat, hamster, and black dog”) or put “a” before each (“I had a cat, a black dog, and a hamster”) or tell the hamster’s color (“I had a cat, black dog, and pink hamster”).

Which is better: “will only be using” “will be only using”?

In most sentences, I recommend you **switch “only” to “just”** (because “just” has fewer syllables) and **put “just” as late in the sentence as possible** (to make clearer which word “just refers to”).

So instead of “will only be using hamburger” or “will be only using hamburger,” say “will be using just hamburger.”

Here are 2 exceptions to my general rules:

1. If “only” is used as an adjective, you can’t switch it to “just.” For example, “she’s my only child” can’t be switched to “she’s my just child.”
2. A common phrase in math & logic is “if and only if.” In that phrase, don’t change “only” to “just,” because that switch confuses mathematicians & logicians.

How to rewrite “It’s hard to change our personalities because of our culture and the environment we grew up in that help formed our personalities”?

“It’s hard to change our personalities, because they’re formed by the culture & environment we grew up in.”

What is indirect speech for “Good morning doctor”?

Your example of direct speech needs a comma (and usually an exclamation point), like this: “Good morning, doctor!”

Indirect would be: I wished the doctor a good morning.

Don’t confuse these 2:

“Good morning, doctor.”
“Good mourning, funeral director!”

Difference Can I say “There are distinct differences between it”?

These sentences are grammatically correct; choose the one matching your meaning:

“There are distinct differences between them.”
“There’s a distinct difference between them.”
“They’re distinctly different from each other.”
“There are many differences between them.”
“It’s distinctly different.”
“It’s quite different.”
“It’s very different.”
“It’s very different from the other.”
“Your nose is quite different from the snot that comes out of it!”
“Omigod, yes! They’re *so* different from each other! Yikes!”
“The two are about the same age, but Biden is quite different from Trump!”
“They’re both charming, but a closer look shows one is a forgery.”

Can I say, “We are waiting for the past few days with a hope?”

Better: “We’ve been waiting for the past few days, hoping.”

Even better: “For the past few days, we’ve been waiting, hoping.”

Alternatives:

“For the past few days, we’ve been hoping.”
“For the past few days, we’ve had hope.”
“For the past few days, we’ve had a hope, but…”

What’s better than saying “Either my brothers or my mom are going to pick me up”?

Shorter is better. Here’s the shortest: “My brothers or mom will get me.”
Most people know “get” typically means “pick up” and not “torture”; but if you need to be 100% clear, say “My brothers or mom will pick me up.”
The conversation might go like this: “Who’ll pick you up?” “My brothers or mom.”
Instead of “pick me up” or “get me,” you can say “take me home” if home is the goal.

Types of grammar English has how many grammar types?

3 kinds: right, wrong, and “I’m gonna say it this way and I don’t give a fuck what you think.” Nerds call the 3rd type “transformational.”

Can my American professor give me a B for an assignment just because my English grammar is poor? Can I convince her I’m not American and not a native English speaker?

An “A” means “Perfect, or nearly perfect.” It’s a reward.

5 things to do:

Ask her whether the B is because of your English or your ideas.
Ask her whether you can resubmit the paper later, to improve it.
Ask her for more suggestions on how to improve it.
Try even harder to learn English better.

If you're still extremely frustrated, switch (to a different professor, class, major, or school), where American English is considered less important or standards are lower.

Punctuation

Here are issues about punctuation.

Commas Are commas okay in "ring, ring, ring!" and "beep, beep, beep!"?

Use commas or exclamation points or hyphens.

Saying "beep, beep, beep" is simple.

Saying "beep! beep! beep!" means it's annoying.

Saying "Beep! Beep! Beep!" means it's annoying and loud.

Saying "beep-beep-beep!" means it's fast.

Examples:

"Some asshole's at the door, making the damn doorbell go ring! ring! ring!"

"I'm driving to the hospital as fast as possible but gotta get the pedestrians out of the way, beep-beep-beep!"

"I'm just kidding, ha-ha-ha!"

"I'm getting angrier & angrier. To be polite, I keep my mouth shut, but my teeth are going grind, grind, grind!"

Should I put a comma before or after "however"?

Avoid saying "however." Change "however" to "but" ("But I like you!") or "no matter how" ("No matter how he complains, be firm!") or "any way" ("Do it any way you wish!").

Old-fashioned style guides say to never begin a sentence with "But" or "And" or "Or," but most modern sources permit them. "But" is better than "however" because "but" is shorter to write, read, and say. "However" makes you sound like an old pedantic asshole whom people would like to kick in the butt!

In a sentence, do you need a comma after "usually"?

Put a comma after "usually" just if "usually" is the sentence's first word.

But starting a sentence with "usually" is awkward. It's better to put "usually" before the verb. Instead of "Usually, I sing before dinner" it's better to say "I usually sing before dinner."

Exception: if you also want to emphasize what's *not* usual, go ahead and put "Usually" before the sentence. Example:

"Usually, I sing before dinner. But today I recited a poem instead."

Should I put a comma before "though" at the end of a sentence?

If a sentence ends with "though," put a comma before it. But instead of putting "though" at the sentence's end, better put "But" at the sentence's beginning.

This is acceptable:

"He's friendly. He's dishonest, though."

But this is better (because shorter and easier to understand):

"He's friendly. But he's dishonest."

Other alternatives:

"He's friendly, but he's dishonest."

"He's friendly but dishonest."

Is this sentence correct: "One day, all the people we have known, will disappear from our lives."

The second comma must be dropped. Since most people prefer brevity, use contractions and fewer words & syllables, like this: "Someday, everyone we've known will disappear from our lives."

When a sentence includes a list of words (ending in "and" or "or"), should I include an **Oxford comma** (a comma before the last "and" or "or")?

I recommend including an Oxford comma (which is also called the "serial comma" and described at Wikipedia.org/wiki/Serial_comma). I put an Oxford comma in all sentences I write.

For difficult lists of words, bind 2 nouns together by using hyphens or quotation marks or an ampersand:

You can have cereal, pancakes, or bacon-and-eggs.

You can have cereal, pancakes, or "bacon and eggs."

You can have cereal, pancakes, or bacon & eggs.

Another example: "I love Joan (my wife) and the kitten." Those parentheses are necessary to prove I love 2 things (Joan and the kitten), not 3 things (Joan and my wife and the kitten) and not 1 thing (Joan, who is my wife and is also the kitten).

When I was a magazine editor and used the Oxford comma, my boss (the magazine's publisher) was against it (because it takes up space, which costs money). He moaned to me that he'd appreciate my not arguing about "one lousy comma." So do whatever you want, as long as your boss doesn't sob and act like an S.O.B.

"Oxford comma" is mentioned in a great song, "Word Crimes" by Weird Al Yankovic at YouTube.com/watch?v=8Gv0H-vPoDc.

Does the Oxford comma apply to ampersands?

I use ampersands but never put a comma before an ampersand.

Here's when I use ampersands...

An ampersand is convenient to separate two simple adjectives. When writing a restaurant menu, "Sweet & sour chicken" is a useful alternative to "Sweet-and-sour chicken," though another possibility is "Sweet 'n sour chicken. Similarly, for other kinds of writing, it's convenient to write "warm & cuddly," "hot & heavy," "fat & ugly." Americans pronounce the "&" the same as 'n, which is pronounced "en" or "un" (or, more precisely, with a schwa sound before the "n").

Example: "I want to order soup, salad, and sweet & sour chicken." In that example, the Oxford comma is after salad (because I like the Oxford comma, which makes lists clearer), and I used the ampersand to bind "sweet" with "sour."

In the movie "The Wizard of Oz," the characters sing: "Lions and tigers and bears... Oh my!" That could also be written "Lions & tigers & bears... Oh my!"

Use ampersands between simple adjectives or simple nouns but *not* between longer phrases. Don't write "You're an asshole & I hate you!" Be traditional and write "You're an asshole, and I hate you!" Some writers, to emphasize a long pause after "asshole," write "You're an asshole. And I hate you!" or "You're an asshole — and I hate you!"

Newspapers & academicians dislike ampersands, but that's because newspapers & academicians are obsolescent assholes.

Does a period (or comma) go inside or outside of quotation marks?

Americans traditionally **put the period (or comma) before an ending quotation mark**, because Americans think that looks prettier than putting the period (or comma) later.

I try to follow that traditional rule. But in the Computer part of my book, I follow the rules of logic instead. If I'm teaching a programmer to type just the word "cat", I must put the comma *after* the quotation mark (like I just did), because otherwise the programmer will think I want the programmer to type the comma also.

How do you punctuate "No there isn't anyone like that she said"?

The best way to write the sentence is:

She said, "No, there isn't anyone like that."

This is acceptable but worse:

"No, there isn't anyone like that," she said.

The best way to write the sentence is usually to put the "She said" at the beginning, not the end. Here's why: if someone is speaking, I'd first like to know who the speaker is, before hearing a bunch of verbiage, especially if the speaker can be described briefly ("she") and the verbiage is long ("No, there isn't anyone like that").

If the speaker must be described lengthily, some newspapers identify the speaker last, like this:

"No," said Joshua N. Mfune, who lives at 22 Nut Street in Somerville and immigrated from Gambia 25 years ago.

Sometimes, identifying the speaker last helps prevent the speaker's name from interrupting the dialog. An example is the final sentence in this dialog:

She said, "I dislike you."

He whined, "But I love you!"

"Fuck off," she replied.

Is this comma correct: "It's 3 a.m., go to sleep"?

These are more realistic:

"It's 3AM! Go to sleep!"

"Oops! It's 3AM! I better get some shuteye."

"Where the fuck are you! It's 3AM and you're not here?"

"It's 3-fucking-o'clock in the morning! Get your ass to bed *now!*"

"3AM and I feel woozy. All that stuff was a real doozy. Guess I'd better get to bed, gently rest my dizzy head."

"My dear intellectual, I know you think it's smart to stay up until 3AM, but you got a lot to do tomorrow, so come to bed now, c'mon!"

"Wow! It's 3 o'clock already! Gee whiz, I better get to bed. But first, I'll have a beer or fudge. Okay, I'll be good: I'll have milk or tea instead. Then brush my teeth then shave. Then... omigod! Now it's 4 o'clock!"

“Darling, it’s 3AM. I know you enjoy reading stupid comments on Quora, but you should come to bed now and turn off the light, so you’ll have enough energy tomorrow to write *reasonable* replies on Quora — plus do all the other things you ignored. Honey, I love you, but you need to stop getting yourself Quarantined!”

Is it okay to say “You too, thank you” (instead of “Thank you, you too”)?

To say “You too, thank you,” use this punctuation:
“You too. Thank you!”

That emphasizes a pause after “too” and excitement about “Thank you!”

Exclamations Which is correct: “Hi Joe.” or “Hi Joe!”

Put an exclamation point after “Joe” and a comma before, like this: “Hi, Joe!”

Which is correct: “Hi! My friend.” or “Hi my friend!”?

The correct punctuation, is “Hi, my friend!” But Americans never say that phrase. When someone writes that in an email, I assume the rest of the email will be an ad from a foreigner trying to get my money, like this.

“Hi, my friend! Do you suffer from being too fat? Watch this video to see how our supplement will make you magically lose weight...” and make us magically rich by stealing your money.

Hyphens Should “reorganization” be hyphenated?

No hyphen.

Should “standby” be hyphenated?

“Standby” does *not* need a hyphen when it’s a noun, adjective, or adverb. If you want a verb, write 2 words, like this:
“I stand by you.”

Should I keep this hyphen: “in-person learning”?

Yes, keep the hyphen. That’s what we traditionalists do. But hyphens are becoming less popular in English. 50 years from now, people might say, “Hyphens? Who uses hyphens anymore?” A few years ago, the Oxford English Dictionary announced it was going to deemphasize hyphens.

Is the word “set-up” hyphenated?

In America, “setup” is a noun (“That’s a nice setup”). “Set up” is a verb phrase (“I set up the office”). We never write “set-up.”

Spaces Put how many spaces after a hyphen?

On a Windows keyboard, the hyphen key is between the zero key and the “=” key. Put no spaces before or after a hyphen.

A dash is wider than a hyphen. To type a dash in Microsoft Word on a Windows keyboard, do this: while holding down the Ctrl and Alt keys, tap the numeric keyboard’s minus key (which is near the keyboard’s top-right corner and above the + key). Put a space before and after the dash.

I’ve been describing the em dash (which is as wide as the letter M). I don’t recommend typing an en dash (which is as wide as just the letter N), but here’s how: follow the same procedure as for an em dash but omit the Alt key.

Is it good that Microsoft Word says a double space after a period is an error?

On June 24, 2020, The Wall Street Journal ran a front-page article about the fight between single-space people and double-space people. The article said most modern people put just one space after a period, but old-fashioned lawyers prefer two spaces because their legal documents have ridiculously long sentences, so a double-space after a sentence is a welcome sign of relief, a chance for the eye to pause before reading more boilerplate crap.

At the end of a sentence, newspapers put just one space, not two, because newspaper space is costly: every blank space costs the publisher money. If every sentence ends with a double-space, the newspaper needs an extra sheet of paper to hold the lengthened articles; distributing that extra sheet to many thousands or millions of subscribers is costly. “Brevity is the soul of wit.”

Parentheses What punctuation should separate a word from its definition?

To write a definition, I prefer boldface then parentheses, like this:

“**psichonostrilitis** (insane desire to blow nose).”
“the **IJF** (International Jerk Foundation)”
“the **International Jerk Foundation (IJF)**”

Highlighting If a sentence’s final words are highlighted, should I highlight the final punctuation mark too?

To highlight just *part* of a sentence (not the whole sentence), follow these rules.

If the final punctuation is a period, don’t highlight it:

I love **Sue**. (Period not highlighted.)

If the final punctuation is an exclamation point or question mark, highlight it:

I love **Sue!** (Exclamation point highlighted.)

You love **Sue?** (Question mark highlighted.)

If the final punctuation is a quotation mark (preceded by a period or question mark or exclamation point), highlight the quotation mark (and the punctuation preceding it) just if you’re highlighting the preceding quotation mark also (and all the words between the quotation marks).

He said, “Sue is a **thief**.” (Neither quotation mark highlighted.)

He said, “Sue is a **thief!**” (Neither quotation mark highlighted, but exclamation point highlighted.)

He asked, “Sue is a **thief?**” (Neither quotation mark highlighted, but question mark highlighted.)

He yelled, “**Sue is a thief.**” (Both quotation marks highlighted, and period highlighted because the quoted passage is a full sentence.)

Sentences extended Can you continue a sentence after a question mark?

Yes. Example:

“Are you nuts? or just crazy? or just joking?”

But it would be more traditional to capitalize:

“Are you nuts? Or just crazy? Or just joking?”

Or use commas:

“Are you nuts, or just crazy, or just joking?”

That’s the most traditional way. But the other ways, with the extra question marks and capitals, mean: when speaking the sentence, make longer pauses before each “or.” That’s essential when typing dialogue for a play.

A different example of continuing after a question mark:

“Maybe you’re an idiot? But I suppose you’re just ‘uninformed.’”

Can I write “Clothing is comfortable. Especially for your feet”?

The traditional answer is to use a comma: “Clothing is comfortable, especially for your feet.”

But modern writers often write “Clothing is comfortable. Especially for your feet.” That’s when they want to emphasize a *long* pause after “comfortable.” For *moderate* pause, use a dash, which is acceptable even by traditionalists: “Clothing is comfortable — especially for your feet.”

A more dramatic example:

“He’s the world’s most honest man — according to himself. But...”

A more traditional way to write that would be:

“He’s the world’s most honest man? So he says. But...”

Is “dot dot dot dot” grammatically correct?

3 periods in a row (...) is called an **ellipsis**. 4 periods in a row (....) is appropriate when you want to end a sentence with a period but also want an ellipsis. Examples:

“I love you forever and ever and ever... But take your toe out of my mouth.”

“The following 7 paragraphs show the many ways I love you....”

When I try to type a period followed by an ellipsis, Microsoft Word insists on putting the ellipsis before the period, but I prefer putting the period before the ellipsis. The difference is barely visible; but when you try to edit the sentence, you notice what Microsoft Word did.

Paragraphs

How should a paragraph look?

Beginning a paragraph Why isn’t the first paragraph indented?

Historically, newspapers & magazines tried to reduce blank spaces (to reduce the cost of paper, pages, and delivery), so they didn’t indent an article’s first paragraph. The other paragraph got indented, to show where each paragraph begins & ends.

Modern newspapers & magazines care less. The first few pages of *The Wall Street Journal* indent every paragraph, even an article’s first paragraph.

Text messages, emails, and the Web usually indent *no* paragraphs: instead, a blank line is under each paragraph. (The blank line is created by hitting the Enter key twice at the end of each paragraph.) That’s because it’s hard to figure out how to indent nicely there, and blank spaces don’t cost much.

Some classic publications, to create beauty, make the article's first paragraph's first letter be big and in a pretty box; that letter is *not* indented, but the next few letters are indented to make room for that box. On the Wall Street Journal's inside sections (Sports, Arts, Opinion, and Personal), each article's first paragraph begins with a big capital letter or picture of the reporter, with the rest of the paragraph moved aside.

Do whatever you want!

In my books, I indent every paragraph. In text messages & simple emails, I don't indent: I put blank lines between paragraphs. In email attachments (and letters, and memos), I indent just when using my own Microsoft Word template (which is biased to make indentation easy).

What words should start a paragraph?

If you begin a paragraph by writing "Don't read this paragraph," that'll make people curious and guarantee they'll read it!

Other possibilities:

"I hate to admit it, but..."

"You might disagree, but..."

"You won't believe this, but..."

"Only a fool would really believe...."

"Wow! Pow! The most amazing thought just hit me...."

"My teacher said she'll kill me because I wrote this paragraph...."

Why do people start a reply by saying "As a person of"?

If you ask about racial discrimination, a person might reply, "As a person of color, I think..."

That could mean "I'm a person of color, even though my skin is light enough so you might think I'm just a whitey with a tan. I don't know what you White assholes think, but here's what I think, because of how you guys treated me in the past."

Or it could mean something milder.

Length Can a long sentence count as a paragraph?

Oh, yes, yes!, yes indeedy!!!, a very long sentence can indeed, inDEED, count as a paragraph, not just a semiparagraph, not just a hemisemiwhammo piece of a paragraph, so help me God, yea, indeed my Lord, my wonderful Lord, a single magnificent paragraph can carry the whole universe away, as well as any idiot who tries to read the whole crap before vomiting into the ocean, the ocean!!!, the beautiful blue ocean, on which to sail into neverland, never to be read again, alas, alack, as we fall into the bottom of written Hell.

But seriously...

Even a short sentence can be a paragraph. But if you have several paragraphs in a row, and each paragraph is just one sentence, your composition looks choppy, disorganized. My personal advice: **make the average paragraph contain 3 sentences.** 2 or 4 are also okay. If a paragraph has just 1 sentence, the paragraphs before and after it should *not* be just 1 sentence.

Here's an example of when to use a 1-sentence paragraph after a longer one:

He hoped. He prayed. He wished so hard that God or *somebody* would hear his voice. But all was silence. So he did what was necessary.

He pulled the trigger.

Why did old books have more complex sentences? And when writing now, is condensation necessary?

Ah, my dear, it's certainly the undeniable truth that brevity is indeed a goal to be strongly sought, as herewith summarized:

Yes.

Wouldn't you rather read "Yes" than the blather above it, especially when you're in a rush?

Folks today are too busy to read much — or do anything else much. Our world is full of distractions now, such as cellphones. It's hard to find time to read a long book or even a long sentence.

Our society has been trained to be brief. The world is rushed. When TV started, TV restricted its presentations to under 15 minutes per chunk, so people could watch commercials, go to the bathroom, or grab a snack. TV expects most commercials be just 30 seconds, because the audience will switch channels (or go to the bathroom to vomit) if your commercial or show doesn't create desire fast. When Apple invented the Mac computer (later imitated by Windows), Apple made people look at pictures ("icons") instead of reading pull-down menus. YouTube began by restricted its videos to 10 minutes. Zoom wants groups to stop chatting in 40 minutes. Going beyond those limits causes complications.

At exhibitions, if you don't attract a person's attention in 7 seconds, the person walks past you to the next booth. Business executives prefer messages short enough to be an "elevator pitch": short enough to be said & finished in an elevator before the elevator reaches the desired floor.

Our world has gotten rushed and stupid — but more diverse.

Also, people travel more, from country to country, so we have more immigrants, whose ability to master long English sentences is limited. In past centuries, we borrowed more directly from German, which loved long subordinate clauses requiring lots of patience to get through; but now sentences are shorter.

We're all prisoners in this world. We prefer to be subjected to shorter sentences, so we can have the freedom to stop reading and just be jerks.

When I tell students how to write essays, I give this advice: imagine you've gone into an office where your boss is a big, fat pompous ass who sits at his desk, smokes a cigar, has his feet up on the desk, and tells you, "Okay, kid, I'll give you 5 minutes. What's your point?"

If you're writing for a newspaper or magazine but your article is too long (wastes too much paper), the editor will abridge it in a way you might not like, so abridge it the way *you* want!

One famous writer advised, "If you've got a nail to hit, hit it on the head." So don't mess around. Get to your point *fast*. The faster the better!

Bottom line: if you don't waste time, you get praised. Popular advice today is "KISS," which means "Keep It Simple, Stupid!"

Robert Frost mocked length. He wrote a long poem saying New Hampshire is beautiful. But then came his last sentence: "I live in Vermont."

When creating comedies, Woody Allen said his requirement is to create at least one laugh every 30 seconds. I apologize for taking longer.

Here's a different, practical reason to be brief: if your words, sentences, or paragraphs are too long, your readers can get confused, tired, sleepy, and dead before finishing them. To keep your readers alive, refreshed, and happy, give them zingers (jokes or exciting ideas) as fast as possible. If you help your readers "laugh or learn" fast, they'll thank you. That's the whole purpose of writing: to please the reader, or at least help the reader become a better person, so the reader (or God) will thank you.

Another suggestion: after writing, go have a cup of coffee or a good night's sleep, then peek at your writing again. Your refreshed eyes will notice many ways your writing could improve. If you're brave, invite your friends to look at what you wrote: they'll tell you scary truths about your writing, reveal truths you didn't notice. You don't have to obey all their suggestions, but you should at least think about them. That experience will eventually raise you from "smart" to "wise."

You're reading this answer after I paused and edited it. Some people think my Quora answers are full of shit; I appreciate their advice about how to defecate (get the shit out).

Improve this English: "What you are saying is neither true in theory nor in practice. That perception only exists in your brain."

Better: "What you're saying is true in neither theory nor practice. That perception exists just in your brain."

Here's why. To be briefer, use contractions ("you're" instead of "you are"). Instead of "only," say "just" (because it's a syllable shorter). Put the words "just" and "neither" as late in the sentence as possible, to clarify which few words they refer to (so say "exists just" instead of "just exists").

Even better (because it's even shorter & clearer): "What you say is false in theory & practice. Your perception exists just in your brain."

To improve further, you could change "perception" to "opinion" or "view," depending on what you're describing.

A more dramatic American (like me) would say instead, "You're nuts! What you said is bullshit, false in both theory & practice! Only a misguided jerk, like you, would believe & say such crap!"

Which is better: "Out of these 3 apples, which one would you eat?" or "Which one would you eat from the 3 apples?"

If the apples are near, ask "Which one of these 3 apples would you eat?"

If the apples are far, ask "Which one of those 3 apples would you eat?"

Pauses How should I indicate a pause (or new paragraph) in the middle of a character's speech? And where should I put quotation marks?

To insert a pause, you can use an ellipsis (three periods, "..."). Then put quotation marks around the whole speech.

That works if the speech is short. If the speech includes many paragraphs, an old-fashioned book does this: indent each paragraph (no spaces between paragraphs); *put an opening quotation mark at the beginning of each paragraph*; and put an ending quotation mark just at the end of the last paragraph. But having so many opening quotation marks and just one ending quotation mark looks awkward; I *hate* that!

Completing the thoughts

When writing books, what errors are often made?

Take a dollar bill out of your pocket. Try to put it on your book's page so the dollar bill covers nothing interesting: the dollar bill covers no boldface, no italic, no underline, no photo, no artwork. That part of your book is visually boring. Your book has failed the dollar-bill test.

The dollar-bill test is used by designers of newspapers (such as *The Wall Street Journal*) and magazines, to make sure every part of every page is visually interesting.

That test should be used for books too! To pass the dollar-bill test, make every part of your book be visually interesting: use some sort of eye-catching font or photo or headline. If you fail the dollar-bill test, your writing is too "gray." What's the most important word in the paragraph? Boldface it or do something else to attract attention. Then when someone browses through the book to decide whether to buy it, the attention-getter will pop out, and the potential customer will say, "Yeah, that's an interesting topic! Maybe I *will* buy the book!"

On average, how long do you take to write an essay?

Here's a short essay about your question:

"I wrote this answer real fast."

That's my essay. I wrote it in just a few seconds.

You were expecting a longer essay? That would take more time! To write an essay about everything wrong with the United States would take many years; and by the time it was finished, it would be already out of date.

Each time I try to write a new edition of my book, I do the best I can.

How do I avoid plagiarism about facts? Since I can't change facts, 2 or 3 words in my sentence will match some website.

Academic writing (such as for a term paper or thesis) has many restrictive rules. But when writing for a more general audience, here's practical advice.

If you're writing about a fact that's already written about in *many* places, don't worry about using the same words as many other people already used.

If you're writing about a fact that's reported in just a *few* places, acknowledge where you found it, such as by saying "According to..." or "For details, see..." or "As reported in..." If possible, reveal the Web address where you found it (or the newspaper's date and page), plus the author's name if given.

If you're reporting on a fact that's reported in just *one* place, or an opinion, be even more sure to acknowledge where you found it. If you're copying *several paragraphs*, be even more sure to acknowledge. If you're copying *many paragraphs in a row*, try to get permission to reprint, if possible.

Copying a *few paragraphs* is okay if acknowledged and not the whole article; that's called "fair use." If you're reporting just on crap that's all over the Internet and you can't easily find out who said it first, just say "According to the Internet."

That's my advice is for general writing. For academic writing instead, your professor probably requires footnotes.

Suppose my teacher asks, "Why didn't you bring your book?" Which should I say: "I forgot it when I prepared" or "I forgot to put it in my backpack while I prepared" or "I forgot it when I was getting ready for school"?

You could say just 2 words: "I forgot." To be slightly more polite, you could say 3 words: "I forgot. Sorry." That 3-word answer is what the average American kid would say.

You could be dramatic: "When I was getting ready to come to school, the dog was biting my leg, my mom was telling me to finish eating my breakfast or she'd kill me, the school bus was honking me to hurry the fuck up, and my dad was ready to punch me, so in the middle of all that confusion I forgot to put the book in my backpack. Sorry."

How do you finish "A headache is only as bad as _____."

"A headache is only as bad as you feel at the moment. It will probably go away. As my doctor said: take 2 jokes and call me in the morning."

How can I write about bravery during a time of disaster?

"I had trouble performing sex with my wife, so I bravely suggested she try my brother instead."

In my own books, here's what I do instead. Before the speech, I write an introductory short sentence that ends in a colon, such as

John said:

I put the speech below, without quotation marks but in a smaller font (8.5-point instead of 10-point) and in a box. (Microsoft Word lets you easily put a box around paragraphs.) Indent each paragraph, except: if the paragraphs are a list of thoughts instead of normal dialogue, begin each paragraph with a bullet (•) or, what I prefer, is to put a half-height blank line between the paragraphs.

Style

What's the easiest way to write academically?

The easiest way to write academically is to write something that sounds profound but no normal person would read or understand.

What's the most difficult issue in English style?

So hey, babe, like should I, y'know, answer yo' question real informal-like? Or, pritheee, should'st I endeavor, with utmost effort, to raise the level of our compassionate conversational interlude to the highest realm of ethereal joy? Or should I talk just briefly and to the point?

Or should I follow traditional rules and never begin a line with "Or"?

English keeps changing. Here are recent changes, not all of which I like.

English gets briefer: "e-mail" becomes just "email"; "a couple of things" becomes just "a couple things"; every "whom" becomes just "who"

English changes capitalization: "Internet" becomes just "internet"; but when discussing a person's skin color (or race), "black" becomes "Black," and "white" becomes "White."

Make this sentence more descriptive: "He slips on the wet dirt and falls on his rear."

"He tries to tiptoe but fails, careening off the devilishly super-slippery mud and tumbling onto his ass, which doesn't appreciate the encounter and shrieks out in pain."

Improve "He squeezes her hand in an assuring manner."

Tom Lehrer wrote a song about handholding. His lyrics are approximately these:

I hold your hand in mine, dear. I press it to my lips.

I take a gentle bite from your dainty fingertips.

My joy would be complete, dear, if you were only here;

But still I keep your hand, as a precious souvenir.

I cried the night I cut it off. I really don't know why.

Now every time I kiss it, I get bloodstains on my tie.

I'm sorry now I left you, for our love was something fine.

Until they come and get me, I will hold your hand in mine.

Digits I was taught to always spell out single-digit numbers when writing, but I've noticed even reputable sources have stopped doing that. When did the rules change? Should I write "until 2 months" or "until two months"?

Style manuals say the numbers from 1 to 10 should be spelled out, and so should any number that begins a sentence. But I disagree. Since I'm a mathematician, I like digits more than words, so **for most numbers I write digits**. I dislike reading a sentence that includes both "eight" and "120," because that inhibits me from easily comparing those two numbers; I'd write "8" for consistency and simpler comparison.

Digits have another advantage over words: digits are briefer to type (so they consume less time to type & read and waste less paper).

When skim-reading an article to find specific data, it's helpful to look for digits, since I can find them faster than words.

The world is moving toward digits because the world is moving toward using computers & cellphones more. Those devices are oriented toward digits and encourage us to use digits more often in our lives. Digits are common in text messages, such as "we long 4U" and "love U 4ever" and "U are gr8!"

Here are exceptions. I write "one" when the sentence mentions no other numbers (such as "You're the one for me"). I often write "zero" instead of "0" (which looks too much like the letter "O"). I spell out a number when I want to indicate the number should *not* be compared with sentence's other numbers (which is why I wrote "two numbers" instead of "2 numbers" in the first paragraph).

Avoid beginning a sentence with digits. Rearrange that sentence to put the digits later. That's because a sentence should begin with a capital letter, and because digits look strange after the previous sentence's period, which looks too much like a decimal point.

How do you write an informal letter to dad telling him about the misunderstandings between you and your brother and you decided to leave his house?

Hey, Dad!

Sorry I murdered my bro because he said I was gay. I left the crime scene and got a free ride to jail, but look at the bright side: you still got one son alive!

How to write a speech about English's importance?

If you're a Democrat, say "English is the world's most important language because it's spoken by the world's biggest asshole, Donald Trump." Republicans disagree.

English dialects

In different cities, people speak English with different dialects. In 2003, Bert Vaux (at Harvard University) asked 30,788 Americans, in all 50 states, about their dialects.

Here's the percentage of Americans using various words:

Roads

roads meeting in a circle	39% traffic circle, 24% roundabout, 13% rotary, 9% circle
big road for fast driving, general term	57% highway, 12% freeway, 5% expressway
small road parallel to the highway	30% service road, 29% frontage road, 18% access road
diagonally across at intersection	50% kitty-corner, 30% catty-corner

Food

long sandwich containing cold cuts	77% sub, 7% hoagie, 5% hero, 3% grinder
end of a bread loaf	59% heel, 17% end, 15% crust, 4% butt

Drinks

sweetened carbonated drink, generic term	53% soda, 25% pop, 12% coke, 6% soft drink
thing to drink water from in school	61% water fountain, 33% drinking fountain, 4% bubbler

Animals

flying insect whose rear glows in the dark	30% firefly, 29% lightning bug
insect that skitters across the top of water	46% water bug, 14% water strider, 6% water spider, 4% skimmer
miniature lobster in lakes & streams	39% crawfish, 32% crayfish, 19% crawdad

Shopping

wheeled grocery-carrier in supermarket	77% shopping cart, 14% grocery cart, 4% buggy
paper container to carry groceries home	90% bag, 8% sack
food bought at restaurant to eat at home	71% take-out, 6% carry-out

Home

where you throw unwanted things	36% trash can, 27% garbage can
sale of unwanted items from your home	52% garage sale, 36% yard sale, 4% tag sale, 3% rummage sale
what you called your mother's mother	51% grandma, 6% nana, 5% grandmother
big clumps of dust under furniture	72% dust bunnies, 21% dust balls
shorten the lawn's grass	67% mow the lawn, 18% cut the grass, 6% mow the grass
covering a house's front with toilet paper	58% TP'ing, 21% toilet papering, 7% rolling, 4% papering

Body

when you're cold, points of skin on arms	90% goose bumps, 7% goose pimples
when walking, feet point outwards	29% duck-footed, 26% bowlegged, 5% splay-footed, 3% toed out
what women use for tying their hair	32% rubber band, 19% hair tie, 15% hair thing, 12% elastic
rubber-soled shoes in gym, general term	46% sneakers, 41% tennis shoes, 6% gym shoes

School

easy course	37% blow-off, 15% gut, 5% crip course
what you do with finished homework	76% hand in homework, 3% pass in homework

Other

address a group of people	43% you guys, 25% you, 14% y'all, 13% you all
rain falling while the sun shines	34% a sun shower, 6% the devil is beating his wife

Each total is less than 100% because, for each question, some Americans use different words instead or make fine distinctions about which words to use when.

Which of those dialects do *you* use? How about your friends?

Here's how Americans pronounced words:

Word

coupon	67% coo pon, 31% cyoo pon
crayon	49% cray ahn, 35% cray awn, 14% cran
mayonnaise	46% may uh naze, 42% man aze
almond	60% all mond, 19% ah mond
et cetera	65% et set er a, 15% ek set er a, 12% et set ra
realtor	44% reel ter, 32% reel uh ter, 20% ree ul ter
really	53% ree ly, 26% ril ly
syrupe	50% sir up, 34% sih rup, 13% sear up

"z" versus "s"

"z" in "citizen"	69% z, 30% s
"s" in "chromosome"	43% z, 36% s
"sp" in "thespian"	79% sp, 9% zh

"s" versus "sh"

"s" in "nursery"	88% s, 11% sh
"c" in "grocery"	52% s, 45% sh

Drop consonant

"sk" in "asterisk"	61% sk, 29% k
"qu" in "quarter"	62% kw, 30% k
"nd" in "candidate"	50% nd, 24% n

Vowel

"ou" in "route"	30% oo (as in "hoot") 20% ou (as in "out")
-----------------	---

"au" in "aunt"	75% a (as in "ant") 10% ah
----------------	-------------------------------

2 nd "a" in "pajamas"	52% a (as in "father") 46% a (as in "jam")
----------------------------------	---

"ie" in "handkerchief"	78% i (as in "sit") 20% ee (as in "see")
------------------------	---

"ee" in "been"	65% i (as in "sit") 29% e (as in "set")
----------------	--

"o" in "Florida"	73% o (as in "sore") 11% ah
------------------	--------------------------------

Emphasis (on which syllable?)

"cream cheese"	56% CREAM cheese 25% cream CHEESE
----------------	--------------------------------------

"pecan"	29% pee KAHN 21% pick AHN 17% PEE can 13% PEE kahn
---------	---

Each total is less than 100% because, for each question, some Americans use different pronunciations instead or make fine distinctions about which pronunciations to use when.

How do *you* pronounce those words? How about your friends?

This Website shows the rest of the 544 questions, with statistics and maps of which dialects are used where:

<http://dialectsurvey.wordpress.com>

Josh Katz & Wilson Andrews made an updated version, using data from 350,000 people in 2013, for the New York Times at:

[NyTimes.com/interactive/2013/12/20/sunday-review/dialect-quiz-map.html](http://nytimes.com/interactive/2013/12/20/sunday-review/dialect-quiz-map.html)

Try it! It asks you 25 of the 544 questions about how you speak. Then it guesses where in the USA you're from.

More comments about accents, with video samples, are at:

<http://mightymarkup.wordpress.com/2014/01/01/in-the-news-american-dialects>

Southern accents

The "South" is the home of the "sweet mouth." People there speak so charmingly!

My Alabamian roommate, James, says you can tell a true Southerner from a fake by noticing how the person uses the expression "y'all."

A true Southerner says "y'all" only when talking to a group, not to an individual. If you watch a TV movie that's supposed to take place in the South but one of the actors says "y'all" to another actor, you know that the actors and scriptwriter are all damn Yankees.

A naughty TV show, "Candid Camera," photographed Southerners trying to explain the difference between how they said "all" and "oil." The Southerners thought they were pronouncing the words differently from each other, but Yankee ears couldn't hear any difference and thought the Southerners were making fools of themselves.

Texas

The Southern part of the U.S. blooms with many strange accents — and they all converge in Dallas.

One girl in Dallas told me that she "sang behind the pasture." I wondered why she sang to the cows, until I realized she meant she sang behind the pastor, in church.

When I attended a math class in a Dallas junior-high school, one of the girls talked about "ot," and all her classmates understood her — except me. Later, I found out what "ot" was: the number that came after 7.

If 20 people gather in a room, how can you spot the Texans? A friend told me to spot them by asking everybody in the room to say "Osborne." The only people he ever met who say pronounce it "Osburn" instead of "Ozborn" are from Texas.

Here's how to translate to Texan:

English	Texan
Can I help you?	Kin ah hep you?
Would you like some chicken?	Kin ah hep you to some chicken?
Can I drive you home?	Kin ah carry you home?
Come again!	Y'all come back now, heah?
I live in rural Texas.	Ah live in rule Texiz.
I'm in the oil business.	Ah'm in the awl bidness.
I need some cash.	Ah need some cash money.
I want to chat with you on the phone.	Ah need ta visit with you on the phone.
That makes no difference.	That makes no nevermind, anyhow anyway.
Maybe I could do that.	Ah might could do that.
I swear.	Ah swan.
I swear I'll do it.	Ah'll do it, ah swan!
Amazing! He killed it!	Ah swan, he killed it!
We had a drought.	We had a drouth.
The milk's gone bad.	The milk's gone blinky.
I knocked over a bucket of fresh milk.	Ah tumped over sweet milk.
I threw rocks at the squirrels.	Ah chunked rocks at the squirrels.
Let's fight over the wishbone.	Let's fight over the pulley-bone.
He's my father.	He's mah fatha.
She told him her complaints.	She told him right off how it was.
She divorced him.	She gave him the gate.
They got divorced.	They split the sheets.

You can find more Texan translations in *How to Talk "Texian"* (Robert Reinhold's article in The New York Times on July 22, 1984, section 6, pages 8-10).

Kentucky

When Toyota built a car factory in Kentucky, Toyota's Japanese employees took a course in how to speak Kentuckian, which resembles Texan. They were taught that in Kentuckian, "can" is pronounced *kin*:

Ordinary English:	Yes, I can do it.
Kentuckian pronunciation:	Yes, ah kin do it.

More confusingly, in Kentuckian the word "can't" is pronounced *can* (since the *a* is held a long time, in a drawl, and the *t* is pronounced too quickly and too softly to hear):

Ordinary English:	No, I can't do it.
Kentuckian pronunciation:	No, ah can do it.

So if a Kentuckian says *can*, the Kentuckian means "can't."

The Japanese learned this important lesson: when a Kentuckian says he "*can*" do a job, the Kentuckian isn't lying, just drawing.

Brooklyn

In Brooklyn, old Jewish residents speak English with an accent:

Instead of saying "the," Brooklynites say "duh."
Instead of saying "girl," Brooklynites say "goil."

The most famous example of Brooklyn accent is this poem:

I have a goil named Goity. She really is a boid! She lives on toity-second, Right next to toity-toid!
--

In that poem, "goil" means "girl," "Goity" means "Gertie," "boid" means "bird," "toity" means "thirty," and "toid" means "third," so the girl lives on 32nd Street.

Boston

Instead of saying "turn left," Bostonians say "bang a left." Instead of saying "U-turn," Bostonians say "U-ey" (pronounced "yoo-ee").

So instead of saying "make a U-turn," Bostonians say "bang a U-ey."

England

British English differs from American. Great Britain and the United States are often called "2 nations divided by a common language."

Pronunciation Even when Americans spell the same as British, pronunciation can differ.

In the word “schedule,” the first syllable is pronounced “sked” by Americans, “shed” by the British.

In the word “adult,” Americans say the second syllable loudest (“a DULT”), while the British say the first syllable loudest (“AD ult”).

In the word “protester,” Americans say the first syllable loudest (“PRO test er”), while the British say the second syllable loudest (“pro TEST er”).

In the word “advertisement,” Americans say the first syllable loudest and pronounce the third syllable like the word “ties” (“AD ver ties ment”), while the British say the second syllable loudest and pronounce the third syllable like the word “is” (“ad VERT is ment”).

In the word “methane,” Americans pronounce “me” like the “me” in “met” & “meth” (“METH ane”), while the British pronounce “me” like the word “me” (“ME thane”).

In the word “patent,” Americans pronounce the first syllable like the word “pat” (“PAT tent”), while the British pronounce the first syllable like the word “pay” (“PAY tent”).

To see & hear more ways Americans pronounce differently from the British, view this lesson (which teaches people in Singapore how to speak both dialects):

angmohdan.com/22-words-with-british-and-american-pronunciations-that-may-confuse-you

Literal English A pair of British TV comedians, called “The 2 Ronnies,” said that if you can pronounce the letters of the alphabet and the numbers from 1 to 10, you can imitate a lot of British English by just saying letters and numbers. Examples:

British	sounds somewhat like these letters
pity	PT
city	CT
titty	TT

Here’s a whole conversation in a restaurant (using a slightly Swedish accent and remembering that Z is pronounced “zed” in British):

Hello.	LO
Are you busy?	RUBC
Yes, we are busy.	SVRBC
Have you any eggs?	FUNEX
Yes, we have eggs.	SVFX
Have you any ham?	FUNEM
We haven’t any ham.	VFN 10 EM
Hey! We <i>have</i> ham!	AVFM
Ah!	R
Oh!	O
See the ham!	CDM
Oh, yes. We have ham.	OSVFM
Okay, ham and eggs!	OKMNX
Have you any tea?	FUNET
One tea?	1 T
One tea!	1 T
Okay, ham, eggs, and tea.	OKMXNT
Ham, eggs, and tea for one!	MXNT 4 1
We haven’t any eggs!	VFN 10 EX
You said you have eggs!	UZUFX
Why haven’t you any eggs?	YFNUNEX
I have eaten them.	IFE 10 M

Watch the whole conversation on YouTube at:

YouTube.com/watch?v=cc3M1nppd3c

Australia

Here’s how to translate American to Australian.

	American	Australian	
Food	French fries	hot chips	(same as British)
	cookie	biscuit	(same as British)
	bell pepper	capsicum	
Travel	gasoline	petrol	(same as British)
	sidewalk	footpath	
Clothing	flipflops	thongs	
	rainboots	gumboots	
	swimsuit	swimmers	(Melbourne “togs”, Sydney “cozzie”)
Other	hair bangs	hair fringe	(same as British)
	liquor store	bottle-o	

At the end of words, Australians like to put “y” (or “ie” or the plural, “ies”). For example, Australians in 2002 invented the slang word “selfie” (a picture of yourself, taken on a smartphone), which Americans have copied.

Here are other examples of Australian slang, which maybe Americans should copy also?

Traditional English	Australian slang
Australian	“Aussie” (pronounced “Ozzie”)
Australia	“the Lucky Country”
the barbecue	“the barbie”
breakfast	“brekkie”
vegetables	“vedgies”
mushrooms	“mushies”
chocolate	“chokkie”
sweets, such as lollipops	“lollies”
chewing gum	“chewie”
cigarette that you roll yourself	“rollie”
chicken parmesan	Melbourne: “parma” Sydney & Adelaide: “parmy”
beer	“coldie”
short beer bottle (375 ml)	“stubby”
tall beer bottle (750 ml)	“tallie”
beer can (or aluminum boat)	“tinny”
lipstick	“lippy”
sunglasses	“sunnies”
track suit	“trackies”
underwear	“grundies”
costume for swimming	“cozzie”
hot-water bottle	“hottie”
truck driver	“truckie”
brick layer	“brickie”
carpenter	“chippie”
electrician	“sparky”
tradesman	“tradie”
postman	“postie”
firefighters	“firies”
politician	“polly”
environmentalist	“greenie”
successful people	“tall poppies”
person living in the Bush	“bushie”
people who surf, not work	“surfies”
barely clothed bar staff	“skimpy”
nude	“in the nuddy”
have sex	“have a naughty”
behaving too manly	“blokey”
feeling maternal, like a hen	“clucky”
a present	“a prezzy”
instant lottery ticket	“scratchy”
Christmas	“Chrissie”
St. Vincent thrift store or hostel	“Vinnie’s”

very	“bloody”
expensive	“exy”
something big	“doozey”
biscuit	“bikkie”
it was expensive	“it cost big bikkies”
take a day off because sick	“throw a sickie”
take a day off, pretending sick	“chuck a sickie”
make a U-turn when driving	“chuck a yewy”
football (soccer or rugby)	“footy”
position (seat in a stadium)	“pozyy”
my parents	“my oldies”
a family relative	“a rellie”
kindergarten	“kindie”
university	“uni”
biting insects	“bities”
mosquito	“mossie”
cockroach, cockatoo, or farmer	“cockie”
in a bad mood	“cranky”
get very upset	“spit the dummy”
go mad	“throw a wobbly”

Pilots

When airplane pilots communicate with ground crews and want to say something such as “flight B9,” they don’t pronounce it as “flight bee nine.” That’s because “bee” sounds too much like “dee” (if the radio transmission is poor), and “nine” sounds too much like the German word “nein” (which means “no”). So when pronouncing the alphabet or digits, pilots say other things instead. Instead of saying “bee,” they say “bravo”; instead of saying “nine,” they say “nine-er.” So “B9” is pronounced “bravo nine-er.”

Saying “bravo” instead of “bee” became popular in 1951. Before 1951, pilots said “Brussels” or “Baltimore” or “baker” or “beta” instead. Here’s how the code developed:

	<u>1920</u>	<u>1927</u>	<u>1932</u>	<u>1943</u>	<u>1949</u>	<u>1951</u>	<u>1956</u>
A	Argentina	Amsterdam	Amsterdam	Able	Alpha	Alpha	Alpha
B	Brussels	Baltimore	Baltimore	Baker	Beta	Bravo	Bravo
C	Canada	Canada	Casablanca	Charlie	Coca	Coca	Charlie
D	Damascus	Denmark	Denmark	Dog	Delta	Delta	Delta
E	Ecuador	Eddystone	Edison	Easy	Echo	Echo	Echo
F	France	Francisco	Florida	Fox	Foxtrot	Foxtrot	Foxtrot
G	Greece	Gibraltar	Gallipoli	George	Golf	Gold	Golf
H	Hanover	Hanover	Havana	How	Hotel	Hotel	Hotel
I	Italy	Italy	Italia	Item	India	India	India
J	Japan	Jerusalem	Jerusalem	Jig	Julietta	Juliet	Juliet
K	Khartoum	Kimberley	Kilogram	King	Kilo	Kilo	Kilo
L	Lima	Liverpool	Liverpool	Love	Lima	Lima	Lima
M	Madrid	Madagascar	Madagascar	Mike	Metro	Metro	Mike
N	Nancy	Neufchatel	New York	Nan	Nectar	Nectar	November
O	Ostend	Ontario	Oslo	Oboe	Oscar	Oscar	Oscar
P	Paris	Portugal	Paris	Peter	Polka	Papa	Papa
Q	Quebec	Quebec	Quebec	Queen	Quebec	Quebec	Quebec
R	Rome	Rivoli	Roma	Roger	Romeo	Romeo	Romeo
S	Sardinia	Santiago	Santiago	Sugar	Sierra	Sierra	Sierra
T	Tokyo	Tokyo	Tripoli	Tare	Tango	Tango	Tango
U	Uruguay	Uruguay	Upsala	Uncle	Union	Union	Uniform
V	Victoria	Victoria	Valencia	Victor	Victor	Victor	Victor
W	Washington	Washington	Washington	William	Whisky	Whisky	Whisky
X	Xaintrie	Xanthippe	Xanthippe	X-ray	X-ray	eXtra	X-ray
Y	Yokohama	Yokohama	Yokohama	Yoke	Yankee	Yankee	Yankee
Z	Zanzibar	Zululand	Zurich	Zebra	Zebra	Zulu	Zulu

The 1956 code is still used now.

Official instruction manuals write “Alfa” instead of “Alpha” to remind foreign pilots to pronounce an “f” sound, not a “p” sound.

Official instruction manuals write “Juliett” instead of “Juliet” to remind French pilots to pronounce the “t”.

That whole thing is called the **NATO phonetic alphabet**. More details about it are at:

wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_phonetic_alphabet

Languages compared

Here’s a famous saying:

What do you call somebody who speaks many languages? “Multilingual”
 What do you call somebody who speaks two languages? “Bilingual”
 What do you call somebody who speaks just one language? “American”

Don’t be just an American!

Back in the 1500’s, the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire was Charles V. He was truly international: he grew up in France (and Belgium), but his mother was Spanish, his father was German, and when he became emperor his territory included Italy. Here’s how he explained the difference between French, Spanish, German, and Italian:

I speak Spanish to God, Italian to women, French to men, and German to my horse.

The world’s 16 most popular languages are:

Language	Native speakers	Secondary speakers	Total
English	378 million	744 million	1.12 billion
Chinese	909 million	198 million	1.1 billion
Hindi	329 million	368 million	697 million
Spanish	442 million	71 million	513 million
Arabic	290 million	132 million	422 million
French	77 million	208 million	285 million
Malay	77 million	204 million	281 million
Russian	154 million	110 million	264 million
Bengali	243 million	19 million	262 million
Portuguese	223 million	14 million	237 million
Punjabi	148 million	0 million	148 million
German	76 million	56 million	132 million
Japanese	128 million	0 million	128 million
Persian	60 million	50 million	110 million
Swahili	16 million	82 million	98 million
Javanese	84 million	0 million	84 million

The following chart compares those 16 languages plus 34 other languages that interest Americans, so you get 50 languages altogether. The chart shows how they all express 25 ideas:

Here are comments about each of those languages....

Germanic languages (based on German)

English is the main language in England and its former colonies (Ireland, United States & Canada, and Australia & New Zealand). English resembles Dutch but borrows many words from French.

Dutch is the main language in the Netherlands (which includes Holland), Belgium, and Suriname (which is in South America). It's often called a "compromise" between English (whose grammar is simple) and German (whose grammar is hard). The U.S. State Department says its employees learn Dutch faster than any other foreign language. **Afrikaans** is South Africa's version of Dutch.

German is the main language in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein (which is between Austria & Switzerland). German capitalizes all nouns (but not pronouns). German changes "ss" to the symbol "ß" (but not after a vowel sound that's short, and not in Switzerland & Liechtenstein). German grammar is difficult. **Luxembourgish** is Luxembourg's version of German. **Yiddish** (which means Jewish German) was popular among Jews in Germany until they got killed in the Holocaust, but comic Yiddish phrases are still used by Germanic Jews in New York City.

Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, and Icelandic resemble each other and are all called Nordic languages, though Icelandic is a bit odd.

Romance languages (based on Latin)

Spanish is the main language in Spain, Central America, Puerto Rico, and the biggest Caribbean countries (Cuba & the Dominican Republic). It's also the main language in half of South America, but not in Brazil (Portuguese) and these 3 tiny neighbors on the north coast: Suriname (Dutch), Guyana (English), and French Guiana (French).

Portuguese is the main language in Portugal & Brazil.

Catalan is popular in Spain's northeast corner (which is called Catalonia), and it's the main language in Andorra (the tiny country between Catalonia & France). The language Catalan resembles most closely is Italian.

Italian is the main language in Italy and 2 countries hiding inside Italy (San Marino & Vatican City). It's also the international language for music notation.

French is the main language in France and Monaco (which is next to France). It's also the main language in parts of Canada, Belgium, and Switzerland. It's the international language for cooking methods. **Haitian Creole** is Haiti's version of French.

Romanian (which is also called Moldovan) is the main language in Romania & Moldova. It's very similar to **Latin**, which was the language of the Roman empire. Romanian & Latin have difficult grammar. Latin is the international language for biology & medicine. **Esperanto** was invented in 1887 by a Polish eye doctor, as an attempt to create a reasonable international language to replace Latin.

Slavic languages (near Slovakia)

Russian & Ukrainian are East Slavic languages, written by using the Cyrillic alphabet (a modified Greek alphabet created in the 9th century by 2 monks).

Czech is spoken in the Czech Republic, **Slovak** in Slovakia. Those 2 countries used to be a combo country called Czechoslovakia, but the combo split apart in 1993.

Croatian is spoken in Croatia, **Serbian** in Serbia. Those 2 countries used to be part of a combo country called Yugoslavia, but the combo split apart in 1992, now forming 7 countries: Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo, Slovenia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Polish is spoken in Poland, **Bulgarian** in Bulgaria.

Baltic languages (near the Baltic sea)

Lithuanian is spoken in Lithuania, **Latvian** in Latvia.

Uralic languages (near the Ural mountains)

Estonian & Finnish resemble each other. In the 17th century, linguists noticed that **Hungarian** was a bit similar, so apparently all 3 languages arose from the same tribe.

Southern languages (south of most Europeans)

Arabic is spoken in many countries near Saudi Arabia (and the Mediterranean Sea's south & east coasts).

Hebrew is spoken in Israel and by Jews elsewhere, though there are 3 pronunciations:

"Ashkenazi" pronunciation is popular in northern Europe and New York City.
"Sephardi" pronunciation is popular in Spain and Africa.
"Modern" pronunciation is a compromise spoken in Israel.

Swahili (which is also called Kiswahili) is spoken in southeastern Africa, **Greek** in Greece, **Turkish** in Turkey.

Iranian languages (based in Iran)

Persian is the main language in Iran (where it's called Farsi) & Afghanistan (whose dialect is called Darsi). Both countries were part of the ancient Persian empire.

Kurdish is spoken by Kurds, who live in northwest Iran (and nearby parts of Iraq, Syria, and Turkey).

Indic languages (based in India)

Hindi is the main language in India. It's especially popular in India's north.

Bengali (which is also called Bangla) is the main language in Bangladesh (which is east of India and called East Pakistan until 1971). **Punjabi** is the main language in modern Pakistan (which is west of India and called West Pakistan until 1971). **Marathi** is the main language in Maharashtra (a state in India's southwest).

Austronesian languages (near Australia)

Malay is spoken in Malaysia, **Javanese** in Java (an island in Indonesia), **Filipino** in the Philippines (and is a modernized version of Tagalog).

East Asian languages (near China)

Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Vietnamese are spoken in their own countries and Asian-American restaurants! The U.S. State Department says Japanese is the hardest major foreign language for its employees to master, because Japanese borrows little from English and requires a knowledge of several different writing systems.

How many weeks?

If an American's native language is English, how many weeks must that person study, to communicate in a foreign language "reasonably well"?

Here's the answer from the U.S. State Department's **Foreign Service Institute (FSI)**, which gives government employees 25 hours per week of classroom study (plus homework).

Category 1A (requires just 24 weeks) These languages are the easiest for Americans to master, because their grammar is simple and their vocabulary resembles English. The easiest language in this category is **Dutch** (which is simplified German). Also in this category are Afrikaans (which is South Africa's variant of Dutch), **most Scandinavian languages** (Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish, which are derived from German), and **most Romance languages** (Romanian, Italian, Spanish, and Portuguese, which are derived from the Roman's Latin).

Category 1B (requires 30 weeks) The only language in this category is **French**. It's a Romance language but has weird spelling and pronunciation.

Category 2 (requires 36 weeks) The main language in this category is **German**. Its vocabulary resembles English, but it's harder than Dutch because it has weird grammar: it makes you conjugate verbs but also nouns and adjectives, using 3 sexes (male, female, and neuter). Other languages in this category are Haitian Creole (which is a variant of French), Indonesian, Swahili, and Malay.

Category 3 (requires 44 weeks) The most famous language in this category is **Russian**. Other famous languages in this category are Greek & Turkish, Icelandic & Finnish, Polish & Hungarian, Vietnamese & Thai, Hebrew & Hindi. This category includes many other languages: **it includes most of the world's languages!**

Category 4 (requires 88 weeks) These languages are the hardest for Americans to learn, because their vocabulary is the most different from English and they don't use the English alphabet. The most famous language in this category is **Chinese** (Mandarin & Cantonese). This category also includes **Japanese & Korean**, which were both derived from Chinese. Japanese is the hardest, because it uses 3 different sets of non-English characters. This category also includes **Arabic**.

Olly Richards

Olly Richards is a guy who says: if your native language is English, these 5 languages (plus maybe Spanish) are the easiest to learn how to chat impressively in:

easiest is Norwegian, then come Dutch, Indonesian, Italian, and Afrikaans

(All those languages are in FSI's category 1A, except Indonesian, which is FSI's category 2). His video about them is at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=jXfj5BKdZCA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jXfj5BKdZCA)

German

The Germans view the world differently from Americans.

Cockroaches

Germans have a different view of cockroaches. The German word for "cockroach" is **Küchenschabe**, which means "kitchen scraper." Whenever a German woman looks at a cockroach, she considers the cockroach to be a cute little robot that sweeps her kitchen. She doesn't scream; instead, she says "Thank you!"

Mark Twain hated German

German grammar and literary style seem weird — especially to Americans such as Mark Twain. In 1880, Mark Twain critiqued German grammar in "The Awful German Language," included in his essay collection called *A Tramp Abroad*.

German's most amazing feature is the order in which Germans put their words.

Instead of saying "when you eat tuna," Germans say, "when you tuna eat" — because Germans put the verb ("eat") at the *end* of the clause, whenever you have a **subordinate clause** (a clause that begins with a word such as "when" or "if").

Germans love to invent long adjectives. Instead of saying "the man who loves dogs," Germans say "the dog-loving man."

Germans carry those two rules to an extreme.

Germans move the verb to the subordinate clause's end, even if the clause is long. Germans create adjectives long enough to contain most of the sentence!

Mark Twain found a German newspaper's article whose words were in this order:

In the day-before-yesterday-shortly-after-eleven-o'clock night, the in-this-town-standing tavern called "The Wagoner" was down-burnt. When the fire to the on-the-downburninghouse-resting stork's nest reached, flew the parent storks away. But when the by-the-raging-fire-surrounded nest *itself* caught fire, straightway plunged the quick-returning mother stork into the flames and died, her wings over her young ones outspread.

Spanish

Spanish is one of the world's most popular languages.

Pronunciation

Of all the world's popular languages, Spanish is the easiest to pronounce. Spanish's rules of pronunciation are simple — if you ignore the exceptions!

Here are the rules and their exceptions....

Vowels Spanish has just 5 vowel sounds:

a is pronounced like the "a" in "mama" or "father" or "ah!"
e is pronounced like the "é" in "café"
i is pronounced like the "i" in "machine" or "police" (or the "ee" in "see")
o is pronounced like the "o" in "go" or "no" or "oh!"
u is pronounced like the "u" in "rule" or "flute" (or the "oo" in "moo")

Exception:

After "q" or "g", **u** is silent, unless it has two dots over it (**ü**), in which case it's pronounced like the English "w."

To practice those vowel sounds and exceptions, say these Spanish words, which you probably know already:

taco, burrito, mosquito, no, la, salsa, olé, padre, madre, mesa, tequila, Santa Fe

When **y** is at a word's end, it's pronounced the same as **i**.

Consonants Spanish pronounces these consonants about the same way as in English: **b, d, f, k, l, m, n, p, s, t, w**, and **y**.

To sound truly Hispanic (instead of having an English accent), use these tricks:

When saying **l**, make your tongue touch your mouth's roof just near your teeth (like the "l" in "leaf" or "leak"), not farther back.

When saying **k** or **p** or **t**, don't put a puff of air afterwards. When saying the **t**, say it softly and make your tongue touch the teeth (instead of your mouth's roof).

Say **b** lazily (without quite closing your lips) if **b** comes immediately after a vowel sound (even if the vowel is at the end of the previous word). The lazy **b** sounds roughly like the English "v."

When saying **d**, make your tongue touch your teeth (instead of your mouth's roof). When you see **d** immediately after a vowel sound (even if the vowel's at the end of the previous word), make the **d** sound like the "th" in "then," softly (so you can barely hear it).

When you see **m** at a word's end, say "n" instead of "m."

When **n** comes before p, b, f, v, or m, say "m" instead of "n". When **n** comes before g, j, k, or w, say the "ng" in "sing."

Some regions speak differently:

In northern and central Spain, **s** is pronounced like the "th" in "thin."

In the Caribbean, when **s** comes before another consonant, people are too lazy to say the **s**: the **s** is silent or pronounced as an "h."

In the River Plate area (which is on the Argentina-Uruguay border), **y** is pronounced like the "sh" in "she" or the "s" in "vision."

The symbol **ñ** is pronounced like the "ny" in "canyon".

These Spanish sounds are the same as others:

Pronounce **z** the same as the Spanish **s**.

Pronounce **v** the same as the Spanish **b**.

Pronounce the pair **ll** the same as the Spanish **y**.

Pronounce **c** the same as the Spanish **k** usually; but before e or i, pronounce **c** the same as the Spanish **s**. So pronounce **cc** (which comes before e or i) the same as a Spanish **k** followed by a Spanish **s**.

Here's how to pronounce the other letters:

Don't pronounce **h**: it's silent! So when you see an **h**, ignore it. Don't even pause! Exception: pronounce **ch** like the "ch" in "cheese."

Pronounce **j** like the "h" in "hot." Exception: in northern Spain, it's pronounced by gargling (like the Scottish "ch" in "loch" or the German "ch" in "ich" and "Bach"). To practice j, say these Spanish words, which you probably know already: **jalapeño**, **Jose**.

Pronounce **g** like the "g" in "go" usually; but before e or i, pronounce **g** the same as the Spanish **j**.

Usually pronounce **r** as between "t" and "d". Better yet, pronounce **r** as between the "it" in "butter" and the "dd" in "ladder". Better yet, pronounce **r** as a Brooklyn "th" (because in Brooklyn, "the" is pronounced "duh" or, more precisely, halfway between "duh" and "tuh"). To practice that r, say this Spanish word: **para**. Exception: pronounce **r** instead like a long Scottish rolled "r" (trill) when the **r** is at the word's beginning or comes after l, n, or s or is written **rr**.

Pronounce **x** like "ks" usually. At a word's beginning or before a consonant, pronounce it like "s". Exception: pronounce it like "s" in **exacto** and **auxilio**. More exceptions: in names invented by Central America natives (such as **Xola**, **Xela**, and **México**), pronounce it like "sh" at a name's beginning, "h" at other parts of the name.

Stress Stress (emphasize) the *next-to-last* syllable. Examples:

taco, burrito, mosquito, salsa, padre, madre, mesa, tequila, santa

Exception: if a word ends in a consonant that's neither n nor s, stress the *last* syllable. Examples:

español, usted, mujer, favor, azul, pedal, felicidad, actualidad

Further exception: if a vowel has an acute accent (the symbol ´), stress that vowel instead. That accent's usual purpose is just to tell you which syllable to stress.

Stressing the right syllable is important! For example, **papá** (which stresses the last syllable) means "dad" but **papa** (which stresses the next-to-last syllable) means "pope" or "potato," so don't call your father "**papa!**"

Sometimes the acute accent is written just to distinguish two words that would otherwise look the same. For example, **de** means "of" but **dé** means "give"; both words are pronounced the same. Another example: **si** means "if" but **sí** means "yes."

Vowel pairs When vowels are next to each other, they form a **vowel pair**. In a vowel pair, pronounce the vowels one-by-one. For example, to pronounce **eo**, pronounce the **e** (which sounds like the one in "café") then pronounce the **o** (which sounds like

the one in "go").

The vowels **i** and **u** are **weak**. The other vowels (**a**, **e**, and **o**) are **strong**. Here are the rules:

A vowel pair counts as 2 syllables if both vowels are strong; otherwise, the vowel pair counts as just 1 syllable. Combine that rule with the stress rules above, to decide which syllable to stress.

When two weak vowels are next to each other, put more stress on the *second* vowel. When a weak vowel is next to a strong vowel, put more stress on the *strong* vowel.

Try it! Hey, you boring white-guy anglo: the next time you see Spanish (on a sign, ad, or instructions), try pronouncing the Spanish properly! Make your mouth marvelous!

Don't be embarrassed

To translate the typical English word into Spanish, just add an **o** or an **a**. For example, "American" becomes *Americano*. But be careful:

Bizarro does *not* mean "bizarre"; it means "gallant."

Insano can mean "insane" but sometimes means just "unhealthy."

Bravo can mean "brave" but sometimes means "wild," "spicy" or "angry."

If you're a woman who feels embarrassed, don't say you're **embarazada**, since that means "pregnant." If you say you're **embarazada**, you'll be *very* embarrassed!

American companies have made embarrassing blunders when trying to sell to Hispanics:

Hewlett-Packard invited Hispanics to a special demonstration of Hewlett-Packard equipment and gave each attendee a badge, showing the person's name and the letters "HP," which stands for "Hewlett-Packard." Hewlett-Packard didn't realize that in Spanish, **HP** is the standard abbreviation for **hijo puta**, which is short for **hijo de puta**, which means "son of a prostitute," which is the Spanish equivalent of the American expression "son of a bitch." My friend Miguel got insulted when Hewlett-Packard gave him a badge saying, in effect, that Miguel was a "son of a bitch."

Coca-Cola's ads, which showed wild teenagers drinking Coke at the beach, annoyed Hispanics, who prefer to drink Coke somberly in the kitchen or the dining room, as if it were iced tea or wine. Coke's executives finally wised up and switched to Spanish ads showing Hispanics drinking Coke as the perfect complement to a wonderful meal.

Latin American dangers

If you learned Spanish from a classical textbook and then go to Latin America, you'll be surprised — because some Latin Americans have dirty minds.

For example, consider the Spanish word for "boy." In Spain, the usual word for "boy" is **niño** or **muchacho**; but in El Salvador, the usual word for "boy" is **cipote**, which means "penis" or "little fucker."

In Spain, the usual word for "mother" is **madre**, and the usual word for "father" is **padre**. Just infants say **mamá** and **papá** instead. A popular insult is **tu padre**, which means "your father — I shit on him!" A Spaniard's biggest insult is to shit on a father; an American's biggest insult is to fuck a mother instead.

In Mexico (a country that loves insults!), the **tu padre** insult has become so popular that the very mention of the word **padre** is considered offensive. So if you go to Mexico, you must never use the word **padre**. Instead, Mexicans use the word **papá**. Yes, polite Mexicans who want to avoid insults spend their entire lives talking like infants: they always say **papá** and **mamá** instead of **padre** and **madre**.

In Spain, the main word for "seize" or "pick up" is **coger**. For example, to "pick up the telephone" is **coger el teléfono**. But if you say **coger el teléfono** in Mexico or Argentina, everybody will laugh at you — because in those countries, **coger** is used just for picking up girls and fucking them. If you say you want to **coger el teléfono**, people will wonder why you want to fuck the

telephone. Instead of **coger**, you must use the other word for “pick up,” which is **tomar**.

The typical Spanish-English dictionary says **bollo** means a bun (or muffin or bump) and **papaya** is a kind of fruit. But the dictionary doesn't mention that **bollo** and **papaya** have obscene connotations in Cuba, where **bollo** is a woman's pussy, and **papaya** is even worse. So if a Cuban woman serves you a muffin, don't say, “I like your **bollo**” — unless you know her very well!

Male or female?

Here's a tale from the Internet.

A Spanish teacher was explaining to her class that in Spanish, unlike English, each noun is masculine or feminine. For example, “house” is feminine (*la casa*), but “pencil” is masculine (*el lapiz*).

A student asked, “Which gender is ‘computer’?” Instead of giving the answer, the teacher split the class into 2 groups, male and female, and asked them to decide for themselves whether “computer” should be masculine or feminine. Each group was asked to give 4 reasons for its recommendation.

The men's group decided “computer” should be feminine (*la computadora*) because:

1. No one but their creator understands their internal logic.
2. When they communicate with each other, they speak in code language just they & experts understand.
3. Every mistake you make is stored in their long-term memory for later retrieval.
4. As soon as you commit to one, you find yourself spending half your paycheck accessorizing it.

But the women's group concluded computers should be masculine (*el computador*) because:

1. To get their attention, you must turn them on.
2. They have lots of data but still can't think for themselves.
3. They're supposed to help you solve problems, but half the time they *are* the problem.
4. As soon as you commit to one, you realize that if you'd waited a little longer, you could've gotten a better model.

The women thought they won.

That's the end of the Internet tale, but here's the truth:

In most of Latin America, computers are feminine: *la computadora*.

In parts of Columbia & Chile, computers are masculine: *el computador*.

In Spain, which is influenced by its neighbors (the French) instead of by U.S. English, a computer is viewed the French way and called “the organizer,” “the orderer”: *el ordenador*.

A male programmer is *el programador*. A female programmer is *la programadora*. A male “computer expert” is sometimes given the same name as a computer: *el computador* or *el ordenador*.

Spanish is spoken differently around the world. Hey, Spanish speakers: which words are used in *your* neighborhood?

Olé

Though Spaniards often say **olé**, the word **olé** isn't really Spanish: it's Arabic. In Arabic, **olé** means “By God!” Spaniards snatched **olé** from the Arabs when Arabs invaded Spain in 711 A.D.

French

In ancient France, the meals were named as follows:

Meal (old France)	Meal's time
déjeuner	breakfast time (because “déjeuner” means “begin day”)
dîner	lunchtime (because biggest meal of the day, to dine!)
souper	supper

In French Canada, those names are still used.

In modern France, people eat later, so the meals are named as follows:

Meal (new France)	Meal's time
déjeuner	lunchtime (because that's when day's main part begins)
dîner	supper (because biggest meal of the day, to dine!)
souper	late at night, after-theater snack

Breakfast is called “little lunch,” **petit déjeuner**.

I asked a French Canadian, “what do you call a meal late at night, an after-theater snack?” She replied, “In French Canada, we don't go to the theater.”

French kids are like criminals

French has two words for “you.” The formal word is **vous**; the informal word, **tu**, is used just when speaking to close friends (such as relatives, colleagues, and God) and lower forms of life (such as children, criminals, and inanimate objects).

Make sure you choose the correct word. For example, one summer I was talking to a French Canadian girl who was 3 years old. Since she was a child, I should have called her “**tu**,” but I made the mistake of calling her “**vous**” instead, which was too formal. She was so amused at my formality — at my treating her like a queen — that she curtsied. She also called me a **vieille banane**, which means “old banana.”

When I asked why I was being called an “old banana,” her mom said I might have heard wrong; maybe the girl was calling me a **vieux bonhomme**, which means “old gentleman.”

But then we heard the girl call me a **vieille banane** again, and her mom admitted I was indeed being called an “old banana,” but consoled me by saying that “Old Banana” was just a TV personality whom the girl thought I resembled.

Oh, well. I've been called worse!

How Americans changed France

What do the French admire about us Americans? To find out, look at which words the French have borrowed from us.

The French use these American words for types of music:

blues, country, folk, gospel, jazz, pop, rock, slow, soul

The French use these American words for clothing:

boots, fashion-victim, pullover, shoes, tee-shirt, trench-coat

The French say **sweat** for a sweatshirt. The French say **basket** for a basketball sneaker or any other sports sneaker.

The French use these American words for food & drink:

bacon, cake, chewing-gum, chips, cocktail, cookie, hotdog, pudding, roast-beef, sandwich, toast, whiskey

The French say **lunch** for any cold meal, even at dinnertime. The French say **corn-flakes** for any breakfast cereal dunked in cold milk, even if it contains no corn.

Here are more American words have crept into the French language and are popular in France now:

baby-boom, baby-sitter, best-seller, bike, biker, blazer, body-building, boss, boy-scout, brainstorming, building, camping, compact disk, cockpit, cowboy, cozy, crash, dancing, drugstore, DVD, e-mail, engineering, film, flash, flashback, gangster, high-tech, hippie, hobby, holdup, job, kidnapper, kitchenette, lad, lobby, loser, marketing, music-hall, nightclub, nurse, okay, parking, pickup, pinup, poster, punk, revolver, scan, scanner, script, self-made-man, self-service, sex-appeal, sexy, shopping, slogan, snack-bar, snowboard, sofa, steward, stop, surf, teenager, ticket, top, tuner, up-to-date, wagon, web, weekend

The French say **black** for any dark-skinned person, **blush** for cheek makeup, **break** for a coffee break, **chat** for Internet chat, **dandy** for a fancy-looking person, **gloss** for lip gloss, **hit** for a success, **jet** for jet airplane, **look** for appearance, **mail** for e-mail, **net** for Internet, **roller** for roller skates, **sitting** for a sit-down

protest demonstration in the street, **spot** for a spotlight, **starter** for a car-ignition starter, **stick** for lipstick or a glue stick, **tank** for an army tank, **trust** for a big international company, **turnover** for personnel changes, and **Western** for a cowboy movie.

The French put **le before most of those words: le best-seller, le boy-scout, le brainstorming**, etc. The main exceptions are **kitchenette** and **nurse**, which the French consider to both be feminine, so they get **la** instead of **le**.

Old French fuddy-duddies who don't like English intrusions call them **Franglais**.

More examples of French craziness are in *1001 Pitfalls in French*, by Grew & Oliver. I thank Christophe Paysant's family for helping me keep the list updated.

Bilingual beauties

The ultimate French-American was Maurice Chevalier, who loved to sing in English with a French accent. I wish he would have sung "My Way" — he would have been cute — but Sinatra got that job.

French teachers love the bilingual song popularized by Nat King Cole in the 1950's:

Darling, **je vous aime beaucoup**.
Je ne sais pas what to do!

I wish more people would write bilingual songs like that!

French can get confused with English. Consider this tale:

One fine winter evening, an American girl had a date with her French lover. When she opened her door to let him in, he burst in and exclaimed, "**Je t'adore!**" (which means "I adore you!" and practically means "Will you marry me?")

He eagerly awaited her reply. But since she didn't know French, she thought he said "Shut da door." So she replied: "I don't feel a draft."

Moral: if you don't know French, you'll miss lovely opportunities!

Japanese

Speaking *some* Japanese can be easy — because the Japanese borrowed many words from us Americans.

3 rules

To speak Japanese, you must know just 3 rules.

Rule 1: the Japanese don't like c, l and v The Japanese change c to either k or s (depending on how the c is pronounced in English), change l to r, and change v to b. For example, the English word "vitamin" becomes the Japanese word **bitamin**.

Let's translate the English word "gasoline" into Japanese. Since the Japanese hate long words, they abridge it to "gasolin"; then they apply rule 1, which gives **gasorin**.

Let's translate "television" into Japanese. Since the Japanese hate long words, they abridge it to "televi"; then they apply rule 1, which gives **terebi**.

Rule 2: the Japanese avoid putting two consonants next to each other To apply that rule, the Japanese often resort to cleverness.

For example, let's translate the English word "correspondence" into Japanese. Since the Japanese hate long words, they abridge it to "correspon"; then they apply rule 1, which gives "korrespon." But according to rule 2, the Japanese don't like the "rr" and the "sp." So the Japanese shorten the "rr" to "r," and shorten the "sp" to "p," and get **korepon**.

Rule 2 says to avoid pairs of consonants. The Japanese often break up a pair of consonants by inserting "u" in the middle of

the pair. For example, to break up "pr," the Japanese often insert "u" in the middle and get "pur." Thus, the English word "pro" (which means "professional") becomes the Japanese word **puro**.

Let's translate "word processor." The Japanese think it sounds like "ward processor." Since the Japanese hate long expressions, they abridge it to "wa pro." To break up the "pr," they insert "u" in the middle, and get **wapuro**.

Let's translate "platform." The Japanese abridge it to "platfo." Applying rule 1, they get "pratfo." According to rule 2, the "pr" and "tf" are unacceptable, so the Japanese change "pr" to "pur" and change "tf" to "t": they get **purato**.

Rule 3: the only consonant the Japanese permit at the end of a word is n To avoid ending with a consonant that's not n, the Japanese add the letter "o" or "u" at the end.

For example, let's translate the word "gas." Since "gas" ends in a consonant, which violates rule 3, the Japanese add the letter "u" at the end, and get **gasu**.

Let's translate the word "hotel." Applying rule 1, that becomes "hoter." Since that ends in a consonant, rule 3 makes the Japanese add the letter "u" at the end, and get **hoteru**.

Let's translate "catalog." Applying rule 1, that becomes "katarog." Rule 3 makes the Japanese add "u" and get **katarogu**.

Let's translate "bell." Applying rule 1, that becomes "berr." Applying rule 2, the "rr" is shortened to "r," giving "ber." Rule 3 makes the Japanese add "u" and get **beru**.

Let's translate "pool," which is pronounced "pul." Applying rule 1, that becomes "pur." Rule 3 makes the Japanese add "u" and get **puru**.

Let's translate "building," which is pronounced "bilding," and which the Japanese abridge to "bil." Applying rule 1, that becomes "bir." Rule 3 makes the Japanese add "u" and get **biru**.

Let's translate "apartment." The Japanese abridge it to "apat." But rule 2 says the "rt" is unacceptable, so the Japanese abridge it to "t," giving "apat." Rule 3 makes the Japanese add "o" and get **apato**.

Let's translate "software." The Japanese abridge it to "soft." Since the Japanese have difficulty hearing the difference between f and h, they think it sounds like "soht." But rule 2 says the "ht" is unacceptable, so the Japanese insert "u," giving "sohut." Rule 3 makes the Japanese add "o" and get **sohuto**.

Let's translate "personal computer." The Japanese pronounce it "parsonal computer," and abridge it to "parso com." According to rule 1, that becomes "parso kom." Since rule 2 says the "rs" is unacceptable, the Japanese then drop the "r" and get "pasokom." But that violates rule 3, the Japanese change the "m" to "n," and get **pasokon**.

Here's what we Americans gave the Japanese:

English	Japanese	English	Japanese
apple pie	appuru pai	glass	garasu
basketball	basuketto bōru	handkerchief	hankachi
beefsteak	bifuteki	ice cream	aisu kurimu
beer	biiru	missile	misairu
cabin	kabin	necktie	nekutai
can	kan	postbox	posuto
coat	kōto	raincoat	rein-kōto
coffee	kōhii	sandwich	sandoitchi
deck	dekki	spoon	spūn
democracy	demokurashii	sports	spōtsu
demonstration	demonsuturēshon	stocking	sutokkingu
department	depāto	table	tēburu
dessert	dezāto	tennis court	tenisu kōto
escalator	esukarētā	truck	torakku
flashbulb	furasshu barubu	typewriter	taipuraitā

Alphabet

To impress your friends, say our alphabet — in Japanese! Here's how the Japanese say it: **ei, bii, shii, dei, ii, efu, jii, eichi,**

ai, jei, kei, eru, emu, enu, oo, pii, kyuu, āru, esu, tei, yuu, bui, dabburu yuu, ekisu, uai, zetto.

Country of yes-men

How would you feel if a stranger walked up to you and said just “Yes!” even though you hadn’t asked a question? That’s how the Japanese feel about us Americans — because when we need to talk with a stranger, we begin by saying “Hi!” which sounds the same as the Japanese word **hai**, which means yes. When you say “Hi” to a visitor from Japan, don’t be surprised if the visitor responds by saying, “I’m sorry — what was the question?”

Japanese like hurly-burly

To make a word plural, the Japanese like to say the word twice, but changing the first letter. For example, the Japanese word for “person” is **hito**; the Japanese word for “people” is **hito-bito**.

In that example, h became b. Notice that h is a “quiet” letter; it became b, which is a “noisy” letter. The general rule is: a quiet letter becomes a noisy letter. Here are more examples:

Rule	Example		
h becomes b	“person” is hito	“people”	is hito-bito
k becomes g	“god” is kami	“gods”	is kami-gami
t becomes d	“time” is toki	“sometimes”	is toki-doki
f becomes b	“joint” is fushi	“every joint”	is fushi-bushi
s becomes z	“that” is sore	“every”	is sore-zore
sh becomes j	“island” is shima	“islands”	is shima-jima
ts becomes z	“month” is tsuki	“every month”	is tsuki-zuki

To have fun, apply those same rules to English. Ask your lover: “Do you want tickle-dickle, hug-bug, kiss-giss, or shower-jower?”

Chinese

If you want a challenge, try learning Chinese! It’s tricky!

In China, most signs are written just in Chinese characters, but a few signs also show writing in **pinyin**, which uses Roman characters (to help Westerners and young Chinese kids who haven’t learned all the Chinese characters yet).

To understand Chinese, your first step is to learn how to pronounce pinyin. Here’s how.

Consonants

In pinyin, these 15 consonants are pronounced about the same way as in English: **b, p, d, t, k, m, n, l, r, f, s, h, j, w,** and **y**. Here are 3 other easy consonants: **g** like the one in “go,” **sh** like the one in “she,” and **ch** like the one in “cheese.”

Unfortunately, these 5 consonants are pronounced quite differently from English:

q	is pronounced like the “ch” in “cheese”
x	is pronounced like the “sh” in “she”
c	is pronounced like the “ts” in “nuts”
z	is pronounced like the “dz” in “gadzoosk”
zh	is pronounced like the “j” in “jump”

To sound truly Chinese (instead of having an American accent), use these tricks...

To say **y** and **w**, open your mouth more than in English, so the **y** sounds almost like the ee in “see,” and the **w** sounds almost like the “oo” in “moo.”

For **h, g,** and **k**, arch the back of your tongue toward your mouth’s roof (so **h** sounds like the Scottish “ch” in “loch” or the German “ch” in “ich” and “Bach”).

For **r**, roll your tongue in the middle of your mouth.

For **j, q,** and **x**, draw your mouth’s corners as far back as possible, so you look like you’re grinning: **q** looks like you’re taking a photo and saying “cheese”; **x** sounds like a kettle ready to whistle, halfway between “sh” and “s”. Grin for those single letters (**j, q,** and **x**) but not for double letters (**zh,**

ch, and **sh**). Beijing’s local dialect adds a “ur” sound after the double letters: so just in Beijing, **zh** is pronounced like the “jur” in “jury,” **ch** is pronounced like the “chur” in “church,” and **sh** is pronounced like “sure.” That’s why people in Beijing sound like they’re growling and muttering: they frequently add “ur-r-r-r!”

Vowels

In pinyin, most vowels are pronounced the same way as in French. So before studying Chinese, it’s helpful to study French! That’s why the French speak Chinese better than other Westerners.

Since you probably don’t know French yet, here are examples in English:

a	is pronounced like the “a” in “mama” or “papa” or “father” or “far”
e	is pronounced like the “e” in “her” or “term” (or the “e” in French “le”)
i	is pronounced like the “i” in “machine” or “police” (or the “ee” in “see”)
o	is pronounced like the “o” in “or” (or the “aw” in “awful”)
u	is pronounced like the “u” in “rule” or “flute” (or the “oo” in “moo”)
ü	is pronounced like the “ü” in German “über” (or the “u” in French “tu” or somewhat like the “eu” in English “pneumonia”); to make that sound, purse your lips like you’re going to whistle, but then say “ee” through them

Here are 2 exceptions:

when the **i** sound comes after **z, zh, c, ch, s, sh,** or **r**, people pronounce it like the **e** sound but with the mouth less open, so it almost sounds like “r”

when the **ü** sound comes after the letter **j, q, x,** or **y**, people don’t bother to write the “ü”: they write just **u**; so if you see **u** after **j, q, x,** or **y**, pronounce it as **ü**

When several vowels are next to each other, pronounce them one-by-one. For example, to pronounce **ai**, pronounce the **a** (which sounds like the one in “mama”) then pronounce the **i** (which sounds like the one in “machine”); you’ll wind up with a **diphthong** (vowel sequence) that sounds like the “i” in “bite”. Chinese uses these 13 diphthongs:

ai	sounds like the “i” in “bite”
ei	sounds like the “ei” in “veil” (or the “a” in “date”)
ui	sounds like compromise between “we” and “way”
ao	sounds like the “ow” in “cow”
uo	sounds like the “wa” in “war”
ou	sounds like the “o” in “go”
iu	sounds like the “yo” in “yo-yo”
ia	sounds like the “ya” in “yard”
iao	sounds like the “eow” in “meow”
ua	sounds like the “ua” in “suave”
uai	sounds like the “wi” in “swipe”
ie	sounds like the “ie” in “sierra” (or the “ye” in “yes”)
üe	sounds like the “eu” in “pneumonia” followed by “air”

In Chinese, the typical syllable consists of one consonant sound, then one vowel sound (or a diphthong), then, optionally, a special ending (**n** or **ng** or **r**). Any special ending affects the sound of the vowel before it:

er	sounds like the “er” in “her,” but with your mouth slightly more open, so it almost sounds like the word “are”
an	sounds like the English word “an” (and the “an” in “fan”), but pronounce the “n” very softly and briefly, so you hear not much more than the “a” in “an”
ian	sounds like “yen,” but pronounce the “n” very softly and briefly
en	sounds like the “un” in “under”
in	sounds like the English words “in” and “inn”
un	sounds like the “ewin” in the word “chewin” (slang for “chewing”)
ün	sounds like the French word “une”
ang	sounds like the “ong” in “gong”
eng	sounds like the “ung” in “hung”
ing	sounds like the “ing” in “ring”
ong	sounds like the English electrical word “ohm” (and the meditation word “Om”) but with “ng” instead of “m”; it also sounds like the word “going” but without the “g” and “i”

For example, here’s how to pronounce Chinese family names (in Mandarin):

The Chinese family name **Li** is pronounced “lee.”
 The Chinese family name **Tang** is pronounced “tong.”
 The Chinese family name **Wang** is pronounced “wong.”
 The Chinese family name **Yang** is pronounced “yong.”
 The Chinese family name **Zhang** is pronounced “jong.”
 The Chinese family name **Chen** is pronounced “chun.”
 The Chinese family name **Cheng** is pronounced “chung.”
 The Chinese family name **Song** is pronounced “so” then “ng.”

Tones In pinyin, you can put 4 accents above a vowel. The accents are called **tones**. The tones can make a difference:

ma is a Chinese word that means “huh” and marks the end of a question
mā is a Chinese word that means “mother”
má is a Chinese word that means “hemp” or “numb” or “pock-marked”
mǎ is a Chinese word that means “horse”
mà is a Chinese word that means “scold” or “swear”

Here’s how to pronounce them:

Pronounce plain **ma** briefly, like a grunt. That’s called **toneless** or **tone 0**.

Pronounce **mā** as a long, high note, as if you were an Italian singer (like Pavarotti) singing a high note of an opera or a popular song. While you sing it, hold your pitch steady, going neither up the scale nor down it. Sing it for about half a second (while you count “one, one thou...”). It’s the tone American doctors use when they tell you to open your mouth and say “ah.” That’s called the **first tone** or **high tone** or **flat tone**.

Pronounce **má** so it rises from “medium pitch” to “high pitch,” like a singer sliding up the scale. To pronounce it easily, raise your eyebrows while saying it. Make its length be rather short. It’s the same tone Americans use when they ask “what?” It’s called the **second tone** or **rising tone**.

Pronounce **mǎ** so it dips from “medium-low pitch” to “low pitch” then rises to “medium-high pitch.” Make the pitch swoop down, like an eagle catching its prey, then swoop back up. To pronounce it easily, drop your chin onto your neck and then raise it again. It takes a long time to finish the performance. It’s called the **third tone** or **dipping tone** or **low tone**.

Pronounce **mà** so it falls from “high pitch” to “low pitch,” like a singer sliding down the scale. Do it fast, so its length is very short. Start loud but quickly fade, as if you’re a singer who has a heart attack: let out a quick high-pitched yelp, then wither (with your voice) to the floor. To pronounce it easily, stomp your foot gently while saying it. It’s the tone Americans use when they yell “Hah!” or “No!” or a command (such as “Stop!”) It’s called the **fourth tone** or **falling tone**.

When a Chinese person speaks to you, tones 1 and 3 are easy to recognize, since they’re long: tone 1 stays high; tone 3 dips. If you hear a syllable that’s short, it’s either tone 0 (which is quiet), tone 4 (which is forceful and accented), or tone 2 (which rises).

To practice the tones, try saying this sentence:

Má mā mà mǎ ma?

It means “Pock-marked mother scold horse, huh?” which means “Does the pock-marked mother scold the horse?”

For “mother,” the Chinese can say **mā** but more commonly say **māma**. (The first syllable is the first tone; the second syllable is toneless. The word sounds like an American baby yelling for his mother: “Mama!”) You can put it in that sentence:

Má māma mà mǎ ma?

A syllable is toneless if it’s a **repetition**, such as the **ma** at the end of **māma**. Here’s another example of repetition: the Chinese word for “father” or “papa” is **bàba**. For brothers & sisters, the Chinese care about their ages:

“Older brother” is **gēge**, but “younger brother” is **didi**.
 “Older sister” is **jiějie**, but “younger sister” is **mèimei**.

So a syllable is toneless if it’s a **repetition** — or if it’s a **particle** (a grammar element, such as the **ma** that means “huh?”).

When ordering food, be careful:

tāng means soup, but **táng** means sugar
yán means salt, but **yān** means tobacco

Many family names use the second tone (**Táng, Wáng, Yáng, Chén,** and **Chéng**), but these family names use different tones:

Zhāng, Lǐ, and Sòng.

Laziness about tones Saying the 3rd tone requires a lot of time & effort: you’re supposed to dip your voice down, then bring it back up. The Chinese do that full procedure just if the 3rd tone comes before a long pause (such as at the end of a sentence). Otherwise, the Chinese rush by taking these shortcuts:

How to pronounce the 3rd tone (if the next tone is tone 0, 1, 2, or 4): dip the voice down but don’t bother bringing it back up.

How to pronounce the 3rd tone (if the next tone is 3rd also): bring the voice up but don’t bother dipping down first, so instead it sounds like just a 2nd tone (rising tone). Here’s a famous example.... The Chinese don’t have a word for “hello.” Instead of saying “hello,” they greet each other by saying “you look great,” which is usually abridged to “you good.” Since the word for “you” is **nǐ** and the word for “good” is **hǎo**, that would make “you good” be **nǐ hǎo**. But Chinese people are too lazy to dip twice in a row — **the Chinese never double-dip** — so they switch the first word to a rising tone and say this: **nǐ hǎo**. Here’s another example.... If you’re chatting about health or feelings and want to say “I’m okay too,” the Chinese form is “I also good,” which would be **wǒ yě hǎo**; but since that would require 3 dips in a row, the Chinese change the first 2 of them to rising and say this: **wó yě hǎo**.

Students and Westerners study tones (to pronounce well), but writing them is tedious, so **most sign writers don’t bother writing tones on signs** — and I won’t bother writing tones in later parts of this book.

When the Chinese write tones above **ü**, they sometimes don’t bother writing the dots above the **u**.

Don’t worry: if you say wrong tones, Chinese listeners can usually guess what you mean. For example, they can guess whether you’re trying to ask for your mother (**mā**) or a horse (**mǎ**). It’s more important to **pronounce correctly consonants & vowels**: if you botch those, your listeners will be totally confused.

Wade-Giles

Mao’s government started using pinyin in 1958, to communicate with kids and Westerners. But many Westerners kept trying to use an older Romanization system, called Wade-Giles, until the 1980’s. Now we all use pinyin (because it more accurately indicates Chinese pronunciation), but some of you old fogies might still remember the **Wade-Giles** spellings:

Pinyin, used now		Wade-Giles, outdated
Běijīng	(the capital city)	Peking
Guǎngzhōu	(a big city)	Canton
Chóngqìng	(a big city)	Chungking
Sìchuān	(a province)	Szechuan
Dào	(a religion)	Tao
Máo Zédōng	(a famous leader)	Mao Tse-tung
Lǐ Bái	(a famous poet)	Li Po
Lǎo Zǐ	(a famous writer)	Lao Tzu

Characters

Instead of being in pinyin, most signs are in traditional Chinese characters. Each character is a picture, one syllable.

Some characters are simple:

The character for the number “1” is a horizontal line. (The pinyin for “1” is **yī**.)

The character for the number “2” is two horizontal lines, stacked so they look like an equal sign, except the bottom line is slightly longer. (Pinyin: **èr**.)

The character for the number “3” is three horizontal lines, stacked, with the bottom line longest and the middle line shortest. (Pinyin: **sān**.)

The character for the number “ten” is a plus sign. (Pinyin: **shí**.)

The character for the word “man” (or “person”) looks like a stick figure of a man, but with no head, no arms, and no feet, so you see just a pair of legs (without feet) and a torso, and the whole thing is just 2 strokes: one stroke is the “torso becoming the left leg”, the other stroke is the right leg. (Pinyin: **rén**.)

The character for the word “big” is the same as for the word “man” but with outstretched arms added. The “outstretched arms” are just a horizontal line. (Pinyin: **dà**.)

Other characters are more complex, containing many keystrokes.

In 1956, Mao's government simplified the most complex characters. The simplified characters are used on the Chinese mainland but not on the island of Taiwan, which still uses the older, fancier characters.

In Chinese characters, sentences are usually written from left to right (like English), but they can also be written from right to left (which is more traditional) or from top to bottom (vertically, which is even more traditional). Chinese books are usually written from front to back (like English), but they can also be written from back to front (which is more traditional). So when you pick up a Chinese book or newspaper, you must spend a few seconds trying to figure out which direction makes the most sense to read it.

Using numbers

Here are the fundamental numbers:

0	líng	(pronounced "ling")
1	yī	(pronounced "yee" or "ee")
2	èr	(pronounced "er")
3	sān	(pronounced "san")
4	sì	(pronounced "suh")
5	wǔ	(pronounced "woo")
6	liù	(pronounced like the name "Leo")
7	qī	(pronounced "chee")
8	bā	(sounds like a sheep: "bah")
9	jiǔ	(pronounced like the name "Joe")
10	shí	(pronounced like the word "she")
100	yībǎi	(pronounced "yee buy" or "ee buy")
1000	yiqiān	(pronounced "yee chee an" or "ee chee an")
10000	yiwàn	(pronounced "yee wan" or "ee wan")

Chinese numbers sound more pleasant and simpler than English ones. For example, 3 in Chinese is **sān**, which sounds more pleasant and simpler than the English "three"; 7 in Chinese is **qī** (pronounced "chee"), which sounds more pleasant and simpler than the English "seven."

To pronounce English, you must learn that 11 is pronounced "eleven," not "one one"; 30 is pronounced "thirty," not "threety". Chinese has no such peculiarities.

In Chinese, the number after "ten" is called "ten one" (**shí yī**). Then come "ten two" (**shí èr**) then "ten three" (**shí sān**) and so on, up to "ten nine" (**shí jiǔ**). Then come "two-ten" (**èrshí**), "two-ten one" (**èrshí yī**), "two-ten two" (**èrshí èr**), and so on. One hundred is **yībǎi**; two hundred is **èrbǎi**; 235 is "two-hundred three-ten five" (**èrbǎi sānshí wǔ**).

If a number's next-to-final digit is zero, say "zero" (**líng**). For example, if you want to say 205, don't say just "two-hundred five": say "two-hundred zero five" (**èrbǎi líng wǔ**). If you forget to say the "zero" and say just "two-hundred five" (**èrbǎi wǔ**), your listener will assume you mean the slang for 250.

For the digit 2, the Chinese use **èr** or **liǎng**.

Choose **èr** when you're counting (1, 2, 3, etc.) and for 20 (**èrshí**) and 200 (**èrbǎi**); choose **liǎng** instead for 2000 (**liǎngqiān**), 20000 (**liǎngwàn**), and when the number modifies a noun ("2 people").

In Chinese you don't have to learn the names of the 12 months, since they have no names.

The Chinese just say "#1 month" (**yī yuè**), "#2 month" (**èr yuè**), etc.

You don't have to learn the names of the 7 days of the week, because they have no names either (except Sunday).

the Chinese just say "week's #1" for Monday (**zhōu yī**), "week's #2" for Tuesday (**zhōu èr**), etc. For Sunday, say "week's sun" (**zhōu rì**).

For the word "week," instead of saying **zhōu** (which literally means "circumference"), some Chinese folks substitute a more ancient word, **xīngqī** (which literally means "star period").

Important stuff first

In Chinese, you talk about important stuff before talking about details.

For example, when giving a date, you say the year then the month then the date. When giving a person's name, you say the person's family (which is usually one syllable, such as **Chén**) then the cute name the mother gave that person (which is usually two syllables, such as **Mínglǐ**). For example, China's most famous leader was **Máo Zédōng**: his family's name was **Máo**, his given name was **Zédōng**.

Grammar & style

In English, to make a word plural you must typically add "s," but some words are irregular: the plural of "mouse" is "mice." The Chinese don't bother pluralizing: in Chinese, the word for "restaurant" is the same as the word for "restaurants."

In Chinese, instead of saying "I own 5 restaurants," you say "I own 5 of restaurant." The only exception is for groups of people: the plural of "friend" is "friend group"; the plural of "student" is "student group"; the plural of "child" is "child group." (The Chinese word for "group" is **men**.)

In English, you have to say "the" or "a" or "some" before most nouns. There are no Chinese words for "the" or "a" or "some."

In Chinese, instead of saying "I see the car" or "I see a car", you say just "I see car." If you want to emphasize that you see just "a" car, not many cars, you can say "I see one of car": the Chinese say "one" (**yī**) instead of "a".

In English, you must learn how to conjugate verbs: "I eat," "he eats", "I ate", "I have eaten," "I am eating," "I will eat." The Chinese never conjugate.

They say "I eat," "he eat," "I yesterday eat," "I tomorrow eat."

To say just "I ate" without bothering to specify which day, a Chinese person says "I eat already." That's easy to say, since the Chinese word for "already" is short: **le**. So to turn any present sentence into a past-tense sentence, just add **le** at the end.

If you're telling a story, don't bother putting **le** at the end of each sentence: just tell the story in the present tense. ("I yesterday eat. Then I drink. Then I sleep.")

Here's another popular shortcut: instead of saying "I will buy an apple," the Chinese just nod and say "buy apple": the "I" and "will" are unspoken and understood.

In English, you must worry about whether to say "he," "she," or "it" — and hope you're not accused of being sexist! In Chinese, you don't have to worry, because "he," "she," and "it" are all pronounced the same: **tā**.

To ask a question in English, you must change the word order: "He is going to Shanghai" becomes "Is he going to Shanghai?" In Chinese, you create a question more simply, by just putting "huh?" at the end of the sentence.

"He go Shanghai" becomes "He go Shanghai huh?" The Chinese word for "huh?" is **ma**. It serves the same purpose as the Canadian "eh?" (Canadians say, "He's going to Shanghai, eh?")

A more emphatic Chinese way to ask a question is to say the verb twice, with "not" in between, like this: "He go, not go, Shanghai?" (The Chinese word for "not" is **bù**.)

Chinese has no word for "yes" or "no."

To reply to the question "You go Shanghai huh?" just repeat the verb: say "go" (while nodding your head) or "not go" (while shaking your head). To reply to the question "He is American huh?" just repeat the verb: say "is" (**shì**) or "not is," which would be **bù shì**; but the Chinese don't like to say "**bù**" before a verb having the 4th tone, so the Chinese change "**bù**" to "**bú**" in that situation and say "**bú shì**." Since "**bú shì**" sounds like "bullshit," American tourists think Chinese people often talk about bullshit.

When Chinese people are lazy, they don't bother saying the verb after **bù**: they say just **bù**, which means "not" and acts as "no." So American tourists think Chinese people resemble ghosts, who always say "boo!"

Though you make the typical Chinese verb negative by putting **bù** (or **bú**) before it, here's a big exception: to make the verb "have" (**yǒu**) be negative, say **méi** instead of **bù**, like this: **méi yǒu** (which means "not have" or "haven't"). For example, if somebody asks whether you have something (or whether you have ever *done* something), reply by saying "have" (**yǒu**) or "haven't" (**méi yǒu**). Chinese people often say they "haven't" done something; they often say **méi yǒu**. Since "**méi yǒu**" sounds like "mayo" (which is American slang for "mayonnaise"), American tourists think

Chinese people often talk about mayonnaise.

Another way to indicate yes is to say “correct” (which in Chinese is **duì**). So Chinese often reply to questions by saying **shì** (“is” or “yes”), **bù shì** (“not is” or “no”), **bù** (“not” or “no”), **yǒu** (“have”), **méi yǒu** (“not have” or “haven’t”), and **duì** (“certainly”).

The Chinese say “please” (**qǐng**) and “thank you” (**xièxie**) less than Americans.

If you use them too much, you’ll be laughed at for being as hopelessly formal as a British butler. Instead of saying a formal “thank you,” Chinese people prefer to be more thoughtful and emotional. When treated to a meal, a Chinese person shows appreciation by saying it was delicious (“good eat extremely,” **hǎo chī jíle**); when done a favor, a Chinese person apologizes for having put the generous person to so much trouble (“trouble you already,” **máfan nǐ le**).

Names for countries

China considers itself to be the center of the universe, so it calls itself the “center country” (**Zōngguó**).

Since the Chinese word for “person” is **rén**, a Chinese person is called a “center-country person” (**Zōngguó rén**). The Chinese language (with its written characters) is called “center writing” (**Zōngwen**).

To a Chinese ear, “England” sounds like **Yīngguó** (“flower country”), so that’s what the Chinese call England.

A British person is called a **Yīngguó rén** (“flower-country person”); the English language is called **Yīngwen** (“flower writing”).

To a Chinese ear, “America” sounds like “Mayka” (if you ignore the unaccented syllables), so the Chinese call the U.S. **Měiguó** (“beautiful country”).

An American person is called a **Měiguó rén** (“beautiful-country person”). To say “I am an American,” say **wǒ shì Měiguó rén** (“I is beautiful-country person”).

Vocabulary

To speak Chinese well, you must learn many Chinese words. Here are the most popular words and phrases for beginners and tourists. For each phrase, I give the English, then the **Chinglish** (Chinese way of handling the English), then the actual Chinese pinyin:

Pronouns

“I” or “me”	I	wǒ
“we” or “us”	I-group	wǒmen
“you” (one person)	you	nǐ
“y’all”	you-group	nǐmen
“it” or “he” or “she” or “him” or “her”	it	tā
“they”	it-group	tāmen

Goodness

“good” or “okay”	good	hǎo
“very good”	very good	hěn hǎo

Chitchat

“hello” or “good to see you” (one person)	you good	nǐ hǎo
“hello y’all” or “good to see y’all”	you-group good	nǐmen hǎo
“good-bye” or “till we meet again”	again meet	zài jiàn
“love”	love	ài
“I love you”	I love you	wǒ ài nǐ
“do you love me?”	you love I huh?	nǐ ài wǒ ma
“how are you feeling?” or “how are you?”	you good huh?	nǐ hǎo ma
“I’m feeling fine”	I very good	wǒ hěn hǎo
“and how about you?” or “you too?”	you likewise?	nǐ ne
“is” or “am” or “are” or “yes, I am”	is	shì
“want”	want	yào
“I want…”	I want	wǒ yào
“I’d like…”	I think want	wǒ xiǎng yào
“please…” or “I’d like to invite you to…”	invite	qǐng
“thank you”	thank-thank	xièxie
“my name is…” or “I’m called…”	I call	wǒ jiào

Negatives

“not” or “no, I’m not”	not	bù
“bad”	not good	bù hǎo

“don’t want”	not want	bú yào
“you’re welcome” or “no need to thank”	not thank	bù xiè

Having

“have” or “has”	have	yǒu
“haven’t” or “I haven’t done that”	not-have	méi yǒu

Possessives

“s”	’s	de
“Wang’s”	Wang’s	Wáng de
“my”	I’s	wǒde
“your”	you’s	nǐde
“its” or “his” or “her”	it’s	tāde

Size

“big”	big	dà
“small” or “little” or “young”	little	xiǎo

People

“mother” or “mama” or “mom”	mama	māma
“father” or “papa” or “dad”	papa	bàba
“friend” or “dear friend to have”	friend-have	péngyou
“mister” or “husband” or “family head”	first-born	xiānsheng
“Mr. Wang”	Wang first-born	Wáng xiānsheng
“wife” or “better half”	too-too	tàitai
“Mr. Wang’s wife” or “Mrs. Wang”	Wang too-too	Wáng tàitai

Food

“eat”	eat	chī
“beef”	cow meat	niú ròu
“pork”	pig meat	zhū ròu
“lamb”	sheep meat	yáng ròu
“chicken”	chicken	jī
“turkey”	fire chicken	huǒ jī
“duck”	duck	yā
“fish”	fish	yú
“salmon”	3-writing fish	sānwén yú
“shrimp”	shrimp	xiā
“lobster”	dragon shrimp	lóng xiā
“soup”	soup	tāng

Drinks

“coffee”	coffee	kāfēi
“tea”	tea	chá
“milk”	cow milk	niú nǎi
“water”	water	shuǐ
“soda” or “carbonated water”	vapor water	qì shuǐ
“cola”	cola	kělè
“alcoholic drink”	alcohol	jiǔ
“wine”	grape alcohol	pútáo jiǔ
“beer”	beer alcohol	pí jiǔ

Dialects

I’ve been explaining mainland China’s official pronunciation, called **Mandarin**, which is especially popular in the capital city (Beijing) and places nearby. But many far-away regions of China have their own dialects.

For example, **Cantonese** is the dialect spoken in Guangzhou (which used to be called Canton) and places nearby (such as Hong Kong and Macau). Cantonese write the same Chinese characters as Mandarin, but the pronunciation is so different that Cantonese people can’t understand Mandarin speakers — and Mandarin people can’t understand Cantonese speakers — unless they take courses. (Now the Chinese government requires all students to learn Mandarin.)

How different is Mandarin pronunciation from Cantonese? Very! For example, while Mandarin has 5 tones (high, rising, falling, dipping, and plain), Cantonese is supposed to have 7 (low, medium, high, low-rising-to-medium, medium-rising-to-high, high-falling-to-medium, and medium-falling-to-low).

Many Cantonese speakers are too lazy to do high-falling-to-medium; they replace it with a simple high instead, so they speak just 6 tones instead of 7. Other Cantonese speakers talk extra-musically: they produce 9 tones or even more.

The consonant and vowel sounds are different, too.

For example, In Mandarin, the word for “I” or “me” is **wǒ**, but in Cantonese it’s **ngo**. In Mandarin, the word for “not” is **bù**, but in Cantonese it’s just the sound **m**. In Mandarin, each syllable ends with a vowel or **n, ng, or r**; in Cantonese, each syllable ends with a vowel or **n, ng, m, k, p, or t** (or a silent **h** that just means to use low tones).

Since Mandarin is so different from Cantonese, people in Hong Kong complain that Mandarin TV broadcasts to Hong Kong are as hopeless as “the chicken talking to the duck.” And Cantonese speakers have developed many local slang expressions and local characters that Mandarin folks don’t understand.

In the United States, Chinese restaurant menus show “Cantonese pinyin” names for the dishes. In China, most people speak Mandarin instead, so they won’t understand if you ask for food by Cantonese names such as “Lo mein,” “Moo shi,” and “Chow foon.”

Chinglish

Chinese grammar is much simpler than English, since Chinese has no plurals, no verb conjugations, no “the,” and no “she”.

When Chinese try to speak English, they often get confused by English grammar & vocabulary and therefore speak Chinese-confused English, called **Chinglish**.

In China, many signs are written in Chinglish. When you see a sign written in Chinglish, you can have fun guessing what it means. My friends and I saw these examples:

Sign, written in Chinglish	What the sign means
Prohibition From Greenbelt	Keep off the lawn
No Climb	Don’t climb on rocks
Do Not Clamber	Do not climb the rocks
No Naked Light	No cigarettes or other exposed flames
Mind Crotch	Low ceiling: duck your head
Fuck Class Do Not Disturb	Exercise class: do not disturb
Wine, Coffee, Cock	We serve wine, coffee, and cocktails
Breakfast	Breakfast
Sucker (Non-Hot Drink)	Straws for cold drinks
Street Of Noshery	Outdoor food court
Finely Decoration City	Fine interior-design superstore
Ratbow Hotel	Rainbow Hotel
Boardinghouse Sales	Condominium-apartment sales
Erection Engineering Co.	Construction-engineering company
Receives The Silver	Cashier
Hand Grenade	Fire extinguisher
High Grade Puke	High-quality poker cards
Pubic Toilet	Public toilet
Genitl Emen	Gentlemen’s restroom
Deformed Man	Handicapped-accessible men’s room
Children Free To Pay	Children free from paying
Question Authority	If you have questions, ask the guard
Be Care Of Safe	Be careful, for your safety
Carefully Fall To The River	Beware of falling in the river
Prevent Any Contingency	Be careful not to have an accident
Take Care of Your Slip	Be careful: slippery
Flyover Ramp	Expressway entrance
Planesketch Map	Aerial view
Scared Land	Sacred land
we Struggle For Success	We strive for success

We saw this sign —

For restrooms, go back toward your behind

which means “Restrooms are behind you.”

We saw this sign —

Help Oneself Terminating Machine

which means “ATM.”

We saw this sign —

To tak notice of safe, the slippery are very crafty

which means “Take notice, for your safety: slippery stairs require you to be very careful.”

At a temple, signs said:

Avoid conflagration
Avoid making confused noise when chanting
Please don’t be crowded

They mean:

Put out your matches and cigarettes
Be quiet while monks chant
Don’t crowd or shove

To have fun, read those Chinglish signs to your friends and see whether they can guess what the signs mean.

This Chinglish sign is written clearly but too candidly:

Hospital for Anus and Intestine Disease

So are these signs in a Gynecology & Obstetrics Department:

Cunt Examination
Fetal Heart Custody

So are these lawn signs:

Green grass dreading your feet
Show mercy to the slender grass
Don’t bother the resting little grass

So is this sign trying to say “automatic-flush toilets”:

This WC is free of washing
Please leave off after pissing or shitting

So is the comment on an ice-cream wrapper:

Kiss me, tease me, lick me, bite me,
let me melted to your heart.
From the pure chocolate taste,
for your pure heart!

When writing Chinese characters, the Chinese don’t put spaces between their words, and they don’t understand why Americans bother, so the Chinese insert spaces into English carelessly. For example, one of China’s biggest banks has a huge sign saying:

AGRICUL TURAL BANK

Many Chinese signs make the mistake of putting a space before ’s, like this:

This is Li Bai ’s home

Modern Chinese is written left-to-right (like English), but classic Chinese was written right-to-left (like Hebrew). Chinese signs can be written in either direction. Some Chinese sign-makers forget that English can’t be written right-to-left. For example, look at this sign:

thcaY taobrotom
thgiarts.oG aera gnimmiws

It means:

Motorboats, yachts, swimming area: go straight ahead

Signs by big international corporations usually have correct English. Chinglish errors occur mostly on signs written by the Chinese government and its state-owned companies.

More examples of Chinglish signs are at these Websites —

bing.com/images/search?q=chinglish
<http://blogs.transparent.com/chinese/chinglish-pictures/>
<http://abravenewway.blogspot.de/2014/04/chinglish-signs-in-chinglish-chin.html>

China tried to fix those signs, so tourists wouldn’t make fun of China during the 2008 Olympics in Beijing.

Piracy In China, many CD’s containing music or computer programs are illegal copies, with English words misspelled.

For example, the jacket of a pirated Michael Jackson CD says it includes these songs: “You are not along,” “Shake your boby,” “Sckeam,” and “Fam.” (It means “You are not alone,” “Shake your body,” “Scream,” and “Jam.”)

Places

Supposedly a melting pot, America sometimes seems more like a meltdown of minds on pot.

The U.S. culture tries to dominate the world. That's why other countries call it the **vulture culture**.

According to the Internet, the United Nations conducted a worldwide survey whose only question was:

Please give your honest opinion about the solution to the food shortage in the rest of the world.

The survey failed because nobody understood the question.

In Africa,	they didn't know what "food" meant.
In Eastern Europe,	they didn't know what "honest" meant.
In Western Europe,	they didn't know what "shortage" meant.
In China,	they didn't know what "opinion" meant.
In the Middle East,	they didn't know what "solution" meant.
In Australia,	they didn't know what "please" meant.
And in the U.S.,	they didn't know what "the rest of the world" meant.

Europeans often say:

Heaven is where the police are British, the cooks are French, the mechanics German, the lovers Italian, and it's all organized by the Swiss.

Hell is where the police are German, the cooks are British, the mechanics French, the lovers Swiss, and it's all organized by the Italians.

But one person objected:

The Swiss are the *best* lovers, because they have more holes.

An Internet chatter named "Rhov" invented this variant:

Heaven is where the dancers are Brazilian, the gardeners are Mexican, the doctors are Swedish, and the military is American.

Hell is where the dancers are American, the gardeners are Swedish, the doctors are Brazilian, and the military is Mexican.

Another chatter, named "dman," invented this:

Heaven is where the comedians are American and the bankers are Swiss.
Hell is where the bankers are American and the comedians are Swiss.

Here's how the captain of a sinking cruise ship convinces the passengers to jump overboard:

He tells the English it would be "unsporting" of them not to jump.
He tells the French it would be the "smart" thing to do.
He tells the Germans it's an "order."
He tells the Italians that jumping overboard is "forbidden."

The world keeps changing. Here's an expanded version of statements by Charles Barkley and Chris Rock, a few years ago:

You know the world is crazy when the best rapper's a white guy, the best golfer's a black guy, the NBA's tallest famous player is Chinese, the Swiss hold America's Cup, France is accusing the U.S. of arrogance, Germany doesn't want to go to war, and the 3 most powerful men in America are named "Bush," "Dick," and "Colon."

Let's look at the U.S. then its alternatives.

U.S. versus world

Jessica Booth wrote a list of 24 things foreigners consider peculiar about us in the U.S. You can read her original list & comments at Insider's Website:

[BusinessInsider.com/things-normal-in-the-us-but-considered-weird-2018-8](https://www.businessinsider.com/things-normal-in-the-us-but-considered-weird-2018-8)

She based it on comments written elsewhere, such as on this Reddit blog:

[reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/1nppqc/nonamericans_who_have_been_to_the_us_what_is_the](https://www.reddit.com/r/AskReddit/comments/1nppqc/nonamericans_who_have_been_to_the_us_what_is_the)

Here's my revision of her list, rewritten as 24 paragraphs....

National pride

We put American flags in front of our homes, businesses, and historical sites. (In other countries, national flags are displayed rarely.)

We think "America" is just the United States, so "Americans" are just people who live in the United States. (Other countries realize "America" includes all of North America, Central America, and South America, so "America" includes Canada, Mexico, Brazil, and beyond. All Canadians, Mexicans, and Brazilian are Americans!)

Units of size & time

We measure in inches, feet, yards, miles, ounces, pounds, teaspoons, tablespoons, pints, quarts, and gallons. (Other countries use the metric system: meters & grams.)

When writing a date, such as Christmas 2020, we write the month's number first: 12/25/2020. (Other countries write the date's number first: 25/12/2020.)

Money

Our money all looks alike: our \$1, \$2, \$5, \$10, \$20, \$50, and \$100 bills are all green and all the same size. (In other countries, their bills have a variety of colors & sizes, so you can notice faster which bills are worth a lot and which are worth less.)

Our advertised prices aren't usually the prices you pay, since you must usually add sales tax, which varies from state to state and city to city. So if you travel to different states & cities, you're not quite sure how much you must pay until you reach the cash register or server or online checkout button. (Instead of a sales tax, other countries have a value-added tax, which is paid by the merchant but not by the consumer, so the advertised price is what you pay, without any surcharge.)

In our restaurants, taxis, and hotels, you're supposed to donate a tip to the people who serve you. For example, in our restaurants you're supposed to give one of these tips: minimal (15%), normal (18%), generous (20%), extra-generous (25%), or wow (30%). So you need a calculator or be good at doing math in your head. Some restaurants provide calculators that are mean to you: they compute that percentage on the price of the "food plus sales tax" instead of on the price of just the food. (In other countries, tips are not expected and are considered rude.)

Our colleges charge students a lot for tuition, so graduates must repay a lot of debt. (In other countries, college is free.)

We work long hours, sometimes even while we nibble our lunches, and take very little vacation. (In other countries, employees work shorter hours, get 6 weeks of paid vacation every year, and don't work during lunch.)

Advertising

Our major TV stations show lots of commercials. (Other countries show fewer.)

TV ads tell us to yell at our doctors and demand they write prescriptions for the drug brands advertised. (In other countries, TV ads don't tell you to control your doctor.)

Our drug stores (such as CVS and Walgreens) also sell junk food, junky snacks, and shampoo. They act like convenience stores. (In other countries, drug stores are strictly pharmacies and sell just drugs.)

Food

Many of our breads contain sugar. (In other countries, breads are always sugarless.)

Our restaurants give ridiculously huge portions of food. (Other countries give smaller portions.)

Since our food portions are huge and hard to finish eating, our restaurants offer takeout containers, called “doggie bags,” to carry the excess home. (In other countries, portions are smaller, so asking for a “doggie bag” is unnecessary and considered rude.)

Drinks

We put lots of ice in our drinks. (Other countries put little or no ice in drinks, unless a customer is weird enough to request lots of ice.)

Our restaurants give free refills for drinks. (Other countries don't. To protect public health, France now makes it *illegal* for restaurants to offer unlimited free refills for soda.)

For coffee, our restaurants give big to-go cups. (Other countries drink smaller quantities and finish them in restaurants, not to-go.)

We often drink alcohol out of red plastic cups. (Other countries use red plastic cups just when throwing “American-style parties.”)

Toilets

Our toilets contain lots of water. (In other countries, toilets contain less water.)

In public bathrooms, the doors on the stalls have big gaps underneath and tiny gaps on the sides, so you can peek through and see whether the stall is occupied. (In other countries, the stalls are completely private.)

Relationships

We often start friendly conversations with strangers we meet on the street, on buses, and in waiting rooms. (In other countries, people are more reluctant to chat with strangers.)

Shortly before a woman gives birth, we give her gifts, by having a party called a “baby shower.” (Other countries don't have baby showers, though they might give her gifts at other times, much sooner or later than the birth date.)

Our women cover their breasts & bottoms whenever in public. (Other countries permit toplessness & total nudity on beaches.)

51 weirdos

Nature World Today collected this list of 51 things about the U.S. that other people think are weird:

Food

A wide variety of food is available at low prices for huge quantities.
The U.S. has more pie flavors than any other country.
The typical supermarket shows hundreds of cereal flavors to choose from.
In stores (& restaurants), food comes in huge portions, such as milk gallons.
Restaurants give free refills on coffee & soda.
Iced tea isn't sweetened unless you request sweetener.
Everything (even Oreos) can be bought deep-fried.
Food contains too much sugar.
Kids eat tubes of colored sugar, called Pixy Stix.
A restaurant chain is called “Olive Garden” and gives free breadsticks.
In the U.S. (and Mexico), people drink a lot of sugary Coca-Cola with meals.
Most tea kettles are plain, not electric (because U.S. electricity is too weak).
Kitchen sinks include garbage disposals.
In Hawaii, people eat lots of Spam.
Kinder Surprise (a chocolate egg containing a toy) is illegal in the U.S.

Health

It's called the “United” States, but some people are very fat, others very thin.
The U.S. (and New Zealand) let drug companies advertise to consumers.
When you sneeze, you can hear “Bless you!” even from strangers.

Money

You're expected to pay a tip to waiters, hairdressers, and taxi drivers.
Two-dollar bills are real but rare.

Jobs

Workers get few weeks of paid vacation.
Your boss can fire you anytime, no warning, no reason (except in Montana).
The U.S. is the only developed country without paid maternity leave.

Holidays

Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Christmas are fun family holidays.
Every Halloween, masked strangers knock at your door and demand candy.
You must celebrate Christmas (with music & lights), starting in September.
St. Patrick's Day is Irish but celebrated throughout the U.S. by wearing green.
On Black Friday, you must go to stores and fight to get discounts.

Travel

School buses are yellow.
Some states let you ride a motorcycle without wearing a helmet.
Manhattan's traffic involves lots of honking & yelling.

Colleges

Public colleges cost much more than in Europe.
College fraternities & sororities have unique parties, hazing, houses, shirts.
At college parties, students drink out of red plastic Solo cups.

Sports

Colleges have their own sports teams, especially football.
To get a scholarship to a good college, be good at sports, especially football.
Cheerleading is a professional sport.
In sports bars, people scream at the TV.
Miami's football team is named the “Dolphins.”

Pride

Flags are displayed on houses, businesses, and trucks.
People are proud to be from Texas and sing “Deep in the heart of Texas!”
Theme parks are named after celebrities, such as Dolly Parton's Dollywood.
You must say the Pledge of Allegiance in schools and government meetings.

Clothes

In Texas, Tennessee, and nearby, people still dress like cowboys.
You can wear the U.S. flag as part of your clothing, though it's illegal.

Nature

National parks offer wide variety and are amazingly beautiful & clean.
At night you see fireflies, also called “lightening bugs” and “glow worms.”
In Florida, wild alligators secretly invade backyard pools.

Lifestyle

You're expected to be friendly, outgoing, and talkative, even to strangers.
New York City actually exists, and it's huge & fast-paced.
In southern California, surfers say “dude” and “gnarly.”

Details are at:

NatureWorldToday.com/assumptions-about-america-that-were-spot-on-is

Hitler

How can you summarize the United States in just one sentence? Adolph Hitler said in 1940:

What's America but beauty queens, millionaires, stupid records, and Hollywood?

Professor Pfumpfernichel

My friend Professor Pfumpfernichel (Chancellor of the University of Pop) teaches foreigners about America. He reveals lots about America that most Americans *don't* know! Here are paragraphs from his lectures, but beware: he has a slight problem with his eyesight and hearing.

In America, people take cars, sink them in the ocean, wait for them to get rusty, then scrape off the **orange rust** and sell it in supermarkets, for you to eat! I see the signs offer you “car rots.”

American supermarkets **ban** a woman named **Ana**. They pay you an award if you see her and pound her in the face! The signs say “BAN ANA, 49¢ a pound!”

When American women get divorced, they pity their ex-husbands and send them trucks of food. The trucks have signs that brag “**Fed Ex**.” Some trucks brag they fed the ex-husbands ground beef! They brag “Fed Ex Ground.”

Americans set **puppies** on fire, boil **kittens**, grab the shit that comes out of a **rat's** rear, dunk **Germans** into acid, then *eat* all those things, while they throw penises cut off from "down there." Yes, I hear Americans say they want to eat hot **dogs** with **cat** soup, **mouse** turd, and sour **krauts** while watching a game of throwing base **balls!**

Books on how to speak English are dishonest. They say to begin a conversation by saying "Hello," but Americans never say "Hello": they say "**Hi!**" To say that properly, use a declining tone (your pitch must fall, not rise) while your right hand (not left) waves with your palm forward (not hidden), hand raised (not lowered) and rotating clockwise (not counterclockwise), making a third of a circle (not half), from the 10 o'clock to the 2 o'clock position. If you don't do that properly, people will know you're not American. If you do that properly, you stand a better chance.

Americans praise the unimportant. They praise Edison for inventing the indecent lightbulb, Lincoln for writing the Gettysburg address (even though back then it was easy, since it didn't need a ZIP code), and Eisenhower for World War 2 (even though it was just the sequel).

Americans make kids stand on the **lawn** and **cry**. I hear parents make their teenagers do "Lawn moan."

Americans like to get nude, jump into a vat of **glue**, then go naked outside until the glue darkens, becoming a tan. They want all that, free! I hear them demand "Glue tan, free!"

On highways, some exits brag they won't give you sunburn. They brag they'll give you **NO TAN**. The signs say "NOTAN EXIT." If you take that exit, my friends say the result will excite you and give you a day to remember!

American department stores sell **oral sex**. I hear their saleswomen offer "Lips dicks."

American women grab **ice-cream cones**, add sprinkles, and plop them on their breasts. I've heard them confess they have "Silly-cone breasts."

Americans want to eat **testicles**: I've heard them request "pee nuts!" Or when they request "pee nuts," maybe they just wanna be pissed on by nutty people?

To celebrate Mexicans, Americans sink **mayonnaise** into the ground. On May 5, Americans shout "Sink-o duh mayo!"

Americans fear a woman who won the beauty contest in **Quito** (which is Ecuador's capital). I hear Americans say they fear "Miss Quito might come."

Americans want to play musical instruments. But instead of stroking a violin, they'd rather make music by stroking a big fish! A violin needs to be **tuned**, and so does a fish. I hear many Americans want this: "Tune a fish!"

Which state is completely surrounded by water?
Hawaii.

Which 3 states are totally artificial (no border has a river, lake, or ocean)?
Utah, Colorado, and Wyoming.

Where's the southernmost point in the United States of America?
American Samoa (which is in the Pacific Ocean, south of the equator).

Americans often forget where the rest of the world is. For example, Americans forget these facts:

Europe is as far north as Canada, though warmed by the Gulf Stream. For example, Venice (in warm Italy) is farther north than Halifax (in Canada's Nova Scotia).

South America is east of the United States. For example, if you go straight south from Florida's Key West, which South American country do you hit? The answer is: none! You're west of all of South America!

The shortest way to fly from the United States to Europe (or Northern Africa or Asia) is to fly north, across or near the North Pole. For example, the shortest way to fly from Miami (in Florida) to Casablanca (in Africa's Morocco) is to fly near Maine. The state closest to Africa is Maine, not Florida. To see that clearly, buy a globe; don't trust maps, which distort distances.

More geography puzzles & facts are in the geography chapter of Peter Winkler's *Mathematical Puzzles*. (The other chapters are about advanced math.)

And now, from **DOSJOKL** (the Department of Stupid Jokes Only Kids Love), here's a geography riddle:

Why won't you starve in the Sahara desert?
Answer: Because of the sandwiches there. (Read that out loud.)

Capital quiz

Here's a list of country capitals, but each is spelled or spaced wrong. Can you fix each? And name its country?

Roam	Mask cow	Have Anna	Car, rock us!
Soul	Hamster dam	Tear Ann	Bare root
Burn	Nude deli	Die! Pay!	Beige-ing
Annoy	Bang cock	Damn! Ask us!	Triple E
A man	Bag dad	Mad! Rid!	Hell! Sink? E-e-e!
War saw	Book a rest	Nah, saw!	Can bear? Uh?
At hens	Boo da pest!	Ah, slow!	Jack cart! Uh?
Washing done	Al jeers	Cat man, do!	Man hill! Uh?
Land done	Pair hiss	Is llama bad?	Man nag. Wha?
King's done	Dub Lynn	Bra's ill? Yah!	Odder. Wha?
	Br-r-r! Lynn!	Toe-key. Oh!	Keto

Here are the answers — but don't peek until you take that quiz!

Rome Italy, Seoul South Korea, Bern Switzerland, Hanoi Vietnam
Amman Jordan, Warsaw Poland, Athens Greece, Washington United States
London United Kingdom, Kingston Jamaica, Moscow Russia
Amsterdam Netherlands, New Delhi India, Bangkok Thailand
Baghdad Iraq, Bucharest Romania, Budapest Hungary, Algiers Algeria
Paris France, Dublin Ireland, Berlin Germany, Havana Cuba, Tehran Iran
Taipei Taiwan, Damascus Syria, Madrid Spain, Nassau Bahamas
Oslo Norway, Kathmandu Nepal, Islamabad Pakistan, Brasilia Brazil
Tokyo Japan, Caracas Venezuela, Beirut Lebanon, Beijing China
Tripoli Libya, Helsinki Finland, Canberra Australia, Jakarta Indonesia
Manila Philippines, Managua Nicaragua, Ottawa Canada, Quito Ecuador

Geography

To challenge your friends, ask these tricky questions about U.S. geography:

What's the most populous city that's east of Reno and west of Denver?
Kids think the answer is Salt Lake City or Las Vegas, but the correct answer is Los Angeles.

Not counting Alaska, which state goes farthest north?
Kids think the answer is Maine, but the correct answer is Minnesota.

Which state is closest to Africa?
Kids think the answer is Florida, but the correct answer is Maine.
To prove it, look at a globe (not a traditional map, which is distorted).

Which state has the point that's farthest from Hawaii?
Kids think the answer is Maine, but the correct answer is Florida.
To prove it, look at a globe (not a traditional map, which is distorted).

What's the only Midwestern state whose name is not derived from a Native American word? The correct answer, ironically, is Indiana, since all the other Midwestern states — Minnesota, Wisconsin, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Michigan, Ohio, Kansas, and Nebraska — have Native American origin.

Which 2 states are the most crowded (have the densest population)?
New Jersey and Rhode Island.

Which 2 states are the least crowded (have the least dense population)?
Alaska and Wyoming.

Which state has the most states on its border?
It's a tie: Missouri and Tennessee each touch 8 states.

What's the only spot where 4 states meet?
The corner of Utah, Colorado, New Mexico, and Arizona.

Vermont

Vermont is a bunch of farmers manipulated by outsiders.

Even the name "Vermont" was invented by an outsider, Dr. Thomas Young of Pennsylvania, in 1777. Since the place was full of green mountains and a bunch of radicals called "Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys," Dr. Young named it "Vermont," which is archaic French for "Green Mountain." He named it in French instead of English to make the place sound as high-falutin' as a French restaurant.

“Ethan Allen and the Green Mountain Boys” tried to keep Vermont independent from the evil colonies of New York and New Hampshire, which wanted to capture it. Vermont stayed an independent republic until 1791, when it became the 14th state.

For a while, Vermont was full of dairy farms and had more cows than people. During the 1970’s, many hippies from New York moved to Vermont to get away from the city rat race and commune with nature. They tried to become farmers but discovered they were more successful at milking tourists than cows. Many tourists visit Vermont in the fall to see the leaves turn color while the cows moo.

Ben & Jerry

Ben and Jerry were a pair of New York Jewish hippies, both born in Brooklyn, 4 days apart. In 1977 they moved to Vermont, where they started a factory that turned Vermont milk into fattening ice-cream for hoity-toity New Yorkers, who felt less guilty about getting fat because Ben & Jerry gave them just tiny portions and donated part of the profits to liberal causes. In the year 2000, the company became secretly owned by Unilever, a Dutch-English conglomerate.

Farmer talk

Vermont farmers have an amazing gift of language. They talk in a slow drawl that’s very effective at deflating the egos of their natural enemies, such as bureaucrats, academicians, lost drivers, tourists, spendthrifts, New Hampshirites, and Texans.

Vermonters versus the bureaucrat This is a true tale. A Vermonter fell off the roof of a barn and died. The insurance company gave his family a death certificate to fill out. The certificate was long and complicated. At the bottom of the certificate was a space labeled “remarks.” For “remarks,” the family wrote, “He didn’t make none.”

Vermonters versus the academician A Vermonter riding a train struck up a conversation with the passenger next to him, who happened to be a Harvard professor. The Vermonter admired the Harvard professor’s brilliance, and the Harvard professor admired the Vermonter’s common sense.

The professor suggested a contest to see who could “stump” the other person. The person who couldn’t answer the question would have to pay 50¢.

“Okay,” said the Vermonter, “but since you’re so much smarter, I think it would be fairer for you to pay me a dollar.”

“Okay,” agreed the Harvard professor. “You go first.”

“Well,” said the Vermonter, “What has 3 legs and flies?”

“I give up,” said the Harvard professor. “Here’s your dollar. What’s the answer?”

“Darned if I know,” replied the Vermonter. “Here’s your 50¢!”

Vermonters versus the lost driver Walter Piston (a famous Harvard music professor) was driving through Vermont, got to a fork in the road, and asked a Vermonter, “Does it make any difference which road I take?” The Vermonter replied, “Not to me, it doesn’t.”

Vermonters versus the tourist Many tourists visit Vermont in the summer. One of them told a Vermonter, “You have a lot of peculiar people around here.” The Vermonter replied, “Yep, but most are gone by mid-September.”

Vermonters versus the spendthrift Vermonters don’t like to spend money. Vermont legislators say, “When in doubt, vote no. Let’s not get something we don’t need and pay for it with money we don’t have.”

Vermonters versus New Hampshire Robert Frost wrote a long poem called *New Hampshire*, which proclaimed page after page of praise for New Hampshire’s beauty. But to

understand the poem’s true meaning, you must read the last line, which says simply and proudly, “I live in Vermont.”

Vermonters versus the Texan A Vermonter was chatting with a Texan, whose drawling wisdom was no match for the Vermonter’s.

Texan: What kind of farm ya got?

Vermonters: Oh, I got a coupla acres.

Texan: Why, why that’s a *piddlin’* small farm. Why, where ah come from, ah kin git in mah car and drive *half a day*, befo’ ah git ta the end of mah farm!

Vermonters: Yup, I had a car like that myself, once.

Recorded tales Those tales were collected by Al Foley, a Dartmouth College history professor who became a member of the Vermont legislature and president of the Vermont Historical Society. He speaks on a 33 RPM record called *A Vermont Heritage*.

New Hampshire

Like most Americans seeking adventurous fun, I moved to New Hampshire, the laughable state nicknamed “New Ha-ha.”

Laws

New Hampshire’s the most libertarian state. It believes in the fewest laws. The state’s motto is “Live free or die,” uttered by General Stark centuries ago and interpreted by modern New Hampshirites to mean “Get the government off our backs.”

Taxes New Hampshire brags that it has **no sales tax, no income tax, and no other “broad-based tax,”** which means “no tax affecting everybody.”

That sounds great and makes many idiots move here. After moving, we discover that the Machiavellis who run the government created many “little” taxes that affect “just a few” people. Here are little examples:

There’s a hefty 9% tax on “restaurant meals, hotel rooms, and rented cars.” But that’s not called a “broad-based” tax, since it affects just tourists (or natives who act like tourists).

There’s a huge “real-estate transfer” tax on buying a house and a huge “property” tax on using your house after you’ve bought it. But they aren’t considered “broad-based” taxes, since you can always live in an apartment instead. (Then your landlord has to pay the hidden 9% “room rental” tax; but that’s his problem, not yours.)

There’s a huge tax on registering your car. But instead you can jog or use a bicycle or skates — or take a bus, if you don’t mind waiting several hours for the bus to show up. (In New Hampshire, searching for a bus is like searching for a Puerto Rican: it requires sleuthing.)

There’s also an “interest & dividends tax” (for people who earn lots of money from bank interest or stocks), a “business profits tax” (for businesses that make a lot of money), and a “telecommunications tax” (on your phone bill). But you can avoid them if you have no money, no business, and no phone, so they’re not called “broad-based” taxes.

So in New Hampshire, you can “live free of taxes” just if you hide under a rock.

No restrictions In New Hampshire, you can do whatever you want, if you don’t get dangerously huffy about it.

For example, **you can drive a car without getting a driver’s license.** I was really surprised about that. When my stepdaughter wanted to learn how to drive, I asked the Department of Motor Vehicles about how to get her a “learner’s permit,” so she could practice; but the Department said she didn’t need one: she could just go ahead and drive. The only restriction is that a licensed driver must be next to her in the front seat and she has to say she’s “learning.”

In New Hampshire, **you don’t need car insurance** — unless

you're such a dangerous driver that the state declares you an exception. So I don't have car insurance. I don't have home insurance or general health insurance either. If my car hits you, or you trip on my lawn, just take me to court and take my house. Then I'll have the pleasure of sitting outside and not having to pay the property tax.

New Hampshire is the only state where **you don't need to wear a seat belt** if you're an adult, even if you're the driver. New Hampshire believes you have the God-given right to kill yourself on the highway. Seatbelts are required just for kids under 18, who are too young to appreciate the finer pleasures of suicide.

If you want to ride a motorcycle dangerously, go ahead: **you don't need to wear a helmet**. Massachusetts bikers love to come to New Hampshire and discard their helmets when they reach our border, so they can feel the wind blowing in their hair — and later feel their heads bobbling on the asphalt. As a result, New Hampshire is the state that has the most motorcycles per 1000 people.

Want to buy a gun? No problem. Just go to a store, say you want to buy a gun, and in less than half an hour you've got it. You don't need a license: just wait the half hour for the store's computer to check you're not a felon.

You can carry a gun with you, loaded, practically anywhere you wish, without a license — even into your local bank or convenience store. The only restriction is you can't take it onto a plane or into certain government buildings. If you carry a loaded gun, just make sure it's visible, so everybody can see it and get properly scared and nervous: don't hide it! (If you want to hide it, you must remove the bullets first, so you don't get arrested for carrying a "concealed loaded weapon.") But if you're stupid enough to carry a loaded visible gun into a bank or convenience store, be prepared to get tackled by a nervous rookie policeman — who'll then apologize to you for having impinged on your New Hampshire rights.

If you don't want to pay a highway toll, you don't have to. That's because New Hampshire lawmakers made a mistake when writing the highway-toll law, and they're too lazy to fix it. The law accidentally says it's illegal for New Hampshire to arrest you for not throwing coins into the toll basket.

Want to kill your mom? Well, that's against the law. We New Hampshireites need to have some limits! But it's okay to strangle a squirrel.

Politics New Hampshire is run mainly by Republicans who tote guns. But they're kind enough to donate shelters to Democrats who escaped from Boston when Boston's real estate got too expensive for normal folks to live in.

For a while, the Republicans were kind enough to let a Democrat lady become governor. She was a kind lady who believed in education. When she had trouble balancing her budget, she decided the fairest solution was to add a sales tax and income tax. The voters decided the fairest solution was to get rid of her. They did. So we still have no sales tax and no income tax. We also got a new governor — Republican, of course — who still couldn't balance the budget, so he got voted out too. The next governor was a Democrat (John Lynch) who succeeded — for 4 terms — by being quiet, so nobody could object to him. Next came a Democrat woman (Maggie Hassan), whose husband ran prestigious prep school (Phillips Exeter Academy); but she didn't really want to be the governor, and her husband got in trouble for being too kind to a bad employee, so she became a U.S. Senator instead. Now voters elected a Republican (Chris Sununu), whose dad was governor back in the 1980's.

Since I'm a Democrat, I'm morally required by the Democrat religion to believe the fairest tax is an *income* tax, since it taxes the rich more than the poor. But I admit I secretly enjoy the evil

pleasure of being in New Hampshire, since it's sure nice to avoid the bureaucratic hassles of figuring sales tax and income tax and filling those stupid forms all you Non-Hampshirites must fill each year.

My friends back in Massachusetts love to taunt me by reminding me that "New Hampshire is great place to live, as long as you don't have a handicapped kid or break a leg or need any other kind of social service." New Hampshire ain't keen on offering such services. Remember the New Hampshire motto: "Live free or die," which means:

If you're not good enough to live freely, just go die — or move to Massachusetts. Let *them* take care of you!

Snow

In New Hampshire, God is a frustrated artist: He keeps trying to draw out the perfect snowstorm. He keeps dumping his efforts on us in His attempt to create the perfect snow landscape but never quite gets it right. Finally, one day, the frustrated Deity of Dramatic Weather gives up, smiles, and breaks out singing:

I can't get snow satisfaction —
And I try, and I try, and I try, and I try.
I can't get snow —
Snow, snow, snow!

Then He creates — for His finale — one final gigantic snowstorm, called "The Oy's of March."

Afterwards, he takes His bow. That's called "spring." The flowers come up and applaud his past achievements but are secretly relieved to see the concert's over.

Oops! I said the forbidden word "spring"! I shouldn't have said that. In New Hampshire, we're not allowed to say "spring." Natives say instead, "It's the mud season," because that's when the snow starts melting and all the shit is sopping wet. Each "yard" becomes a series of rivers and waterfalls running under the snow — until finally old man Sun gets really hot and angry and lets the birds chirp. But then "The Old Man in the Mountain" (New Hampshire's godlike mountain stone face, still alive in spirit) gets grumpy, tells the birds to shut up, and throws snow on them — for many days in a row — in April or May. That's called "Whitey's surprise party."

In New Hampshire each year, the weatherman admits again that "March came in like a lion and went out like a moose: a big, lumbering surprise whose journey was unpredictable."

In other states, pixies sing "April showers bring May flowers." In New Hampshire, we sing "April crud brings May mud."

But if life here weren't an adventurous challenge, why would anyone come?

During what month does snow here start? The answer is: "Whenever you don't expect it." For example, on a bright, sunny day in mid-October, I was foolish enough to ask my neighbor Tom (a policeman who's lived here for many years) when snow would start. He said, "December or late November, but never before November 15th." I shouldn't have asked. Just asking the question sealed my fate: the very week I asked, it snowed many times, to drive home the point that newbies shouldn't ask such stupid questions. It also reminded me that to find out what goes on here, don't ask a policeman.

While other states have a storm that "rains cats and dogs," in New Hampshire it "snows bears and moose."

Since our gigantic storms hit us unpredictably, here's how we New Hampshireites chat with our next-door neighbors:

"What's new?" "What snow!"
"What now?" "Don't know!"
"Here it comes!" "Here we go!"
"Holy cow!" "Holy Mo'!"

During winters, New Hampshire farmers don't say "Have a nice day." Instead they say, "Have an iced hay." That sounds the

same but is more realistic, since you can never have a “nice day” during a New Hampshire winter.

Dartmouth College

New Hampshire’s most famous college is Dartmouth. It was started centuries ago as a missionary school to teach Indians about religion and English. None of the Indians got to speak English real well, but the best of the bunch was sent to England to try to raise donations. His pitch was, basically, “Me Indian. Me speak English. You want more Indians to speak English? Give money.” Nobody gave very much. The idiot who gave the most was the Earl of Dartmouth, so they decided to name the college after him, in the hopes he’d give more. He never gave another cent.

Like New Hampshire weather, Dartmouth College is full of extremes: a hotbed of liberals peppered with silly arch-conservatives. For example, the arch-conservative student who lived down the hall from me hung a Confederate flag on one wall, hung a Rhodesian flag on the other, and wore an upside-down peace button showing a bomber and the words “Drop it!”

When Democrats vying to be U.S. president visit New Hampshire, they love to give speeches at Dartmouth College, so the college liberals will cheer them and make them feel good. The rest of the state, which is mainly Republican, ignores them.

Manchester

I live in New Hampshire’s biggest city, which is spelled “Manchester” but pronounced “Manch has duh.” That pronunciation summarizes the city: Manch has, duh, stupid people. When I lived in Boston, I had the pleasure of chatting with advanced Harvard and M.I.T. students about the meaning of life; but now I’m stuck in Manchester, where the main intellectual question is:

Who has the greenest lawn — and why?

At first glance, Manchester is just a dying mill town, full of abandoned boarded-up textile mills along the river. But at second glance, Manchester is... still an abandoned mill town. Not until you take a third glance do you realize Manchester is full of secrets, such as:

It’s the only U.S. city whose main street has two dead ends. That’s one reason why Manchester is called “dead-end city.” The other reason is that living in Manchester will make your career go nowhere — like mine.

The only famous person who grew up in Manchester is comedian Adam Sandler. When he was a high-school student, he insisted in history class that Abraham Lincoln was Jewish, because the textbook said Lincoln was shot “in the temple.”

Though Manchester is New Hampshire’s “biggest city,” it’s small: just 110,000 people. Most of them live in suburban-style houses and within a 10-minute drive of each other.

Manchester has the best buffet deals, because of endless buffet wars here. The current buffet-war winner is Great Buffet, which stuffs you with unlimited high-quality American, Chinese, and sushi for just \$6.99 (if you’re smart enough to come at lunchtime).

Manchester has the best deals on foot-long sandwiches. The winners are the foot-long veggie at the Subway inside Wal-Mart and the pastrami sub at the Mobil gas station near my house.

Though Manchester is small and in Yankee territory, it includes ridiculously many foreign restaurants: Italian, Greek, Mexican, Portuguese, Brazilian, Chinese, Thai, Polynesian, Japanese, Vietnamese, Korean, Indian, Nepalese, and French Canadian.

Nobody living in Manchester really wants to be here, but people live here anyway because the housing is cheap, there’s no sales tax, and Manchester is just an hour from each kind of fun: Boston, the ocean, the lakes, the mountains, and skiing.

Manchester has New England’s best airport, offering cheap, fast parking (\$2) and discount airfares (on Southwest Airlines and competitors).

Manchester is where you could find the house decorated to look like a piano: the chimney’s bricks are painted to look like a giant piano keyboard.

Manchester has New England’s best newspaper: it’s a weekly, called *The Hippo*.

Manchester contains many cultures:

It has houses with big lawns, for the rich.

It has low-cost apartments, for the poor.

It has hotels, for tourists en route to fall foliage, winter skiing, summer hiking, and presidential candidates.

It has a drag strip full of shopping malls, surrounded by huge parking lots to hold **Massholes** (visitors who come from Massachusetts to avoid sales tax).

It has a downtown full of shops, restaurants, and wild bars (where bands perform and slutty girls gamble their lives away, giving Manchester the nickname **ManchVegas**).

It has a quiet lake, where visitors relax and residents get their drinking water. (Please don’t piss in the pool!)

It has a riverbank lined with hundreds of abandoned textile mills, which developers quickly turn into industrial-chic restaurants and other “playgrounds for the rich.”

South of Manchester, you see hoards of Democrats who wanted to keep living in Massachusetts but could no longer afford Massachusetts’ expensive housing. North of Manchester, you see rustic tribes of Republican outdoorsmen who want government to “leave them alone”: they hate Democrat socialists. Manchester is the dividing line between those two cultures, where the Democrats and Republicans clash.

Manchester is where you could find the hotel on which this poem is based:

The Fleabag Hotel

Police just released me. I’d nowhere to go —
Just dumped in the park in the rain in the dark.
I asked fine hotels, “Have you room?” They said “No,
The rooms are all taken for kids’ graduation.”

A cabbie said, “Sonny, I’ll show you a door
That always has room — like a bride for her groom.”
Just 5 minutes later, we got there. Oh, swell:
I found myself joining the Fleabag Hotel.

Atop a high hill overlooking its prey,
The Fleabag Hotel guarantees a bad day.
For victims who enter, there’s no other way:
You pay for your stay and then pray you’re okay.

Your life is real Hell at the Fleabag Hotel,
Where each ne’er-do-well gives his personal yell.
Broke bums join this hole when they’re out on the dole;
Cute toughs grab this goal when they’re out on parole:
Their violence beams to your eyes, which can’t nod.
You hear ev’ry bod say “Fuck you!” and “Oh, God!”

Stained carpets, gray foam make this “home” far from home.
The water pipes groan as the banged-up girls moan.
The lights on the fritz make the danger signs flash.
All paint’s peeling off. “We take cards, checks, and cash”:
The man at the desk tries to sell a night’s rest.
Your chest fills with screams in your night beyond dreams.

The ceilings all leak, dripping yellow from rain.
The floors kindly creak, just to harmonize pain.
Don’t breathe when you’re there, or you’ll take in the stench
Of old cigarettes and each weary whipped wench.
The bathrooms’ black mold covers curtains and walls.
No “tissue rolls” there, so you’ll *scratch* ass and balls.

The curtains, too short, don’t quite hide you from peeps
By gangs who come round to turn losers to weeps.
The phones never work: “You don’t call police, please.”
The exits are locked, so don’t try to run. Freeze,
And hope for the best as you hear clanging chains
All strike, just to test how your neighbors take pains.

You come for a treat, but you leave feeling beat
From bright candy canes that sure mess up your brains.
The girls who were slain in the bed where you’ve lain
Shall haunt you with blood that was poured down your drain.
I don’t understand all this. Neither should you.
Just stay far away, so you won’t be there too.

Okay, I confess I exaggerated a bit: not *all* the rooms have blood in the drains.

Boston

Years ago, I moved to Boston and made it my home town. Here's why.

Who lives in Boston?

Boston is America's most intellectual city. It bulges with about 100 wonderful colleges, and its suburbs contain others that are even more prestigious, such as Harvard University, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.), Wellesley College, and Tufts University.

M.I.T. is New England's top engineering school. Most students at M.I.T. are tops in engineering (and science & math) but weak in humanities. Many students at Harvard are the opposite: bright in humanities but weak in science & math. Hence this incident:

At a supermarket, a young man buying 13 items enters the express-checkout lane. The cashier says, "You must be from Harvard or M.I.T." The man says, "Yes! How did you know?" The cashier points to the "12 items or less" sign and says, "You're from Harvard (so you can't count) or M.I.T. (so you can't read)."

Boston subways are packed with students. The main subway station treats you to free music by student musicians.

In Boston subways, the image is "students" — unlike New York subways, where the image is "drunks."

Many Bostonians are escapees from New Jersey. As youngsters, they lived in New Jersey, graduated from fine high schools there, and got admitted to prestigious Boston-area universities. When they graduated from the universities, they'd fallen so in love with Boston that they didn't want to leave, so they decided to live in Boston permanently. On the walls of their Boston apartments, they hang Kliban's cartoon showing a man running away from a smokestack and entitled "Houdini escaping from New Jersey."

Though Boston can charm you awhile, many Bostonians eventually move beyond it, to Maine's countryside, just a few hours away. Maine is populated mainly by escapees from Boston, just as Boston is populated by escapees from New Jersey. Ornithologists call that the "migration pattern of creative humans."

Before escaping to Maine, intellectual students are torn between a love of Boston and a love of San Francisco, whose suburbs include the great universities of Berkeley and Stanford. But San Francisco is worse than Boston in 3 ways: its monotonously foggy climate denies you the thrill of seeing golden sunshine and snowstorms; its steep hills, like warts, prevent you from jogging across the city smoothly; and it lacks Boston's old-world charm. On the other hand, Bostonians visiting San Francisco are forced to confess that compared to San Francisco, Boston is a third-world country, technologically and socially 3 years behind.

Visitors

Boston is a magnet that draws visitors from all over the world. We get to shake hands with proud parents (of Harvard students), French Canadians (coming "south" to Boston to spend an enjoyable day), history buffs (gaping at the birthplace of the American Revolution with its Boston Massacre, the Boston Tea Party, Paul Revere's ride, and Battle of Bunker Hill), engineers (analyzing the high-tech companies encircling Boston), and nature lovers (wandering through Boston while searching for beautiful fall foliage).

Yes, they come from all over. On the sideway leading up to my Boston apartment, I even found a matchbook saying, "Toot'n Totum is the only home-owned chain of convenience food stores in Amarillo." I feel proud that my sidewalk's magnanimous enough to receive litter from Amarillo, Texas.

What Europe gave Boston

Boston is America's most European city. The street I've lived on is so pretty and quaint that my visitors believe they've been magically transported to an English fairy tale.

Boston has a history of being loads of fun, beginning with how the city got its name. Centuries ago, England had a saint called "Saint Botolph," who started a town called "Botolph's town," which got shortened to "Bo's town," then further shortened to "Boston." That's how the English city of Boston got its name. America's Boston was named after England's.

Neighbors

Boston's a patchwork of hundreds of tiny neighborhoods, each 4 blocks long and a fascinating microcosm of society.

The most famous neighborhoods are:

the **Combat Zone** (the red-light district), **Chinatown** (next to the Combat Zone), **Haymarket** (where Italians stand on the sidewalk to peddle fruits and meats), **Hanover Street** (where Italians beg you to come in their restaurants and pastry shops), **Quincy Market** (a paradise full of singles bars, hand-held foods, and lunchtime sunshine for secretaries), **Newbury Street** (where rich bitches buy uppity clothes, while the wish-we-were-rich gaze longingly from cafés), **Bay Village** (where gay men live in cute houses), the **Fenway** (the park for gay flowers and gay men), **Northeastern University** (where blue-collar students drag Africans, Iranians, and Venezuelans down to their level), **Beacon Hill's south side** (where the richest Bostonians live), and **Beacon Hill's north side** (whose slopes are as severe as San Francisco's, with charming houses hopelessly subdivided into teensy apartments for students).

But those neighborhoods are just the obvious ones. Walk 4 blocks in any direction, and you'll discover yet another neighborhood!

Moreover, in Boston, every single block has its own character — and its inhabitants are proud of it. Whenever a Bostonian reveals his address, he gives it with pride.

My own neighborhood I lived in Boston on Saint Botolph Street, which years ago became famous for its prostitutes. One of my elderly readers sent me a letter admitting that while a student back in the 1940's, he flunked his freshman year at M.I.T. because he spent too much time on Saint Botolph Street.

The prostitutes eventually left Saint Botolph Street and moved to lush pastures, but the street's reputation lives on, and it's attracted a strange bunch of folks — such as me!

My own neighbors My neighbors on Saint Botolph Street were lots of fun.

Down the hall from me was a pair of bedrooms whose occupants shared my kitchen and bath. That pair of bedrooms became home to many of Boston's finest citizens:

"Mr. Neat" turned on the iron, rested it on the wood floor, then went off to work. (I guess he thought he was hot stuff — or am I just being ironic?)

"Mr. Drunk" came home every night at 3AM, turned on the oven, put his TV dinner into the oven, then flopped into bed with the oven still on — so each night I was awakened by a smoke cloud engulfing my building.

"Mr. Sportsman" put a dartboard on his door and threw darts at it, to discover how many times he'd miss the board. Then he complained to the landlady about how his door was full of holes.

"Mr. Clean" insisted on hanging his towel inside the bathtub, complained we got it wet, and retaliated by throwing water on everybody else's towel every day.

"Mr. Honeymooner" borrowed a few hundred bucks from me for his honeymoon — and never came back.

"Mr. Gay" loved to cuddle his gay boyfriend in the kitchen.

"Mr. Gone" simply disappeared. At the end of the year, on December 31, when his lease ran out, he vanished. His parents and employer asked me where he went. I opened his room and found everything covered by a layer of cigarette butts, beer bottles, unread mail, shredded newspapers, and unwashed clothes, which when sniffed indicated they'd been unwashed for at least 6 months. On the wall, he'd hung all mirrors backward, so he wouldn't have to look at himself. His personal effects were all there, but *he* was missing. We shrugged our shoulders, figured a suicide, and wondered how to tell his parents. Since a new tenant was coming the next day, we tried hard to clean the room and hide his effects fast. Several weeks later, the "dear departed" phoned us and said just "Sorry, but I had to get away."

Those characters living down the hall can't compare to the neighbors in the adjacent buildings.

For example, one night at 7PM, while I was lying in bed after a hard day's work, I heard someone yell "Jump!" I looked out my window, and saw a guy jump out the window next to mine. His whole building was on fire. The 5-alarm fire needed 11 fire trucks to put out the blaze. The building was totally ruined; but we weren't surprised, since it was the 5th fire there in 5 months. We figured it was arson for insurance money. Sure enough, the building was converted (at no expense to the landlord) into one of Boston's finest condos.

The building on the other side of me also burned to the ground, in a dramatic blaze that was the highlight of the 11PM news. That building's occupants escaped by athletically leaping from their windows into ours. The poor guys in our own building were shockingly awakened from sleep by guys leaping into their windows while shouting "Fire!"

It was probably arson again, since it had the same result: the building was replaced with one of Boston's finest condos.

So now I have condos on both sides of me. That's how Boston's neighborhoods improve.

But before that latest fire, I got a real kick out of the people who lived in that building:

"Miss Bouncy" jumped out of the 4th-floor window to escape from her sister — and survived because she bounced off the roof of a car.

"Mr. Drummer" got up each morning at 5AM and tuned his steel drum. He sure knew native rhythms, since he made all his neighbors howl at him and gyrate violently while hoisting their weapons.

"Mr. Beater" loved to beat his dog for howling out the window. His neighbors achieved similar pleasures by beating their wives and babies.

In that building, the main source of income was drugs and fencing stolen goods. Truly an outstanding tribe of entrepreneurs!

But in that building, my favorite family was the one where mom and dad would disappear each day and leave their two 5-year-old girls alone in the apartment.

Those two cute little girls spent the whole day there, every day, smoking cigarettes — except whenever they left their room, climbed up on the roof, and pretended to jump off. I'd give them a friendly wave from my window, and they'd wave back. To solidify the friendship, they came over to my building, found the circuit breaker, turned off all my building's electricity, then lit my building on fire by cleverly setting a match to the lobby's rug.

When my landlady tried to explain to them that nice little girls don't set fires to buildings, those two cute little girls told her, "Go away, ya old biddy!" When my landlady told their mom they'd been lighting fires, their mom said it was impossible because the girls couldn't get matches. When I told the mom her girls were indeed using her matches daily to light cigarettes, she wasn't upset that her girls had been smoking, playing with matches, and lighting fires; instead, she was thrilled to find out why she was always short of matches.

When the police investigated, they found her tiny room housed not just her two daughters but also her many boyfriends and a big collection of scattered whiskey bottles. The police took the girls into protective custody. Shortly afterwards, the girls' building burned, totally. I wonder why.

Edwin Arlington Robinson

When I was hunting for a room to live in, I happened to wind up at "92 Saint Botolph Street," because it was fine but cheap. After moving in, I discovered that one of my neighbors was one of my heroes: the famous poet Edwin Arlington Robinson lived just a few doors away, at 99 Saint Botolph Street. Years earlier, when I was a high-school kid in New Jersey, I loved reading his poems, so I was thrilled to discover he lived just a few doors away. Unfortunately, he died 22 years before I was born. We were both tortured writers.

In case you don't remember who he was, here are my **abridged versions** of poems he wrote in 1897, as part of his book called *The Children of the Night*....

Recite this poem when you're jealous of a rich person or think of killing yourself:

Richard Cory

Whenever Richard Cory went downtown,
We people on the pavement looked at him:
He was a gentleman from sole to crown,
Clean favored, and imperially slim.

And he was always quietly arrayed,
And he was always human when he talked;
But still he fluttered pulses when he said
"Good morning," and he glittered when he walked.

And he was rich — yes, richer than a king —
And admirably schooled in every grace:
In fine, we thought that he was everything
To make us wish that we were in his place.

So on we worked, and waited for the light,
And went without the meat, and cursed the bread;
And Richard Cory, one calm summer night,
Went home and put a bullet through his head.

Recite this **villanelle** (poem with repeated lines) when you move out of your home (or the White House's

occupant changes at the end of the 4-year term, or the House of Representatives goes on vacation):

The House on the Hill

They are all gone away,
The House is shut and still,
There is nothing more to say.

Through broken walls and gray
The winds blow bleak and shrill:
They are all gone away.

Nor is there one today
To speak them good or ill:
There is nothing more to say.

There is ruin and decay
In the House on the Hill:
They are all gone away,
There is nothing more to say.

Give this retort if your friends complain you waste too much time writing poetry instead of making big bucks:

Dear Friends

Dear friends, reproach me not for what I do,
Nor counsel me, nor pity me; nor say
That I am wearing half my life away
For bubble-work that only fools pursue.

And if my bubble be too small for you,
Blow bigger than your own:
Remember, if you will,
The shame I win for singing is all mine,
The gold I miss for dreaming is all yours.

Boston's old-world charm keeps getting struck by lightning thoughts from its professors and students:

Boston

How Boston always like a friend appears,
And always in the sunrise by the sea!
And over it, somehow, there seems to be
A downward flash of something new and fierce,
That ever *strives* to clear (but never clears)
The dimness of a charmed antiquity.

Street people

As you walk down Boston streets, you'll meet the Dickensian characters who give Boston its special charm.

For example, a guy on Boylston Street wears a green plastic garbage bag on his head. An art professor named "Sidewalk Sam" has painted beautiful pictures on the sidewalk. "Mr. Yankee Doodle" has the amazing ability to whistle Yankee Doodle so loudly that he can be heard for many blocks — but with his mouth nearly closed, so nobody knows he's the culprit. Another guy sports a black beard, black sunglasses, black cap, and black shopping bag and spends his whole life standing against a wall.

Friendliness

Boston is friendlier than New York. In New York, everybody is distrustful, expects to get ripped off or mugged, and lives in fear. In Boston, muggings are equally popular and prices are even higher — but nobody minds, because Boston's crooks all smile.

Boston is more manageable than New York. New York is too big: it overwhelms. Boston's buildings are shorter and its neighborhoods tinier, so a brief walk through Boston lets you feel you've mastered it all. In Boston, you feel you own the city; in New York, you feel the city owns you.

Fantasyland

My dad called Boston a "toy city" because of its tiny buildings, tiny neighborhoods, and tiny inhabitants (mainly kids who are students). He preferred New York, which he called the "real" city. (Cynics call New York the "real" mess!)

I love Boston, because I love to live in fantasyland.

Boston's in Massachusetts, whose biggest fantasy was George McGovern. In the 1972 Presidential election, Massachusetts was the only state that voted for McGovern instead of Richard Nixon. After Nixon won, botched Watergate, and had to resign, Massachusetts cars sported proud bumper stickers saying, "Don't blame me — I'm from Massachusetts!"

Weather

Boston is the 3rd windiest city in the United States. It's much windier than Chicago. The only U.S. cities windier than Boston are Oklahoma City and Butte Montana (if you don't count Washington D.C.'s windbag politicians).

Boston's average wind speed is 12½ miles per hour. But that "average" is misleading. Sometimes, the air is perfectly still. At many other times, the wind whips by at 100 miles per hour — especially near Boston's Hancock Tower.

Boston's in New England, where the weather continually changes, quickly and unpredictably. Back in the 1800's, Mark Twain said, "If you don't like New England's weather, wait a minute." He also said:

The weatherman confidently checks off what today's weather is going to be on the Pacific, down South, in the Middle States, in the Wisconsin region. See him sail along in the joy and pride of his power till he gets to New England, then see his tail drop. He doesn't know what the weather's going to be in New England. He mulls over it and by and by gets out something like this: "Probable northeast to southwest winds, varying to the southward, westward, eastward, and points between; high & low barometer swapping around from place to place; probable areas of rain, snow, hail, and drought, succeeded or preceded by earthquakes, with thunder and lightning." Then he jots this postscript to cover accidents: "But it's possible the program may be wholly changed in the meantime."

Driving

Here's mankind's biggest challenge: driving through Boston.

For example, suppose you're trying to visit a friend who says he lives on "A Street." If you look at a map, you'll find that Boston contains three streets called "A Street."

There's an A Street in the part of Boston called "Charlestown"; but 2½ miles southeast of that, you'll find another A Street, in the part of Boston called "South Boston"; and 6 miles southwest of that second A Street, you'll find a third A Street, in the part of Boston called "Hyde Park."

Similarly, Boston contains three B Streets. Boston also contains five Lincoln Streets, five Pleasant Streets, and six Park Streets.

After figuring out which A Street to go to, your next problem is to figure out which streets will take you there. That's a major challenge, since practically every street in Boston is curved.

Boston was planned by meandering cows: each old street was a cow path, curved to avoid hills and ditches. When Boston city planners lopped off the hills to fill the ditches, they forgot to straighten the cow paths, so Boston's streets are still curved, to avoid the hills and ditches that no longer exist. In Boston's intellectual suburb (Cambridge), Massachusetts Avenue curves so sharply that the natives describe Harvard University as being "at the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and Massachusetts Avenue."

Traffic signs To make Boston driving a challenge, most of the popular streets are marked "One Way," usually in the opposite direction from where you want to go, and with no obvious alternative route in sight. To increase your challenge, Boston city planners consider street signs to be optional, so that you're never quite sure which street you're on. The few street signs that remain are often wrong.

My favorite signpost is on Boston's outskirts. At the top of the post, a sign says you're going south; underneath is a sign saying you're going north. Altogether, the signs say you're going south on route 93 and north on route 128. Which direction are you really going in: south or north? The correct answer is neither: you're really going west!

But suppose you're nerdy enough to bring a map that shows which streets are one-way. Your troubles aren't over yet: you're just about to turn left onto the street you wish, which even goes in the direction you wish, when all of a sudden you're confronted by a sign saying "No Left Turn." To be legal, you try to somehow drive around the block, but you get a surprise: each side of the block has a combination of "One Way" and "No Left Turn" signs designed so that you can't reach your destination. "You can't get there from here" is a popular saying in Boston. Every taxi driver knows the only solution: interpret the "No Left Turn" sign to mean "Turn left as fast as possible, before anybody notices."

Traffic lights You can tell a newcomer to Boston by the way he reacts to traffic lights. He's under the mistaken impression that a red light means "stop."

In Boston, a red light does *not* mean "stop"; instead, it means "think about it, slow down a little, stare at the other cars, honk your horn at them, then continue straight through." A yellow light means "drive faster, before it turns red." A green light means "wait for the cars in the other direction to finish going through their red light; then race."

Rotaries Boston city planners suffer from one major fetish: rotaries. Boston and China are the only places in the whole world that have so many rotaries.

Driving into a Boston rotary is like jumping into a washing machine filled with sharks during the "spin" cycle: coming out is either miraculous or bloody.

Jams Boston traffic is so heavy that you're guaranteed to find yourself in a massive traffic jam before you reach your destination.

3 of Boston's main arteries are Storrow Drive, the Southeast Expressway, and the Mystic River Bridge. Because they're the sites of so many traffic jams, they've been called "Sorrow Drive, the Southeast Distressway, and the Misery River Bridge." Recently, the name "Mystic River Bridge" was changed to "Tobin Bridge," called the "Toe Been Bridge," since it's the longest bridge in New England and too long for your toes to patter across.

Parking To park, seasoned Boston drivers use the "Braille method": bump the cars surrounding you until you finally nestle into the space between them.

When you come back the next day to retrieve your car, don't be surprised if it's gone. Boston's the car-theft capital of America. If you park your car, and it's still there the next day, you'll pat yourself on your back for being lucky — until you burst out in tears when you see the parking ticket. Nearly every parking space in Boston is marked "illegal." A parking ticket can cost you \$100 or more.

No Republicans

Boston's a Democrat city. In Boston, calling somebody a "Republican" is equivalent to calling the person an "ass." The **Phoenix** (Boston's underground newspaper) has run many personal ads where women say they want to date a man, any nice man, but "no Republicans."

In **Cambridge** (the town containing Harvard and M.I.T.), Democrat Al Gore beat George W. Bush during the year 2000

elections, of course. But here's the shocker: during that election, even Ralph Nader beat Bush. Yes, Bush came in 3rd.

Little peculiarities

Boston's peculiar.

Charles River The Charles River separates Boston from its intellectual suburb, Cambridge (home of Harvard and M.I.T.). Three major bridges cross the Charles River: one bridge goes to Harvard; one goes to M.I.T.; and the middle bridge comes from Boston University and goes to nowhere.

The bridge that comes from Boston University is called the "Boston University Bridge." But the bridge that goes to M.I.T. is not called the "M.I.T. Bridge"; instead it's called the Harvard Bridge, because Harvard owns it.

As you walk across the Harvard Bridge, from Boston to M.I.T., look down near your feet: you'll see a surprise! Painted onto the sidewalk is a marker saying "10 Smoots." As you continue walking, you come to a marker saying "20 Smoots," then markers saying "30 Smoots," "40 Smoots," etc., until you reach bridge's far end, where the final marker says "364.4 Smoots, plus one ear." Here's why:

In the early 1960's, an M.I.T. student with the unfortunate name of "Oliver Smoot III" was taking a class whose professor gave this assignment: measure the length of the Harvard Bridge in an unusual way. The night before the assignment was due, he hadn't yet begun working on it; instead, he spent the whole evening getting drunk with his fraternity brothers in Boston. To help him find the length of the bridge, his fraternity brothers finally *rolled him across the bridge*. Altogether, they had to roll him 364.4 times — plus one ear!

The Charles River is beautiful, especially during the spring, when it's dotted with sailboats. But its beauty is just on the surface: underneath, it's polluted. One hot summer day, the water's surface evaporated, to let the polluted water underneath reached the air and give off such a strong sulfurous stench that the drivers on Storrow Drive were overcome by the fumes, lost control of their cars, and crashed into each other!

Scrod Boston is famous for a fish dish called **scrod** (young Atlantic cod & halibut, split for cooking) and for **intellectual cab drivers** (often foreign students), which combine in this tale:

A lady got in a Boston cab and asked the driver, "Where can I get scrod?" He replied, "I never heard it conjugated that way before."

Wednesday Boston's the only city where "Wednesday" has a special meaning. In fact, the best way to determine how long a person's lived in Boston is to ask, "What's Wednesday?" If the person can't answer the question correctly, the person isn't a true Bostonian.

For many decades, Boston was covered with signs proclaiming the answer: "Wednesday is Prince Spaghetti day." Those signs were courtesy of the Prince Spaghetti Company, whose first factory was on Boston's Prince Street.

John Hancock Tower The John Hancock Tower is Boston's tallest building, but you can make it disappear! Here's how...

Stand on Boylston Street, on the block between Clarendon Street and Dartmouth Street. Stand directly under the "R" of the green "STATE STREET BANK" sign.

From that position, the entire John Hancock Tower seems to "disappear." Specifically, the building's longest sides (which are a whole city block long) hide from your view (because they sit at a peculiar angle), so the entire Tower seems to be just a narrow, fragile, tall wall of unsupported glass.

Street performers The best street performers are the ones you find each summery day in front of Quincy Market. One group, called the "Shakespeare Brothers," has an amazing way with words. The other group, called the "Dueling Bozos," juggles on unicycles. Both groups include magic, audience participation, and practical jokes; they give you the best laughs to be had in Boston.

I remember the first time I saw the Shakespeare Brothers; I'll

never forget their act, which consisted of fake magic.

For example, one of the brothers had a deck of cards. He made a girl in the audience pick a card, not show it to him, and hide her card in the middle of his deck. Then he said he'd make her card rise to the top of his deck. He tapped his deck three times, and said her card was now at the top of his deck. He asked what her card had been. She said, "the Jack of Diamonds." He looked at the top card, saw it was not the Jack of Diamonds, saw it was the Ace of Spades instead, and said, "See, I magically turned her card into the ace of spades!" The crowd cheered wildly. We all enjoyed the joke.

And that's why we all love Boston. Boston isn't a city: it's a joke. It's the world's best-kept zoo. And we love it.

New York City

New York City is divided into 5 boroughs: Manhattan, Queens, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Staten Island.

Queens

This borough was probably named after Queen Catherine of England in 1683, though historians aren't sure. In 1988, the government of Queens decided to erect a huge statue of her, 35 feet high, facing the United Nations (which is across the river in Manhattan), with encouragement from Donald Trump and Jimmy Carter. But when the statue was built, Queens citizens refused to let it stay in Queens, because of these objections:

If the Queen faces the U.N. (which is in Manhattan), she'll show her backside to Queens citizens and seem to **fant** at them. Moreover, she'll stand at the spot where Americans turned chicken and ran from the British in the Revolutionary War, so don't put a statue honoring British royalty there!

The Queen was from England, which oppressed Ireland, so the **Irish** in Queens consider her an oppressor.

The Queen was actually the daughter of Portugal's king, who gave her to King Charles II of England along with a dowry that included all of Bombay India and trading rights (in return for England's promise not to attack Portugal), so people from **India** dislike her — and so do **Blacks**, who are upset that her family made profits by shipping slaves.

The Queen headed Spain while its Catholic government burned 60 citizens for the crime of "being Jewish" during the Spanish Inquisition, so the **Jews** in Queens consider her an oppressor of Jews.

Queen Catherine quickly became the most disliked woman in Queens. Now her statue hides in upstate New York, where her face got mutilated by Mother Nature and poorly reconstructed by an apprentice sculptor.

The Bronx

This is the only borough that requires you to say "the" before it: you must say "the Bronx." Here's why:

The place began as farmland bought by Jonas Bronck from the Indians in 1642. When his family owned it, people visiting there said "I'm going to the Broncks." Eventually, "Broncks" got shortened to "Bronx."

Manhattan

Some folks say the Indians named the main borough "Manhattan" when they saw it get overrun by European men wearing stupid hats.

Staten Island

Some folks say "Staten Island" got its name when Henry Hudson first saw it and asked his crew:

's dat an island?

Some say it should be spelled "Statin Island" because its residents love to pop pills that are statins.

Brooklyn

People from Brooklyn have an accent, explained on page 269.

Canada

Canadians love telling this tale:

On the sixth day of creating the universe, God turned to the angel Gabriel and said, "Today I'm going to create a land called Canada, full of outstanding natural beauty: majestic mountains with mountain goats & eagles, sparkling lakes bountiful with bass & trout, forests full of elk & moose, high cliffs overlooking sandy beaches with abundant sea life, and rivers stocked with salmon. I'll make the land rich in oil to make prosperous the inhabitants, called Canadians, who'll be known as the friendliest people on earth."

"But Lord," asked Gabriel, "don't you think you're being too generous to these Canadians?"

"Not really," replied God. "Just wait and see the neighbors I'm going to give them."

Yes, Canadians have trouble dealing with their southern neighbor! In the same bloody vein, here's a riddle:

What borders on stupidity?

Answer:

Canada & Mexico

Margaret Atwood said:

Every Canadian has a complicated relationship with the United States, whereas Americans think of Canada as the place where the weather comes from.

Pierre Trudeau (who was Canada's prime minister) said:

Canada's main exports are hockey players and cold fronts. Our main import is acid rain.

Justin Trudeau (Pierre's son who became prime minister) said:

Canada & America are closer than friends. We're more like siblings: we have shared parentage, though we took different paths in later years. We became the stay-at-home type, while you grew to be a little more rebellious.

Will Ferguson said:

The great themes of Canadian history are these: keeping the Americans out, keeping the French in, and trying to get the Natives to somehow disappear.

Laurence J. Peter (who invented the Peter Principle) said:

I must spend so much time explaining to Americans that I'm not English, and to Englishmen that I'm not American, that I have little time left to be Canadian.

Mike Myers said:

Canada is the essence of not being (not being English, not American) and a subtle flavor: we're more like celery.

Andy Barrie said:

We'll explain to you the appeal of curling if you explain to us the appeal of the National Rifle Association.

China's importance

The most important foreign country is China. Here's why....

China is slightly smaller than the U.S. but contains 4 times as many people. There are over 1.44 billion people in China, compared with .33 billion in the U.S.

There are 6 billion people in the whole world. A quarter of them live in China.

At first glance, China doesn't look crowded; but it is. The U.S. has just one crowded city (New York); China has several. The U.S. has vast unoccupied areas (forests, deserts, mountains, canyons, and swamps); China's are smaller.

To prevent further crowding, the Chinese government passed many laws encouraging couples to have just 1 child (though the government later switched to recommending 2 children and now recommends 3, because now too many of the Chinese are retired, there aren't enough young workers, and too many Chinese parents want to spend money on just 1 child).

India is even more crowded: it's much smaller than China but contains almost as many people (1.39 billion). India permits couples to have many children, and they do. In the next 25 years, people predict India's population will increase to 1.4 billion, making it even more populous than China; but for now, China is still the most populous country.

Of all the languages in the world, Mandarin Chinese is the most popular native language. For every person whose native language is English, there are 2½ people whose native language is Mandarin Chinese. (The world's other popular native language is Hindi, spoken in India; it's just slightly more popular than English.)

If you travel all over the world, you'll discover that more schools teach English than Chinese. In all countries, students study English, usually as a foreign language. Even students in China study English! That makes English the most popular *foreign* language; but Chinese is the most popular *native* language.

China is modernizing fast. Chinese consumers are rapidly buying Western goods, and Chinese factories are rapidly making goods to sell to the West. The Chinese are very excited about all that international trade in both directions, and the Chinese have been quickly constructing fancy factories, fancy stores, and fancy housing. **China's stock market and real-estate market have both been generating huge profits for investors.** China is exciting — a hot marketplace.

The Chinese government's challenge is to control the bubble so it grows safely without bursting. China's immediate concern is to slow down construction somewhat (to give the electric utilities a chance to catch up with the increased demand) and to fix the banking system (where half of all loans are never repaid, because they're given too easily to friends, politicians, and failing government-owned businesses).

After the Soviet Union disintegrated, China was left as the only big country worrying the U.S. (Of course, the U.S. worries about smaller countries too, such as North Korea and battlers in the Middle East.) China is worrisome because:

China's the biggest country without freedom of speech.

China's the biggest country whose government continually tells lies. (It even lies about the weather & temperature, to prevent government employees from requesting time off when it's too hot to work.)

China is the U.S.'s biggest trading partner. It has the biggest effect on U.S. jobs: without cheap goods from China, Wal-Mart would be dead.

Goods from China have cost little because the Chinese government kept an artificial exchange rate of about 8 yuan per dollar, even though most economists say a fairer rate would be 5 yuan per dollar. Other countries have asked China to change the exchange rate, and China's promised to do so by the 2008 Olympics. So far, China has let the exchange rate dip to about 6 yuan per dollar, so a yuan costs about 17¢. When China eventually lets the exchange rate fall to 5 yuan per dollar, the whole world's trade could be thrown out of kilter, unless China handles the change carefully.

China's borders touch many countries that the U.S. worries about. Though most Chinese people yellow-skinned, some are white (near Russia's border) and some are brown (near India's border). Like the U.S., China has many minorities, which celebrate their own cultures, though not as freely as in the U.S. (since the Chinese government frowns on religions and anything threatening the Chinese Communist Party).

China's history

The world's first humans began in Africa 14 million years ago, where they were black. Some of those migrated north to the Middle East, where they turned lighter. Then some migrated farther north to Europe (where they turned white), while others migrated to India and then China (where they turned yellow) and then to Alaska and the rest of the Americas (where they turned red).

Dynasties

China had many dynasties.

Xia dynasty At first, China's inhabitants were just a bunch of disorganized hunters and farmers (starting half a million years ago), but in **2200 B.C.** a kingdom was finally established. The king's family name was Xia. His kingdom, called the **Xia dynasty**, was ruled by him and later by his descendants.

Shang dynasty In **1750 B.C.**, a rebel leader overthrew the Xia dynasty. His family name was Shang. He started the **Shang dynasty**. During the Shang dynasty, the Chinese people became excellent at working in bronze, and they also began to write more (often by carving characters into pig bones).

During the Shang dynasty, whenever a king would die, he'd be buried with his possessions and more than 100 slaves, who were thrown in his burial pit while they were alive or after being beheaded. (Later dynasties were kinder and threw in terra cotta statues of slaves instead of real people.)

During the Shang dynasty, whenever an important building was finished, the building would be consecrated by sacrificing some humans. Unlike other dynasties, the Shang dynasty used this strange rule: whenever a king died, the next king would be the dead king's brother (not son); and if there were no more brothers left, the kingship would pass to the dead king's cousin (the king's mother's oldest nephew).

Zhou dynasty The last Shang king, who was ridiculously mean, was overthrown in **1100 B.C.** by a chieftain from the frontier tribe called Zhou. That chieftain began the **Zhou dynasty**. It was more normal than the Shang dynasty: it used father-to-son succession and avoided human sacrifice. In 771 B.C., the Zhou dynasty's capital was sacked by barbarians; the king was killed. His relatives fled east, where they set up a new capital and continued the Zhou dynasty.

During the Zhou dynasty, 3 conflicting philosophies arose:

Confucianism (invented by Confucius in 500 B.C. and written down by his optimistic student Mencius) said you should be **kind** (especially to your ancestors & government) and treat your king like a god. That philosophy later became: a king rules because God wants him (so you should obey him) — but if the king gets overthrown it's because God no longer considers him worthy enough to be king.

Legalism (invented by Confucius's cynical student Xun-zi) said that to survive you must be **tough**, ruthless, and trust nobody. If you run a government you should create a secret police, encourage your citizens to rat on each other, foster an atmosphere of fear, bury your enemies alive, and burn all their books.

Daoism (which began with Lao-zi's book "Dao de Jing") said you should be weirdly **mysterious** & mystical and invent puzzles & paradoxes.

Today, Chinese people are still confused about which of those 3 philosophies to follow — whether to be kind, tough, or mysterious — and many heartaches are caused by modern Chinese governments who switch erratically among those 3 philosophies.

Toward the end of the Zhou dynasty, the Zhou controlled just the eastern part of China and was fighting other states in battles that grew gigantic, with 500,000 soldiers on each side.

Qin dynasty In **221 B.C.**, the western frontier state called Qin finished winning against all rivals (mainly because Qin had lots of iron to make iron weapons). That began the **Qin dynasty**. (The English name "China" means "Qin's country.")

The Qin's king, Qin Shihuangdi, called himself "emperor" (a title previously used just for mythological gods). He followed the advice of Legalists: he was tough, killed (or banished) all Confucian scholars who disagreed with the Legalists, burned Confucian books (and most other books too, keeping just books about medicine, pharmacy, agriculture, and divination), and had a policy of executing generals who showed up late for maneuvers. He created the Great Wall by combining little walls the warring states had created for themselves. (His Great Wall was made of just packed earth. Later dynasties turned it into brick.) To control what had become a big country, he divided it into 36 provinces, each headed by an official reporting directly to him.

That emperor died in 210 B.C.

Han dynasty Shortly after Qin Shihuangdi's death, a soldier bringing in draftees was getting delayed by rain. He feared getting executed for tardiness along with his draftees, so the whole group of them revolted. Those revolutionaries got executed, but the turmoil they fomented led to new leadership in **206 B.C.**: the **Han dynasty**, which is considered China's best dynasty. (Most people in modern China proudly claim they're "Han Chinese.") During the Han dynasty, China gained many improvements:

Paper was invented (made from rags or bark), so people started writing characters by using ink brushes instead of carving. Government was based on Confucianism (friendly respect) rather than Legalism (meanness). Local officials were selected by civil-service exams instead of heredity. The Imperial University was created, to teach Confucian classics and prepare students for civil-service exams. Engineers invented irrigation methods, sundials, water clocks, and seismographs (earthquake detectors). China expanded westward and created The Old Silk Road, on which ambassadors and traders traveled to the Greek empire to sell silk. The trading brought to China new ideas, such as Buddhism from India.

The Han dynasty ruled until 220 A.D. — except for a brief interruption by a reformer named Wang Mang. (He'd worked in the royal palace and was appointed "emperor" by the Han household from 8 A.D. until his death in 25 A.D.)

In **220 A.D.**, the Han dynasty fell apart. Here's why:

People were migrating from the Yellow River (which is in the north) to the Yangzi River (which is in the south), especially because barbarian tribes were raiding the north. The Han dynasty had trouble managing the change.

Civil servants became corrupt. They sided with landlords in oppressing the peasants, who finally revolted.

350 years of confusion After the Han dynasty fell, China got 350 years of fighting & confusion, during which the Han people kept moving south, while barbarians kept moving into China from the north and assimilated themselves into the northern population. During that period, Buddhism (which had come from India) became more popular and started including features from Daoism.

Post-Han dynasties Finally, China got major dynasties:

The **Sui dynasty (589-618)** unified China again. This dynasty was based in the north (so partly barbarian).

The **Tang dynasty (618-907)** was almost as good as the Han. It was based in the north (so partly barbarian). During the Tang dynasty, block printing was invented, which helped spread the written word to the masses.

The **Song dynasty (960-1279)** was almost as good as the Tang. During the Song dynasty, use of the printing press spread, and better ways were invented to grow & harvest rice. (One trick was to use fast-growing rice from Vietnam.) Before the Song dynasty, Chinese people had just 2 ways to get rich & famous (be in the government or own land), but during the Song dynasty a

3rd rich&famous class was formed: merchants.

Unfortunately, the Song rice system worked so well that future dynasties saw no need to improve it further, no need to do more research, no need to industrialize, so China's progress started to fall behind Europe's.

The **Yuan dynasty (1279-1368)** was established by Mongolian barbarian horsemen who attacked from the north. The Yuan dynasty was a puppet government controlled by the Mongolian Supreme Leader, Kublai Khan (Genghis Khan's grandson). Those Mongolians were kind enough to leave Chinese culture intact and not destroy it.

Two Italian brothers, Niccolo & Matteo Polo, were the first Europeans to travel across Asia. In China, they met Kublai Khan, who gave them a letter to take back to the Pope, saying China wanted the Pope to send teachers. On their second trip to China, they took a letter from the Pope (along with 2 missionaries who chickened out before reaching China), and they also took along Niccolo's son, Marco Polo, who impressed Kublai Khan and became Kublai Khan's advisor and a governor of big provinces. After 20 years in China, Marco Polo returned to Italy and wrote a book telling Europeans how great China was.

Unfortunately, the paragraph you've just read might be full of lies and exaggerations, since our only source of info about the Polo family is Marco Polo's book, which historians don't completely believe, because:

The Chinese have no records of any "Marco Polo," even though the Chinese keep careful records and he claimed to be governor.

Some of his book's Chinese events seem awfully similar to events in French romance novels written earlier by his editor.

It's strange that in such a long travelogue he never mentioned Chinese characters, chopsticks, tea, or the Great Wall, though apologists have theories about why he might want to skip those topics.

Regardless of its truthfulness, his book had a big effect on Europe: it made Europeans curious about China.

Land travel from Europe to China became endangered by bandits in-between, so Europeans started searching for a way to reach China by sea. (Later, that searching made Columbus accidentally discover America.)

The **Ming dynasty (1368-1644)** was started by a rebellious army officer (who was Han Chinese and had previously been a peasant and Buddhist monk), so it was a *true* Chinese empire: it threw the Mongolian leaders out. Life during the Ming dynasty was peaceful, except for this: when that first Ming emperor discovered his prime minister was plotting against him, he beheaded the prime minister and the prime minister's family and 40,000 other people too.

The **Qing dynasty (1644-1911)** was run by Manchurian barbarians who attacked from the North, so it was disliked.

During the Qing dynasty, China was approached by Westerners (the Portuguese then the Spanish, British, French, Germans, Russians, and Americans), who wanted to buy Chinese tea, silk, and porcelain. But the Qing dynasty didn't want to buy much from Westerners in return, so trade was stifled.

British traders solved the problem by encouraging people in the Chinese city of Guangzhou to buy raw cotton & opium that the British shipped from British-controlled India. Opium was illegal in China, but the British got it in by using Chinese smugglers and corrupt officials.

The Qing dynasty sent a commissioner to Guangzhou to stop the illegal opium. He detained all foreigners and destroyed 20,000 chests of British opium. The British retaliated by starting the Opium War in 1839. China was surprised at the strength of the British navy and lost the war in 1842 to Britain, which won many concessions from China, including the entire island of Hong Kong, plus tax breaks and freedom from having to obey any Chinese

laws. That made the Chinese more curious about Western thought, so Chinese scholars started studying Western thinking.

After several more revolts, famines, and foreign takeovers of China's puppets (the French took over Cambodia & South Vietnam, the British took over Burma & Kowloon, the Russians took over Turkestan, and the Japanese took over Taiwan & Korea), the Qing dynasty finally was overthrown by dissidents in 1911. It was the last dynasty!

Republics

In **1912**, a republic was formed, whose presidents would be chosen by legislatures instead of heredity. The first president was **Dr. Sun Yat-sen** ("Sun Yixian" in pinyin). He was born in China but grew up in Hawaii. He'd also been a physician in Hong Kong, lived in Japan & the United States, and raised donations from Chinese people around the world. Nearly everybody liked him. He's called "The Father of Modern China."

But a military leader, **Yuan Shikai**, wanted to be president too. To prevent civil war, Dr. Sun agreed to step down and let Yuan Shikai be the leader.

But Yuan Shikai turned out to be a despot. He changed the constitution to give himself more power. Dr. Sun's friend, **Song Jiaoren**, created a political party (called the **Nationalists** or **National People's Party** or **Guomindang** or **Kuomintang** or **KMT**), which campaigned against Yuan Shikai and won most seats in the legislature. Yuan Shikai responded by getting Song Jiaoren & several pro-KMT generals assassinated. Then 7 provinces rebelled against Yuan Shikai, but he suppressed the rebellion. Scared, the legislature agreed to confirm Yuan Shikai as president. Then he outlawed the KMT and removed its members from the legislature. Then he suspended the whole legislature and forced onto China a new constitution that made him president for life. Then he decided to become a monarch. Then everybody revolted against him; but before they could lynch him, he died of natural causes in 1916.

Then China broke apart: regional warlords fought each other. In 1919, Dr. Sun reestablished the KMT, and in 1921 the KMT controlled southern China; but warlords still controlled northern China (and Beijing). Dr. Sun tried to get help from Western countries; but they ignored him, so he turned to the Soviet Union, which agreed to help his KMT but also help a smaller party, the **Chinese Communist Party (CCP)**. The Soviet Union started trying to convince those 2 parties to merge.

In 1923, Dr. Sun's lieutenant, **Chiang Kai-shek** ("Jiang Jieshi" in pinyin), went to Moscow for military training. When he returned to China, he set up a military academy in China.

In **1925**, Dr. Sun died of cancer. Then Chiang Kai-shek started battling the northern warlords and became the KMT's leader. In 1926, he conquered half of China.

But after thwarting a kidnapping attempt against him, he got nervous about Communists, dismissed his Soviet advisors, and prevented Communists from holding any KMT leadership positions. Then he declared Communist membership a crime punishable by death, and he started killing Communists.

One Communist who managed to escape was **Mao Zedong** (who'd been a peasant, student, librarian, and poet). He and other communists fled west, so China had 3 capitals: Beijing (in the north, controlled by warlords), Nanjing (in the southeast, controlled by the KMT), and Wuhan (in the central south, controlled by the Communists). In 1928, the KMT conquered Beijing. In 1934, the KMT tried to conquer Communists also, but the Communists escaped by fleeing to the west then north then east, traveling a total of 6,000 miles, which took a year, mainly under Mao Zedong's leadership; that's called "The Long March." During that, the Communists developed a reputation for being nice (especially to peasants), while the KMT were considered mean.

Meanwhile, the Japanese started invading China (Manchuria in 1931, Shanghai in 1932, the rest of China in 1937). Eventually, the Japanese killed 20 million Chinese people (and raped many Chinese women).

Chiang Kai-shek still wanted to concentrate on fighting the Communists, but his KMT associates finally convinced him to fight the Japanese instead. The Communists fought the Japanese also.

At the end of World War 2, the Japanese lost, and so did the KMT: the Communist Party emerged the winner for the hearts, minds, and bodies of the Chinese. Chiang Kai-shek and his KMT fled to the island of Taiwan, where he became Taiwan's leader. (Under KMT leadership, Taiwan gradually improved. Now Taiwan's a good, democratic country, full of freedom. It's modern and financially successful. It's particularly strong at manufacturing computers and other electronic devices.)

On October 1, **1949**, the Communist leader (Mao Zedong) stood in Beijing and proclaimed that the mainland was now under Communist control and called the **People's Republic of China (PRC)**. It was indeed a republic, except that just members of the Communist Party could run for office.

The PRC's leaders divided into 2 groups: the leftists versus the rightists:

What leftists wanted	What rightists wanted
be nicer to the peasants (farmers)	be nicer to the merchants and intellectuals
be socialist: share the wealth	be capitalist: create your own wealth
be nicer to the Soviet Union	be nicer to the U.S. and Europeans
force people to share burdens	gently nudge people to improve

Mao tended to be leftist (because of his peasant background), and his wife was even more leftist. The leftists tried many extreme experiments, such as these:

During the **Great Leap Forward** in 1958, peasants were forced to work together in gigantic communes. The average commune held 5,000 families, 20,000 people, all sharing a field, a dining hall, a nursery, classrooms, and a furnace to make pig iron (to turn into steel). There were 23,500 of those communes.

People were forced to work in factories making steel.

Trees were burned to create farms and fuel for making steel.

During the **Cultural Revolution**, which began in 1966, kids & teachers were kicked out of high schools & universities and forced to work on farms instead. From 1968 to 1972, no high schools or universities were allowed to accept any new students; the only remaining students were ones who'd entered in earlier years.

Some of those policies had disastrous results. For example, now China is short of trees, so China has bad air (full of pollution & dust). China's commune experiment was unsuccessful and caused a famine that killed 30 million Chinese people.

The leftists decided: big projects should be run by socialists, not technologists. They said "Better Red than Expert." The result: many projects failed, and many factories produced goods having poor quality.

Mao died in 1976.

In **1978**, a rightist named **Deng Xiaoping** gained control. Many state-run businesses were privatized. (Unfortunately, some then went bankrupt and stopped paying pensions due to retirees, who suddenly became destitute.)

Deng was practical: he let technologists & capitalists run projects, regardless of ideology. He said:

It doesn't matter if the cat is black or white. What matters is how well it catches mice.

He also said it's okay to let some people get rich. He even said:

To get rich is glorious.

Deng died in **1997**. After him came his protégé, **Jiang Zemin**, then **Hu Jintao**, then **Xi Jinping**, who've all continued Deng's rightist policies.

Now Chinese citizens are allowed to criticize the Chinese government — but permissible criticism is limited to attacking screw-ups (corrupt bribed officials, inefficiency, and inertia), not the Communist system itself.

China's new worry is that China's economic boom hasn't benefited the peasants yet; the income gap between China's rich and China's poor has widened. For example, half the Chinese people are poor peasants who don't have *any* electricity yet, not even for light bulbs, while many of China's rich buy air conditioners & cars. In cities, rich people live in condos in new high-rises built by companies whose rich investors haven't yet paid the migrant laborers who actually did the work. Those migrants are dirt poor, still waiting for the pay they were promised but never received. In some cities, the electric and water companies haven't been beefed up enough yet to handle all the new factories and high-rise apartments, so people suffer from rationing & brownouts. Half of all bank loans aren't repaid on time. In March **2004**, Hu Jintao gave a speech in which he promised to solve those problems by changing the tax rates (to favor the poor) and handing out fewer private construction permits, until the infrastructure has time to catch up. He also promised to make factories obey China's minimum-wage law, which most companies have ignored, and that's why China's goods have been so cheap!

Frontline In the U.S., public television's *Frontline* showed a documentary film about how life in China changed dramatically, with some folks becoming lucky capitalists and others becoming ill beggars. The documentary tracked the lives of several people from different walks of life, in different parts of China, from 1998 (when the Chinese government decided to become more capitalist) to 2002. The documentary had surprisingly sad endings:

A mayor who was handsome, powerful, effective, and beloved by his town (in the 1998 part of the documentary) wound up in jail (where he supposedly "died suddenly from cancer") because of a corruption scandal.

A peasant woman shown with an untreated goiter was "not allowed to be filmed" afterwards — because the government said "her problem reflects badly on her village."

Retirees protest because their employers (state-run companies) have gone bankrupt and don't pay pensions anymore, leaving the retirees destitute.

In a factory, a woman manager is forced to take a huge salary cut and lower position (cleaning all toilets!) to avoid being laid off and lose her pension potential.

A peasant kid leaves his farm, to go to refrigerator-repair school in Beijing; but the school makes him do slave labor, tearing down brick walls instead.

Constitution Since China is supposed to be a "republic," it needed a constitution. China's constitution is a bizarre mix of leftist & rightist thinking.

The Communist Party is the only party mentioned in the constitution. The constitution's Article 1 calls China a "democratic dictatorship." Here's the full text of Article 1 (in its final version, as revised in 1982):

Article 1. The People's Republic of China is a socialist state under the people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers & peasants. The socialist system is the basic system of the People's Republic of China. Sabotage of the socialist system by any organization or individual is prohibited.

Article 34 says you're guaranteed the right to vote — unless the government doesn't want you to:

Article 34. All PRC citizens who've reached age 18 have the right to vote and stand for election, regardless of nationality, race, sex, occupation, family background, religious belief, education, property status, or length of residence, except persons deprived of political rights according to law.

Article 36 gives you freedom of religion — unless your religion causes protests or seems physically or mentally “unhealthy” or is controlled by a foreigner, such as the Pope:

Article 36. PRC citizens enjoy freedom of religious belief. No state organ, public organization, or individual may compel citizens to believe in, or not believe in, any religion; nor may they discriminate against citizens who believe in, or do not believe in, any religion. The state protects normal religious activities. No one may make use of religion to engage in activities that disrupt public order, impair the health of citizens, or interfere with the state’s education system. Religious bodies and religious affairs aren’t subject to any foreign domination.

Article 40 protects your privacy — except when the government wishes to censor you:

Article 40. The freedom & privacy of PRC citizens’ correspondence are protected by law. No organization or individual may, on any ground, infringe on the freedom & privacy of citizens’ correspondence except in cases where, to meet the needs of state security or of investigation into criminal offenses, public security or procuratorial organs are allowed to censor correspondence in accordance with procedures prescribed by law.

So long

As you can see, Chinese history is quite long. Chinese centralized government (the first dynasty) began in 2200 B.C., which was about 4200 years ago. By contrast, U.S. centralized government (declared by the Declaration of Independence) began in 1776, which was about 250 years ago. That makes “China” about 17 times as old as the “United States”! Compared to China, the U.S. is just a baby country, too young to have any serious history yet.

A Chinese friend attended a party in the U.S. and heard a guest say she was getting a Ph.D. in U.S. history. He laughed and said, “How can you get a Ph.D. in U.S. history? The U.S. has no history!”

Chinese people love watching, on Chinese TV, dramas about Chinese history, especially the intrigues of the emperors and the women who lived with them. They’re much more fascinating than U.S. battles between cowboys & Indians (whoops, I mean “Native Americans”).

What to read

For a funny romp through Chinese history, read:

CondensedChina.com

Then grab more details by reading “History of China” at —

chaos.umd.edu/history

but make sure you type the “www.”

The full Chinese constitution has 138 articles plus 13 amendments. You can read them (except the 10 new amendments added in 2004) on the Internet in English at:

english.peopledaily.com.cn/constitution/constitution.html

New Chinese culture

I’ve always been curious about Chinese language and culture. When I lived in Boston, I loved to visit Boston’s Chinatown. I even joined some Chinese clubs. Six years ago, I married a Chinese immigrant, whose nickname is “Donna.” In a section of this book called “Donna’s comments,” you can read her comments about China, the United States, and me.

Though I married Donna, I never had a chance to visit China or her relatives — until 2004. What a treat! Visiting China was eye-opening fun!

I told Donna I wanted to meet her relatives and also see how Chinese people live, rather than just hit tourist spots. So she let

me visit Chinese homes, take walks with her friends, and go shopping with them for everyday needs.

China is too huge to be seen completely, and my time was limited to 2 weeks (so I could return to New Hampshire and resume answering the endless phone calls about life and computers). I had to adopt this strict schedule: in January 2004, I flew into the capital (**Beijing**), then quickly flew to **Chengdu** (a beautiful city in Sichuan province), then got driven to her home town, **Jiangyou** (2 hours north of Chengdu), where I spent 9 days (with side trips to nearby towns). Then I retraced my steps back to Chengdu (where I lingered 2 days), Beijing (2 more days), and the U.S., so the whole experience lasted 15 days (including transportation).

Beijing’s become quite westernized. The first time I saw it, it looked like an American city (Washington D.C. or the Queens part of New York City), except its signs were in Chinese.

Chengdu has more Asian character but is also partly westernized. Jiangyou is much smaller and hasn’t been westernized as much yet, so I found it the most fascinating, the most “authentic,” the most memorable.

Here are my comments. Most are about Jiangyou, but some apply to the other cities too....

China’s 3 moods

China is dominated by 3 moods: a rush to westernize, a willingness to bend, and quiet.

Rush to westernize For many centuries, China was isolated from western culture. Now China is rushing to catch up. China is rushing to grab ideas, languages, appliances, cars, language, music, software, the Internet, consumer goods, brands, lifestyles, ideas, and everything else, from the U.S. and Europe (with some help from Japan). But while rushing to do all that, the Chinese take short cuts, which result in poor workmanship and lack of finesse. My summary of China in 2004 is this:

China has always been very beautiful.

China is now also very modern — and everything almost works.

Willingness to bend To understand China, look at its trees. Many of China’s trees have branches that bend wildly, unlike American and German trees, whose branches are boringly straight. China’s culture is inspired by Chinese trees: the culture bends.

For example, Chinese characters have strokes that bend: there are no simple, straight strokes. Traditional Chinese buildings have roofs that are slanted (pitched), but they bend slightly up at the edges and bend up even more at the corners, to form dramatic curves. Chinese people love to bend the rules: they interpret every rule and law “flexibly.”

If a person creates anything exactly straight or acts properly straight-arrow, the Chinese would consider that person too Germanically rigid, an uncultured goose-stepping Nazi asshole, though Western technology keeps trying to impose that requirement.

Quiet Chinese people tend to act quietly, mysteriously.

The love of mystery comes from Daoism. The need to act quietly — tactfully — stems from many centuries of fearing the wrath of Chinese government leaders and officials: if you open your mouth, you might get beheaded, figuratively or literally. Even now, the Chinese government accepts no criticism of its system. Since Chinese households have traditionally been large (including grandparents, grandkids, and other relatives) and close-knit — and since friendships are also tightly woven and are needed to get job references — speaking your mind can get you booed by many generations of people and the whole town and make you become a worthless person.

So Chinese kids still learn this rule: you’d better shut up!

How to travel

Traveling to and through China is an adventure.

Get your visa If you're an American who wants to visit China, you must get an American passport (from the U.S. government) and a Chinese visa (from the Chinese government).

Be careful what you say on your visa application! On mine, I made the mistake of saying my occupation was "publisher and author of computer books." I should have left out the word "author," since the Chinese government doesn't trust "authors." The Chinese consulate phoned my wife and grilled her about me, with questions such as:

What cities are you two going to? Where's *that* city? It's not in Tibet? What does Russ write? Does he write *just* computer books? Are you sure he doesn't write about anything else?

They're paranoid about foreign journalists interviewing real Chinese citizens, especially in Tibet!

Donna said I was just a dumb computer guy (which was true at that time). The consulate said that was okay. But I might not be allowed to return to China in the future.

After America's September 11th tragedy, the U.S. government got meaner about foreigners visiting the U.S., so the Chinese government got meaner about Americans visiting China: the visa fee has been raised, and you're not allowed to get your visa by mail — you must personally walk into the Chinese consulate (or bribe a friend or travel agent to walk in for you).

Beijing-airport tax Whenever you want to fly out of Beijing airport (to the U.S. or other countries or other Chinese cities), you must get a ticket but then, afterwards, stand in a special separate line to pay an airport-construction departure tax.

If your travel agent forgot to mention the airport-construction departure tax, or you were duped into thinking your ticket includes all taxes, tough luck! No ticket sold in the U.S. or China or anywhere else ever includes that airport-construction departure tax: you must go stand in the tax line and make sure you haven't spent all your money already — or you won't get home!

Warning: the tax is very high and depends on where you're going.

7 road vehicles Chinese cities (such as Beijing, Chengdu, and Jiangyou) all have modern streets, like U.S. cities.

In Jiangyou, you commonly see 7 kinds of vehicles: **bicycles, tricycles, motorcycles, taxis, cars, vans, and buses.** (Trucks and trains are rare.)

The typical **bicycle** has a just a tiny basket in front. It doesn't hold much.

Tricycles come in 2 forms.

Simple tricycle The rider sits near the front wheel; vegetables sit in a cart suspended over the back wheels. The contraption acts as a human-powered pickup truck.

Fancy tricycle The driver sits near the front wheel, but a buggy is suspended over the back wheels. The typical buggy holds 2 paying passengers (just 1 if the buggy is slim). The contraption acts as a human-powered taxi. The driver spends his whole day pedaling, looking for passengers and hauling them. He needs strong legs! Like a convertible car, the buggy has a roof to put up during rain; the roof protects the passengers but not the poor driver. You could call the whole thing a "rickshaw," though that term was used mainly in the old days for a more primitive contraption that had just 2 wheels and forced the driver to walk. The proper term for this 3-wheeled human-pedaled taxicab is a **pedicab** or **trishaw**. This "tricycle taxi" is slower than a real taxi but popular because it's cheap and can squeeze into side streets too narrow for 4-wheeled beasts. In Chengdu (which is more advanced than Jiangyou), tricycles have motorcycle engines, so drivers don't need strong legs! In another town, Luoyang, tricycles are prohibited because they look too primitive for a modern town like Luoyang!

Most **motorcycles** resemble the ones in the U.S. and Japan.

Taxis, cars, and vans are slightly smaller than the ones in the U.S., because most Chinese people are short and thin and have

less money. (If you're 6 feet tall, you'll need to duck.) 10 years ago, most of China's cars were made by Volkswagen, and many of them are still on the streets, but newer vehicles have a wide variety of brands, especially Changan (which is Chinese), Citroen (which is French), and Buick (which is American). Minivans are too expensive for normal use: they're used mainly by government-employee car pools. Cars and minivans cost more in China than in the U.S.; for example, a minivan in China costs \$60,000. (Most other goods cost slightly less in China than in the U.S.)

In Jiangyou, the **buses** have no doors. Instead, the bus's doorway has strips of clear plastic hanging down from the ceiling; to enter the bus, you push the plastic strips aside. Most stores are the same way: no doors, just plastic strips to push aside. That's because Jiangyou is in Sichuan province, which is always warm. (You'll find more doors in Beijing, which is farther north.)

Besides the bicycles, tricycles, motorcycles, taxis, cars, vans, and buses, the streets also contain **pedestrians**.

How to drive Here's how to drive a car, Jiangyou style:

If your car's about to hit a pedestrian, don't bother stopping: cars have the right of way over pedestrians, because cars are bigger. It's the pedestrian's responsibility to get out of the way. Crosswalks (which are striped and called **zebra lines**) just mean pedestrians should walk there, not elsewhere; they *don't* mean cars must stop there. If you think a pedestrian doesn't see you, tap your horn once or twice lightly, quickly, politely, to warn the pedestrian courteously.

You should drive on road's right-hand side, usually. But if traffic's heavy there, go drive on the road's left side instead, until the oncoming traffic threatens to hit you. That's true even on an expressway: if the right lanes move slowly, go drive on the highway's other side awhile.

If you're driving faster than the car to your right (who's in a slower lane), put your left blinker on, even though you're not changing lanes. In this situation, the left blinker doesn't mean you're changing lanes; it means "I'm passing you." You should also honk politely, once or twice, or flash your lights. The blinker, honking, and flashing all mean: "Stay out of my way, I'm going faster than you, be careful!" Instead of pondering, just follow this simple rule: whenever you're driving in the fastest lane, leave your left blinker on the whole time (even if you're in that lane many minutes); and whenever you see a slow-lane car you're passing, honk or flash.

When driving on city streets, beep once or twice at any car or pedestrian that you think might come closer, to make sure you're noticed and not hit. Since city streets are busy, keep one hand by your horn at all times: you should beep (or double-beep) about once every 10 seconds, under normal traffic conditions.

Drive as if you were in a ski slalom: zoom around the cones, other cars, pedestrians, bicyclists, tricyclists, etc., but always politely, with polite little beeps. If you hear strange rumbles, don't worry: it's just your half-broken car or the half-broken street. "Driving" means "swerving while rumbling and politely beeping." It's fun! Just keep your eyes open and signal the other adventurers, so nobody gets hurt. It's like being in an amusement park's "bumper cart," except you're not allowed to touch the other players — but it's fine fun to come within 4 inches of each other: it happens all the time.

Since Chinese drivers don't leave much distance between themselves and other cars, crashes are common. When driving on the expressway from Chengdu to Jiangyou, I saw a 40-car pileup: the highway suddenly turned into a junkyard full of dented trucks, buses, minivans, BMW's, and all other vehicles imaginable. Very impressive!

To encourage drivers to stay farther apart, expressways have signs showing what "50 meters apart" looks like and what "100 meters apart" looks like. But drivers ignore them.

Intersections Though Chinese drivers don't take traffic lanes and distances seriously, they respect traffic lights. As in the U.S., red means "stop" and green means "go." In the U.S., the red light is always above the green, but in cities such as Jiangyou the lights are mounted randomly: sometimes red above green, sometimes green above red, sometimes red left of green,

sometimes green left of red. That confuses the colorblind. It also confuses tourists from America, since in America “red left of green” means “don’t go in the left lane but you can go in the right lane.” Traffic lights are usually polite: they show a countdown of how many seconds remain before the light changes.

That’s how traffic lights work, but they’re rare. Most small intersections have no lights. Most big intersections have rotaries instead. The typical rotary is huge (2 blocks wide), with a center that’s a grassy park full of strolling pedestrians (plus the elderly doing aerobic martial-arts exercises), who get into the park by playing a game of chicken with the cars. At night, the park’s grass looks so green that you’ll wonder how the Chinese got such amazing fertilizer, until you look more closely and see the trick: the grass is lit by floodlights that are tinted green.

Careless drivers At night, many cars turn on just dim parking lights or don’t turn on any lights at all. Seatbelts are usually ignored — even on expressways, where they’re theoretically required.

Expressways The typical expressway has 3 lanes in each direction. They’re labeled in Chinglish. For example, on the expressway from Chengdu to Jiangyou, the left lane is called the “overtaking lane”; the middle lane is called the “main lane”; the right lane, which is for breakdowns and other slowed traffic, is called the “parking lane.”

Atop the expressway’s tollbooths, you see a giant surprise: a huge, surprising billboard ad that’s hundreds of feet wide, so it stretches over all the lanes and all booths. Wow! U.S. highway departments would raise lots of money (and complaints) if they’d do the same and turn U.S. tollbooth roofs into billboards.

Ask for directions When you try to find your way through small cities (such as Jiangyou), you discover there are no available maps and no numbers on buildings. Sorry, guys: you must “act like a woman” and continually ask for directions from knowledgeable local folks (handsome policemen, taxi drivers, tricyclists, and neighbors).

Housing

Rural peasants often live in shacks. City folks usually live in apartments (rented apartments or condo apartments). In Jiangyou, for example, many huge condo complexes are being built fast; each complex holds thousands of people.

Cheap luxury Housing is cheap. For example, my wife (Donna) bought a brand new 3-bedroom condo apartment in Jiangyou for just \$12,000. That price includes just bare cement walls and floors; she added \$10,000 for appliances, furniture, and décor (with help from her brothers in choosing and installing it), making a total of \$22,000. The result is drop-dead gorgeous, the kind of place that would cost a million dollars if it were in Manhattan on Park Avenue.

Her daughter (Mimi) bought an even more gorgeous condo apartment, also new, in a fancier city (Chengdu) for \$20,000, plus \$10,000 for appliances, furniture and décor (including the fee to the interior designer). That apartment has just 2 bedrooms, but the décor and location are superb.

Exteriors Most of China’s beauty is hidden: the insides of apartments can be gorgeous, but the outsides are drab. Many apartment buildings are just raw cement; others have the cement covered by a tile façade.

(Wood is rarely used in Chinese construction, since most trees were destroyed and burned during the “Great Leap Forward.” Brick is rare also.)

Some buildings have gigantic ornaments mounted on their roofs to make the buildings look taller, more impressive, and classy.

Stairs The typical apartment building is 7 stories high but has no elevator. If you live on the top floor, you need strong legs! One reason why Chinese people are thin is that they get lots of exercise running up and down stairs. (A few apartment buildings have elevators, but those buildings cost too much.)

Even in the nicest apartment buildings, the stairwells are disappointing. The stairs are just cement slabs, covered with dust instead of carpets, and the stairwell’s walls are gashed by people moving furniture in and out.

To save electricity, the stairwell lights are usually off. They’re supposed to turn themselves on when noise is detected, but they’re not sensitive enough, so they tend to stay off until you stomp hard on the stairs. As a result, you’ll see a lot of Chinese people stomping and hollering in stairwells at night, just to get the darn lights to turn on. That’s another example of how things in China “almost work.”

One reason why the stairwells are a mess is that nobody’s responsible for making them better. Condo dwellers pay almost no monthly maintenance fee, so almost no common-area maintenance gets done.

Ceilings Americans like to decorate apartment walls, but the Chinese prefer to decorate apartment ceilings instead.

For example, in Donna’s Jiangyou apartment, the living-room ceiling has edges hiding dozens of recessed colored lights. They’re turned on mainly to celebrate holidays and amuse visitors. Many restaurants use those same kinds of lights.

Many restaurants also hang red paper Chinese lanterns from the ceiling, since red is the Chinese color for happiness. (Americans seeing red think of cherries or blood, but the Chinese think of cheer instead.)

Walls Chinese wall decorations are plain: just a few photos or simple art.

Floors For flooring, you’ll see beautiful woods, tiles, and throw rugs, but no wall-to-wall carpeting.

Dirty shoes Since the stairwells and streets are so dusty, the Chinese typically take off their shoes when entering homes or apartments. The homeowner tries to lend everybody slippers.

If a big crowd of visitors enters the home, there might not be enough slippers to fit everybody, so people try this alternative: when they enter the home, they put blue plastic bags over their shoes, then walk in the bagged shoes. The bags act as galoshes but look ugly, like Wal-Mart shopping bags. To a toddler looking up at the crowd, the people look like gigantic carrots sprouting from shopping bags that are hopping across the floor.

Where’s the toilet? If you’re an American visiting a typical Chinese home, your biggest culture shock will be when you visit the bathroom: there’s no toilet to sit on. Instead, there’s just a hole in the floor: you piss or shit in the hole (while squatting), then push a flush button on the wall.

The hole’s made of porcelain and includes a long shitting area (so you can’t miss). It looks like a urinal that fell over and sunk into the floor.

Since you must squat rather than sit, the typical Chinese bathroom contains no magazines to read.

Just the most westernized homes (such as Donna’s and Mimi’s) have sitting toilets. They require you to flush twice (press the left button and also the right button).

Where’s the bathtub? The typical Chinese home has no bathtub. When you take a shower, there’s no tub and little or no curtain, so the whole bathroom floor gets wet. That’s why the typical Chinese bathroom floor has a gigantic grated drain hole, plus a mop to help you push water into that hole.

In Donna's apartment, which is luxurious, the bathroom actually includes a shower stall, with a sliding door and its own drain! That stall is quite fancy, with water squirting you from the stall's sides, the stall's roof, and the stall's hand-held hose. Whee — it's fun! The stall looks like a Jacuzzi that was tilted on its side to stand upright. It even includes a ledge to rest your foot on while the foot is washed. Like most other things in China, when that shower stall was first installed it failed — the hot water turned cold after about 10 seconds — but her brothers grabbed their wrenches and fixed the plumbing themselves, rather than go through the trouble of yelling at the "professional" plumbers they'd hired to construct the bathroom.

Hot water In China, hot water can be temperamental because the typical home has no hot-water tank.

Instead, the apartment's hot-water heater is tankless, gas-fired, and hides in the kitchen. When you turn on a hot-water faucet anywhere in the apartment, the heater senses the drop in water pressure and turns itself on, instantly heating the water passing through the heater's pipe.

If two people try using hot water at the same time, the heater is usually inadequate.

Hot air To heat the air in winter, Beijing (which is cold) uses American-style piped heat.

Sichuan (which is warm like Atlanta) uses big electric space heaters instead, which are stashed in corners or mounted on walls. In the summer, those space heaters act as air conditioners: they have secret pipes to the outside, to the blow heat out.

Windows Many apartments have luxurious big windows (which Americans call "picture windows").

But like most other things in China, those beautiful windows are made cheaply: just single-pane. They offer little insulation. Especially in Sichuan's winter, they collect so much dew that they look like somebody dumped a bucket of oil on them: they're too blurry to see through, until the dew evaporates in the afternoon.

Cheap workmanship Here are other examples of cheap workmanship I've seen in new products:

The edges of windows have too much putty residue that wasn't scraped off.

The edges of bathroom floors have too much caulk.

The towel racks are loose: if you lean on a rack, it will fall off the wall (and you'll fall on your face).

On drawers, the door handles are mounted upside down (so you must stand on your head to read their brands).

Appliances The Chinese homes I visited in Sichuan typically had a big T.V. screen, a CD player, a DVD player, nice furniture, and a washing machine. But you get no clothes dryer, so you must hang the clothes somewhere (a room, patio, or porch) and wait for them to dry.

There are two kinds of washing machine: the newest kind (called "automatic") resembles American kinds, but a cheaper kind (called "semi-automatic") is still popular and works like this:

You see two holes in the top. Put the clothes in the left hole, then turn on that hole's power. You see jets of water squirt at the clothes (as if the clothes were in a Jacuzzi), as rubber sponges spin against the clothes and lint get collected. But that hole has no spin cycle: when the left hole is done washing the clothes, you must take them out and put them into the right hole, which spins them. While spinning, the water coming out of the clothes is automatically piped back to the left hole, to be used for the next wash. Unfortunately, putting the clothes into the left hole and then the right hole doesn't wash the clothes well, so families normally rewash the clothes by going through that whole procedure 2 or 3 times.

You get no "dishwasher" machine, but upper-income folks (like Mimi) have the next best thing: a "dish dryer" (which looks like a microwave oven).

Light switches The typical American light switch looks male: it's a prick that sticks out of the wall. The typical Chinese light switch looks female instead: it's a rounded button (which you press or rock).

In a Chinese bathroom, the switches are covered by a clear plastic shell that keeps humidity out of the electronics. To access those switches, lift the shell first.

Water Though China's tap water has improved, the Chinese still don't trust it, so they boil it before drinking. Then they drink it warm, or wait for it to cool, or make it cool faster by refrigerating it.

Protective ornaments Where the hallway meets the living room, the wall's protruding corners are covered with dark-wood protective ornaments, so if you accidentally bump into the corner, you'll be banging those protectors instead of wrecking the wall.

Hotel frugality When we visited Beijing, Donna treated me to a "4-star international hotel." (It was called "international" because it included a bathtub.) It used two tricks to discourage us from being wasteful:

When we entered our room, the lights stayed on for just half a minute, then suddenly shut off. To make the electricity continue working, we had to put the room "key" (which looked like a credit card) into a special holder. When we left the room and took the key with us, the lights would all shut off again — to make sure no electricity got wasted when the room was unoccupied.

In the bathroom, a sign urged us to reuse the same towels for 2 days, so the staff wouldn't have to waste water by rewashing them. The sign said: the maid will fold our towels but not clean them (unless we leave them in the bathtub). The sign included this summary: "For a green and clean environment, please use towels second day, else put in bathtub."

Department stores

China still has many small shops but now also has huge department stores, many stories high, new and chic, full of luxurious high fashion and cosmetics from around the world.

Jiangyou's main department store has two sneaky tricks for keeping customers in the store:

To go from the street to the departments, you take the Up escalators, which are pleasantly wide and inviting; but the Down escalators are narrow (to discourage you from leaving).

When you try to leave an upper floor by taking a series of Down escalators, you discover the Down escalators aren't next to each other. At each floor, you must walk through several departments to get from one Down escalator to the next.

Discounts are advertised differently than in the U.S.: instead of a sign saying "30% off," you'll see a Chinese sign saying just "7," which means "you pay 70% of list price." As you walk through the store, you'll notice that some racks of clothes say "7," while others say "6" (meaning you pay 60% of list price) or "5" (meaning you pay 50% of list price).

Though a department store looks like just a huge single store, financially it resembles a mall: each part of each aisle has its own salesperson, who rents space from the store. To buy an item, you must first hand the item to the salesperson, who scribbles a purchase order for you; then you hand the purchase order to a cashier (elsewhere on the floor) with your payment; then the cashier hands you a receipt, which you bring back to the salesperson, who finally hands you the item you bought.

Food

To get food in China, you have several choices.

Supermarkets China's supermarkets are like department stores: huge, several floors, including imports, with salespeople in every aisle to offer you advice about what to buy. Some supermarkets are even part of department stores.

If you want to buy fruit or fresh vegetables, don't just bring them to the supermarket's main checkout counter: instead, bring them first to the produce department desk's own clerks, which weigh what you bought.

The Chinese government is trying to convince its citizens to drink more milk (for vitamins and calcium) — and so are milk's marketers. Milk is not refrigerated; instead, you buy stay-fresh cartons (which you can keep at room temperature) or powdered milk (which you mix with water).

China offers many kinds of "milk," just like the U.S. offers many kinds of "multivitamin pills." When you walk down the milk aisle in Jiangyou's supermarket, salespeople accost you and try to find the best kind of milk for you: for example, you can choose "milk for seniors" or "milk for infants." In China, all stay-fresh cartons and most powdered milk is whole milk, with just slight modifications. Skim milk is available just as a powder and just if you look hard for it among all the other milks.

As in the U.S., China's supermarkets include bakery and deli sections, which provide meals cheaper than restaurants.

Fast food In big cities (such as Beijing and Chengdu), you can easily find MacDonald's (look for the arches) and Kentucky Fried Chicken (look for "KFC"). In Beijing, a Japanese fast-food chain competes against American junk by offering dishes based on rice instead of French fries.

In Beijing, the fast food places are so busy that it's hard to find an empty table, so they hire ushers who look out for empty seats from departing customers and guide you to them.

Several Chinese companies have started their own fast-food chains. Jiangyou's best (run by Donna's sister's friend) serves American fast food (hamburgers, hot dogs, and soft-serve ice cream) along with European pastry and Chinese-European loaves of bread (thick, dark, tasty, and tangy, with a touch of blueberry jam hiding inside). Instead of buying a hot-dog grill (and finding room for it), this place deep-fries the hot dogs, as if they were French fries.

Tables of fine food In a Chinese home, the typical table is a double-decker: it has a glass surface (to put your food and drinks on), with a wooden surface below (to put knickknacks, napkins, and other distractions).

Most tables are rectangular, in homes and restaurants; but restaurant tables for big groups (6 or more) are round, and the glass surface rotates (and is slightly smaller than the wooden part), so the glass surface acts as a lazy Suzan, holding the pots of food that everybody shares.

You don't say "pass me the turtle soup"; instead, you just rotate the glass until the turtle soup comes to you. Then you get as much of it as you wish into your individual bowl, which is on the wooden surface.

By the way, about that turtle soup: it really has a dead turtle floating in the middle of it. You see the whole turtle, even its head. Chinese people prefer to eat meats and fish with the head still on, to prove that it's freshly killed. In restaurants, if you want to order fish, you walk over to the fish tank, look at the fish swimming there, point at the fish you want to eat, and say "kill this one." You'll receive it, cooked, with the head still on.

In homes and restaurants, the Chinese eat family style: everybody shares the pots of food that have been cooked. There are no serving spoons: instead, everybody grabs his own spoon or chopsticks and digs into the pots, transferring as much as desired to his personal bowl.

Sharing food like that is unsanitary: if one person is ill and goes back for a second helping, everybody else at the table will eat his illness. On the other hand, the food itself is quite healthy: the food eaten in Sichuan contains lots of watery broth and vegetables, with very little saturated fat, and it's hard to overeat, since the

chopsticks and tiny spoons slow you down, though when rushing the Chinese take this shortcut: raise the personal bowl to the mouth, then shovel food from bowl to mouth as fast as possible, using chopsticks to help push it.

The typical American quickly chomps through a hamburger or a Big Mac. But in Sichuan, you'll slowly manipulate watery noodles with weird things sitting on them; you won't get fat.

The Chinese stay thin because of their wet diets, chopsticks, stairs, human-powered transportation, and realization that there's more to life than just staring at TV screens and computer screens.

Guangzhou's reputation Guangzhou is the pinyin name for "Canton," the city that invented Cantonese food, and where people are willing to experiment by eating different kinds of animals. Chinese people say:

In Guangzhou, they eat everything that flies, except a plane; they eat everything that swims, except a boat; they eat everything with 4 legs, except a table.

No surcharges

In China, you don't have to tip waiters, taxi drivers, hotel maids, or anybody else. Tipping is never expected.

There's no general sales tax, either: the price you're quoted is the price you pay, not a penny more!

That's why Chinese immigrants to the U.S. don't tip — and don't expect to be taxed — until Americans reeducate them.

Time

Most Chinese office workers take a *two*-hour lunch break, from noon to 2PM. That long lunch is like a Mexican siesta: very practical on a hot day! During lunch, the workers go home if they live nearby.

To take that long break and still finish the day's work, the workers come in early (8AM) and leave late (6PM). So the day consists of two 4-hour shifts: 8AM to noon, then 2PM to 6PM.

The U.S. has several time zones (Eastern, Central, Mountain, and Pacific) plus Daylight Savings Time. China has none of that silliness: all of China is on the same clock, all year. All China is forced to use Beijing's clock. Since Beijing is in eastern China, workers in western China must come to work in the dark before sunrise, though after work they enjoy lots of sunshine — like U.S. construction workers.

Entertainment

The Chinese have many ways to amuse themselves.

TV On Chinese TV, the mouths aren't quite in synch with the sounds. That's partly because some shows are secretly dubbed (Cantonese actors are dubbed into Mandarin) but also because China's long-distance satellite-TV system isn't accurate.

Historical dramas are particularly popular. The typical drama includes lots of talking (among the royalty and occasionally the peasants), interrupted by an occasional kung-fu skirmish. The talk-to-fight ratio reminds me of "*The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*" (the famous Clint Eastwood cowboy movie that was mostly talk but interrupted by an occasional fight).

As in the U.S., China TV includes ads. Many of the ads are for health (milk, pills, cosmetics, and toothpaste). The ads show Chinese characters supplemented by some pinyin, English characters, and Internet addresses.

The Chinese leave the TV on, for background sound, when socializing or eating meals. But some TV ads are inappropriate during mealtimes. Reacting to citizen complaints, the government promises that during dinnertime the TV will run fewer ads for feminine-hygiene products.

If you visit China and have a chance to watch TV, turn to channel 9 (CCTV-9). It's all in English! It's the international

channel, to teach foreigners about China. It's a pleasant mix of news, views, travelogues, and introductions to Chinese art, culture, language, and regional differences. I wish America had a channel like that to teach foreigners about America!

Chinese New Year Chinese New Year is based on the lunar calendar and comes in late January or early February, depending on the moon's mood. It's the country's biggest holiday, and the whole country gets a week-long vacation, optimistically called **Spring Festival** (even though it's really winter), during which the Chinese visit their relatives by fighting to get on overcrowded planes, trains, and buses.

During that week, TV presents the **Spring Festival Gala**, full of gala spectaculars that are glitzy and mindless. Some folks complain that the gala doesn't devote enough attention to minorities and social issues. In 2004, the gala's planners tried to loosen things up by including more audience-participation shows.

During Spring Festival, lots of kids and families shoot off fireworks, from rooftops and parks. They're not the dinky little fireworks that American kids shoot at July 4th; instead, they're industrial-strength fireworks, many feet tall, the size of surface-to-air missiles, shooting hundreds of feet into the air, with multiple payloads, colors, ba-ba-booming sounds, visible from miles away — the kind that Americans would permit only when shot by professionals protected by a moat and a fire department. On Chinese New Year night, the sounds and sights will make you think you're in a war zone. Chinese families schlep oil drums to the park, then launch the many rockets hiding inside, by remote control, and just hope no girl walking by at the wrong moment has her guts propelled to heaven.

Mahjong When Chinese folks have nothing else to do, they play **mahjong**, which is a form of poker. Instead of "hearts, diamonds, clubs, and spades," the suits are "sticks, circles, and chickens." Instead of being thin, the cards are thick, so they look like wooden dominoes (or big Scrabble letters).

Mahjong players usually gamble small amounts of money. Elderly people like to spend their days relaxing in teahouses while playing mahjong.

Badminton While waiting for customers, shop assistants sometimes stand outside, on the sidewalk, playing badminton. It's good exercise for the employees, and it attracts attention to the store. But if you try that in the U.S., some bureaucrat will probably complain that the store doesn't have a badminton-onsidewalk permit.

Drum corps When a new store's been constructed and has its grand opening, the store hires a 100-woman drum corps, which marches back and forth in front of the store, banging their drums. It attracts attention to the store and the whole neighborhood.

Hey, kids, why not start a similar service in the U.S., to attract attention to new businesses? Just make sure you get permits!

Historic sites In the U.S., historic sites are rather boring: you usually enter a building, hear a lecture, and get tired. Chinese historic sites are more fascinating, because they're surrounded by beautiful parks.

To enter a Chinese historic building, you must hop over a wall that's nearly a foot high. That wall's the **threshold**: it marks the doorway's bottom. All old houses and buildings had those thresholds instead of American-style "doors," which weren't needed since Sichuan usually has pleasantly warm weather, no snowstorms, no rainstorms, and no crime.

In the Northeastern U.S., many places brag that "George Washington slept here." In Sichuan, many towns brag that "**Li Bai** lived here." He was China's most famous poet. He lived from 701 A.D. to 762 A.D., during the Tang dynasty. He's called the "drunk poet," because his poems are full of drunken

hallucinations. His most famous poem begins like this:

Have you never seen Yellow River waters Flowing down from Heaven, Rushing toward the sea, Never to return?
--

Like most of his poems, it begins by describing China's natural beauty, but American men notice it's also a good poem to recite to a urinal.

Another Sichuan attraction is **Du Jiang Yan**, the world's first major water project, built in 250 B.C. by the Qin family (who, 29 years afterwards, conquered the rest of China and called themselves the "Qin dynasty.") The project was hard: to divert water to Chengdu, Qin's peasants had to build a dam and blow up a mountain, but explosives hadn't been invented yet, so they broke the mountain's boulders apart by lighting fires on them, then dousing the fires with cold water, to make the rocks fissure. After 8 years of that, they finally created a mountain pass for their canal to flow through. Now the canal, dam, and reservoir are surrounded by a park with scenic views of mountains and rivers.

Weather

Sichuan rarely gets rainstorms but often gets drizzles. The drizzles dampen the streets but aren't strong enough to wash dirt away, so city streets and sidewalks stay dirty and dusty awhile, until finally attacked by city employees who grab huge brooms (resembling tree branches) and sweep every street and sidewalk in the whole city, by hand.

Since Sichuan is usually warm and balmy, retired folks love to relax by sitting outside (playing mahjong at outdoor cafés) or doing aerobic martial-arts dances in parks.

Beijing is farther north, much colder, and much windier. It's also less relaxed: there are fewer benches to sit on. In winter, Beijing's grass turns pale, while Sichuan's stays green.

Trees

In many cities (such as Mianyang in Sichuan province), the bottom 4 feet of each tree trunk are painted white, to discourage bugs from eating the bark.

Hanging roots Especially in downtown Mianyang, you see trees that have strange things hanging down from the branches. Those "strange things" are roots! Yes, roots grow down from the branches and search for the soil. If those extra roots don't succeed in reaching the soil, they shrivel; otherwise, they grow strong and look like auxiliary trunks.

Painting If you want to become a landscape painter, look at the trees on the hills near Mianyang. The branches bend in strange ways. Especially in winter, the leaves are sparse but come in bunches, which look like powder puffs, so they're easy to paint: just one dab from a splayed brush will give you a whole puff. New England is best for colors, but China is best for shapes.

Bulges Many trees look pregnant: they have huge bulges around their trunks. If you look at the bulges carefully, you discover they're bales of hay, tied into balls and hung there by farmers.

Relationships

When I travel, I'm more interested in the people than their wares.

What the Chinese think of America The Chinese are eager to learn English (because they want to understand American music and movies and earn more money from international trade). They like most Americans, though they think Bush was an idiotic callous jerk to start a war with Iraq.

Though Americans often visit big cities such as Beijing, Americans are rarer in small cities such as Mianyang and Jiangyou. Many kids in those cities have never seen an in-the-flesh American before — though they’ve studied English in school and seen Americans on TV — so they stare at me when I walk down the street or sit in a restaurant. They treat me as if I’m a cross between a Martian and a superstar. A 7-year-old girl kept staring at me while I was eating in a restaurant; finally, when I was leaving, she shyly said “Hello” to me in English. I said “Hello” back to her. That made her day. She beamed.

Dancing The Chinese people are proud of their culture. Donna’s relatives showed me their dancing skills and asked me to show them my American dancing, so I showed them the most advanced American dances I’ve mastered: the Bunny Hop and the Hokey-Pokey.

the **Bunny Hop** (a line dance where you hold the hips of the person before you and kick right twice, then left twice, then hop forward-back-forward-forward-forward, while twitching your nose to look like a scared bunny)

the **Hokey-Pokey** (a circle dance where you learn the English names for body parts by following Simon-says instructions such as “put your ass in, put your ass out, put your ass in, and you shake it all about”)

All her relatives started freakily copying my Bunny Hop and Hokey-Pokey, and Donna made me teach those dances to all senior citizens in the park, too! So now I, too, can put on my résumé that I’m an “American who corrupted Chinese culture.”

Advice The Chinese love to give advice. In fact, they *insist* on giving advice, even when you don’t want it.

Americans believe that “people should be free to boogie through life however they wish.” The Chinese believe “everybody should act properly.”

A friend of mine visited China for many months and became part of China’s culture. When she returned to the U.S., her roommates complained her personality had changed: she’d turned into an annoying authoritarian asshole, telling them all how to act. She apologized and returned to the American philosophy of “do whatever you want.”

Donna’s daughter explained to me that in China, each group of people (such as a family) develops a leader who tells everybody else in the group what to do; and if anybody asks why, the leader just says, “That’s a rule.” The leader keeps inventing more rules.

Because of China’s history of repressive governments and mass slaughters, survival’s often meant being warned what to do, before you get in trouble. But now that China’s government is starting to loosen up, maybe someday the Chinese will become as free as Americans.

City reputations Sichuan province’s most famous city is Chengdu, which produces beautiful women. (My wife was born there.) Married men who visit Chengdu often wish they’d married Chengdu women instead! Chinese people say:

When you visit Chengdu,	you learn you married too early.
When you visit Beijing (the capital),	you learn your rank is not high.
When you visit Guangzhou,	you learn you’re not rich.

More often, Chinese people use advanced grammar to purposely create Daoist mysterious confusion, like this:

Not until you visit Chengdu	do you realize you married too early.
Not until you visit Beijing	do you realize your rank is not high.
Not until you visit Guangzhou	do you realize you’re not rich.

Recently, other Chinese cities have become even richer than Guangzhou.

“Not One Less”

To experience China without leaving the comfort of your American home, rent a movie about China. I recommend *Not One Less*, which I found at our local video-rental store in New Hampshire.

It’s about a girl who, though just 13 years old, is forced to take a job as an elementary-school teacher in rural impoverished China, then must run to the city to retrieve a student who ran away, then winds up on TV.

The biggest surprise comes at the end, when you discover who the actors are. The characters are all played by themselves: they used their real names and real titles. Even the bureaucrat was played by... a bureaucrat!

You’ll see the schoolkids get lessons in Chinese & math and see how hard it is to discipline an elementary-school class.

The director is famous in China for trying weird experiments. The movie ends with a political message saying millions of schoolkids run away from school to earn money for their families.

The film is subtitled and won an international award in 1999, but I can’t figure out when the story’s supposed to take place, since the schoolkids give a pledge-of-allegiance to Mao, who died in the 1970’s, and my wife doesn’t believe life in rural China is so bad today. Is it?

Joe Wong

“Joe Wong” was born in China but went to college in the United States, where he became a citizen, a Ph.D. microbiologist at Harvard, and a funny Chinese critic of U.S. life. He said this at a dinner with Vice President Joe Biden & journalists:

I bought a used car. The bumper sticker said, “If you don’t speak English, go home,” but I didn’t notice it for 2 years. Like many other immigrants, my wife and I want our son to become president of this country, so we try to make him bilingual: Chinese at home, English in public. That’s hard to do. Many times in public, I must tell him, “If you don’t speak English, go home.” He asked me, “Why do I have to learn 2 languages?” I replied, “Once you become president of the United States, you must sign legislative bills in English and talk to debt collectors in Chinese.”

When I graduated from Rice University, I decided to stay in the United States, because in China I can’t do the thing I do best here: be ethnic.

To become a U.S. citizen, I had to take American history lessons, where they asked us questions like “Who’s Benjamin Franklin?” We replied: uh, the reason our convenience store gets robbed. “What’s the second amendment?” Uh, the reason our convenience store gets robbed. “What’s Roe versus Wade?” Uh, 2 ways to come to the United States.

In America, they say all men are created equal. But after birth, it depends on the parents’ income, for early education & health care.

President Obama’s always been accused of being too soft. But he was conducting 2 wars, and they still gave him the Nobel Peace Prize, and he accepted it. You can’t be more badass than that!

In 2008, I became a U.S. citizen, which I’m really happy about. America is number 1: that’s true because we won the World Series every year.

Now we have a president who’s half black, half white. That gives me hope to become president myself, because I’m half not-black, half not-white. As president, I’ll eliminate unemployment in this country by reducing the American workforce’s productivity, so 2 people have to do the work of 1, just like the president and the vice president.

88 ways to know you’re Chinese

People who are born in the United States but are ethnically Chinese are called **American-born Chinese (ABC)**. People who are born in Canada but are ethnically Chinese are called **Canadian-born Chinese (CBC)**.

Canadian-born Chinese love to pass around an e-mail that reveals “88 ways to know whether you’re Chinese.” Chinese in Canada and the U.S. have gradually improved the list, to make it truer. I’ve organized it into topics....

Diet

1. You like to eat chicken feet.
2. You suck on fish heads and fish fins.
3. You prefer shrimp with heads & legs still attached, to show they're fresh.
4. You like to eat congee with thousand-year-old eggs.
5. You've eaten a red-bean Popsicle, know what moon cakes are, and acquired a taste for bitter melon.
6. You boil water then store it in the fridge. You always keep a Thermos of hot water available.
7. When you're sick, your parents tell you to boil herbs and stay inside. They also tell you to avoid fried foods or baked goods because they produce "hot air" (*yeet hay* in Cantonese).

Eating style

8. You eat all meals in the kitchen, whose table has a vinyl tablecloth on which you spit bones and other food scraps.
9. Your teacup has a cover. You tap the table when someone pours tea for you.
10. You reuse jam jars as drinking glasses.
11. At the dinner table, you pick your teeth (but cover your mouth).
12. Whenever you take a car ride more than 15 minutes, you carry a stash of dried food: prunes, mango, ginger, beef/pork jerky, and squid.
13. When you visit a home, you bring along oranges (or other produce) as a gift. Your parents refuse any sacks of oranges that guests bring. At Christmas, you give cookies (or fruitcakes, which could be over 5 years old).

Food economy

14. You hate wasting food, since your mom gave lectures about starving kids in Africa. When someone plans to throw away the table's leftovers, you'll finish them even if you're totally full. Your fridge's "Tupperware" contains three bites of rice or one leftover chicken wing; but you don't own *real* Tupperware — just a cupboard full of used but carefully rinsed margarine tubs, takeout containers, and jam jars.
15. You eat every last grain of rice in your bowl but not the last piece of food on the table.
16. You reuse teabags.
17. Your fridge's condiments are either Costco sized or come in tiny plastic packets (which you save/steal every time you get takeout or McDonald's). Ditto paper napkins.

Restaurants

18. You know all the waiters at your favorite Chinese restaurants.
19. You starve yourself before going to all-you-can-eat buffets.
20. Whenever you go to a restaurant, you wipe your plate and utensils before you eat.
21. You fight (literally) over who pays the dinner bill.
22. At restaurants, you rarely tip more than 10%; when you do, you tip Chinese delivery guys/waiters more.

Food preparation

23. You use a wok, own a rice cooker, and wash your rice at least twice before cooking it.
24. Your kitchen's covered by a sticky film of grease. Your stove's covered with aluminum foil.
25. You've never turned on your dishwasher, which you use as a dish rack.
26. You beat eggs with chopsticks.
27. You own a meat cleaver and sharpen it.
28. You don't use measuring cups. You always cook too much.
29. You have stuff in the freezer since the beginning of time.

Dealing with parents

30. You've never kissed your mom or dad.
31. You've never hugged your mom or dad.
32. You never discuss your love life with parents.
33. Your parents are never happy with your grades.
34. If you're 30, you still live with your parents (and they prefer it that way) — or you're married and live in the apartment next door or at least in the same neighborhood. If you don't live at home, your parents always want you to come home. Each time they call, they ask whether you've eaten, even if it's midnight.
35. You never call your parents just to say "Hi."

Relationships

36. At work, you e-mail your Chinese friends, though you're just 10 feet apart.
37. When you go to a dance party, a wall of guys surrounds the dance floor and tries to look cool.
38. You often say "Aiee Yah!" and "Wah!" You say "Wei" when answering your cell phone.
39. You've been on the Love Boat or know someone who has.

40. You love Las Vegas, slot machines, and blackjack.
41. You own an MJ set and possibly have a room set up in the basement. You know "MJ" doesn't mean Michael Jackson; it's mahjong!
42. Your parents send money to relatives in China.

Eyes

43. You've worn glasses since the 5th grade.
44. Your unassisted vision is worse than 20/500.
45. You wear contacts to avoid your "Coke-bottle glasses," which you saved though you'll never use them again.

Appearance

46. You're less than 5' 8" tall.
47. You look like you're 18.
48. Your hair sticks up when you wake up.
49. You use a face cloth. You take showers at night.
50. You iron your own shirts.
51. You always leave your shoes at the door.
52. Your house is covered with tile.
53. You leave the plastic covers on your remote control — or enclose your remote controls in plastic — to keep greasy fingerprints off.
54. You twirl your pen around your fingers.
55. If you're male, you have less body hair than most girls.
56. If you're male, you clap at something funny. If you're female, you giggle while placing a hand over your mouth.
57. You're always late.
58. Your parents use a clothesline and can launch nasal & throat projectiles.

Cars

59. You drive a Honda or Acura.
60. Your dashboard is covered with hundreds of small toys. A Chinese knickknack hangs from your rearview mirror.
61. You don't want to wear your seatbelt, because it's uncomfortable.
62. You drive around looking for the cheapest gas. You drive around for hours looking for the best parking space.

Music

63. You've joined a CD club at least once.
64. You sing Karaoke.
65. You play a musical instrument.
66. You have a piano in your living room.

Movies

67. You like Chinese films in their original undubbed versions.
68. You love Chinese martial-arts films, and you've learned some form of martial arts. "Shaolin" and "Wutang" actually mean something to you.
69. Your parents never go to the movies.

Practical skills

70. You majored in something practical, like engineering, medicine, or law.
71. Your dad thinks he can fix everything himself.

Hotels

72. You don't mind squeezing 20 people into one motel room.
73. You have a collection of miniature shampoo bottles you took every time you stayed in hotels.
74. You avoid the non-free snacks in hotel rooms.

Economizing

75. You love to use coupons.
76. You save grocery bags, tin foil, and tin containers.
77. Your toothpaste tubes are all squeezed paper-thin.
78. You unwrap Christmas gifts very carefully, so you can reuse the paper.
79. You buy Christmas cards only after Christmas, when they're 50% off.
80. When toilet paper's on sale, you buy 100 rolls. You store them in your closet (or the bedroom of an adult child who moved out).
81. You feel you've gotten a good deal if you didn't pay tax.
82. You have a drawer full of old pens, most of which don't write anymore.
83. You always look phone numbers up yourself, since calling information costs at least 50¢. You make long-distance calls only after 9PM.
84. You know someone who can get you a good deal on jewelry, electronics, or computers.
85. You'll haggle over something that's not negotiable.
86. You keep most of your money in a savings account.

Conclusion

87. You know this list consists of just 88 reasons because, in Cantonese, "8" is pronounced the same as "good luck."
88. You see the truth in this message and forward it to all your Chinese friends.

Donna's comments

You've heard enough from Russ, my husband. Would you like to hear from me? Russ asked me to contribute this section, though my life has no "tricks."

I'd also love to contribute my singing to you. You'll be surprised to hear my songs & their stories, at:

SingWithDonna.com

East versus West

I'm a Chinese American. To American eyes, I'm Chinese; but if I go back to China, I'm legally an American.

I'm living in two cultures. I eat half Chinese food and half American food. I speak half Chinese and half English. I enjoy the two different cultures, which makes my life more colorful.

Here are interesting phenomena I'd like to share with you. In this article, when I say "Chinese," I mean people in China, not Chinese-Americans.

What I say might not be 100% right, but I'm sure it's at least 70% right: it applies to 70% of such people and situations. If you read it and think some things are *not* true, you may belong to or be familiar with the other 30%.

Eating

Eating's an adventure!

Eat or drink soup? Chinese people like clear soup. They actually "drink" soup. A mother usually cooks chicken or pork soup, with special mushrooms, for her family. It takes 4 to 5 hours to cook, and the soup's considered very good for you.

Not many people in China have Chinese-American "egg-drop soup" or "hot & sour soup," which I'd never seen before I came to the U.S.

American soups are too thick to drink. The way Americans have their soup is more like eating a soup.

Eager to serve Visiting Chinese friends at their homes? As soon as you sit down, you're automatically served with hot tea, fruits, and whatever snacks they have. They even peel apples and oranges for you. If the time's right, they'll persuade you to stay for lunch or dinner. Then the housewife will disappear into the kitchen, and in no time a table full of beautiful dishes magically waits for you.

Drinks When offered a drink, a Chinese guest often says, "Oh, thank you so much, but don't bother." An American guest is more relaxed and says, "Coke would be fine."

Eating more Chinese try to make their guests eat more, even if the guests say they're full. Chinese often help their guests to the food, like a server. Americans let guests decide for themselves what to eat and when to stop.

At a Chinese banquet, food keeps coming to the table. You find yourself already full, but dishes after dishes are still coming. So be careful not to eat too fast and get full too soon!

Even at a grand American wedding banquet, just 7, 8, or 9 courses are served, unless it's a buffet.

Passing food When eating, Americans pass food around, with a big plate in front of each person. Chinese share foods from

a few dishes in the middle of the table, with a small bowl of rice in front of each person.

Salt & pepper Americans often shake salt and pepper onto their food before even tasting the food. Chinese never add salt or pepper to their food at the table, unless the cook did a bad job.

Chinese food is tastier. American food is more natural.

Utensils Americans lick their thumbs after eating something like donuts or cake. Sometimes they use their thumbs to help the fork push food in the end.

Chinese sometimes hold up the bowl to the mouth and use chopsticks or a spoon to help shovel the food into their mouths.

Peeling Many Chinese peel apples, pears, and peaches. Some even peel grapes. But they normally don't throw out chicken and pork skins.

Many Americans don't eat chicken skin, pork skin, or salmon skin but eat lots of fruit skin.

Slaughter An American home doesn't have to slaughter chicken or fish. At the table, Americans are scared to see fish with heads on.

Most Chinese families needed one brave guy to slaughter chickens until recent years. Now ready-to-cook chickens are available in a supermarket, but people complain those chickens don't taste good enough.

Socializing

To understand a society, look at how it socializes.

Kind words Americans say "thank you," "excuse me," and "sorry" a hundred times a day. A Chinese couple doesn't say "thank you" when passing food to each other.

Helpfulness If your car breaks down on a highway or you're lost in a strange city, you're more likely to get help from an American than a Chinese. But if you must borrow money urgently or need a place to stay for a few days, go to your *Chinese* friends.

Inside out Americans are more outgoing. They like to greet people. They're more likely to talk to strangers and more easily make friends. A typical Chinese prefers to be quiet before strangers.

Back door In China, there's a "back door" for power-related people to get a good job, promotion, business, and escape the law. Small-business owners try to befriend tax officials or policemen for "benefits." Businesses spend lots of money for power-related social relationship.

In America, friendships are more personal than "beneficial." "Back doors" are not common.

Gifts It's not rare for a Chinese to spend 20% or 50% of a month's wage for a wedding gift. If you receive 2 or 3 wedding invitations in a month, you feel you'll go broke. But people still give generously, because they think smaller gifts can't show their feelings — and if you spend less than others, you'll "lose face." American friends are content to give and receive *small* gifts.

When American friends go to a restaurant, they can pay bills separately, a rarity in China.

Never give a clock or green hat as a gift to a Chinese. In Chinese, the word "clock" is pronounced *zhong* — and so is the word "end" or "funeral." Old people are especially scared of receiving that. As for wearing a green hat, it means "cuckold" (a man whose wife is sleeping with a different man).

Social drinking In America, a bigger percentage of people drink alcohol than in China. Pubs, bars, lounges, and alcohol have a secret strong attraction to American teenagers. College students under 21 can't wait to go to a bar like their older schoolmates. The more you want to forbid something, the stronger desire it may arise.

China has no law against minors drinking alcohol, though it's never encouraged. Parents can send a young kid to buy a bottle of

wine (or cigarettes) for them. At a family reunion party when I was little, my parents dipped a chopstick into a glass of wine and then let me taste it, just for fun. But that taste made me dislike alcohol for the rest of my life.

Chinese men make lots of noise when they drink. At parties, they clamor to make somebody else drink — for congratulations, health, friendship, respect, good wishes, the punishment of being late, or no reason. The more you can make somebody drink, the better. That becomes the most popular social activity.

Waiting lines Americans patiently wait in lines for banking, boarding, and eating. In China, you can see people shove ahead to board a bus — and young guys cut in line for tickets.

Handling foreigners Chinese are very friendly to foreigners and treat them as guests.

In America, strange-looking people might not be foreigners. You can't tell foreigners by their looks. But some Americans don't have good feelings toward "foreigners."

Lawsuits In America, "everybody sues everybody." People buy expensive home insurance for fear someone will fall at the door and sue. Some people get very rich by suing big companies.

Chinese think that's ridiculous and dishonest. The cost of "everybody sues everybody" is Americans pay too much for insurance and medical care. A Chinese saying is:

Forgive if you can.

Traditionally, Chinese sue just criminals, but now they're starting to learn American's way and become smarter.

Family versus world

Which is more important: your family or the world?

Chinese parents Chinese parents pay college tuition for their kids, even if doing so puts the parents in poverty or heavy debt. Parents don't mind working 80 hours a week to buy a kid a computer or piano. Often you'll see a bright young man get a doctor's degree but still not know how to cook rice.

When they're old, Chinese parents are taken good care of, often living with their kids.

Chinese social circles Lending money to a relative or close friend is interest-free. Sometimes the money is even a gift. Relatives and friends form a strong social circle for a Chinese person. A Chinese saying is:

You depend on your parents at home, friends outside.

Getting jobs, promotions, and customers can depend on how strong your social circle is. A person may cheat or do something illegal just for the sake of a relative or friend. A Chinese may feel less responsible to the rest of the world; a cynical Chinese saying is:

Shovel your own snow in front of your house.
Worry not about the frost on others' roofs.

American extended feelings Americans tend to have weaker family ties, even if family is the most important thing to them. Some kids must work hard for tuition or to pay back their loans. Old folks live lonely. Borrowing money from a brother, you might have to worry about the interest.

But Americans tend to have more *extended* feelings. They pay lots of tax to help the poor and schools, rather than buy their lonely old mothers expensive gifts. They're especially nice to the handicapped and retarded. They treat their pets like their children. They donate money to African kids. They spend huge sums of money on international affairs, to fight for other countries and build other countries. They're proud of working as the international police.

Schooling

China's schools are quite different from America's.

China's mountainous burden China's educational reformers say "Give back kids' childhood" and "Study while having fun," but middle-school students in China still study 8-10 hours a day, including morning reading and evening homework.

12th-grade students study more than 12 hours a day, to pass the nationwide college entrance exams.

During their junior and senior years, kids stay up late after midnight every night: no TV, no movies, almost no sports, no dating, no shopping, no parties, no household chores, nothing but studying. Some kids get sick; all think it's a miserable life. But they realize they must do it to get into a good college or even just a mediocre one. Their parents watch this happen — with painful hearts but high expectations. Schools and teachers get high praise and great reputations if their students get enrolled in great colleges.

July 7, 8, and 9 are the 3 days when the nationwide college examinations are held. Kids say as soon as that ends, they'll throw away all their books and sleep 3 days and 3 nights and then have parties 3 days and 3 nights.

When they finally get into college, they never study as hard as in high school, and they can't believe they were able to go through it. They're scared even to think of it.

Goofing off? American high school students don't need to study so hard to enter a college. They can always get into some sort of college if they can afford the tuition.

High-school seniors still have time to work in McDonald's or date girls. Many kids already get admitted to a college while still seniors. If they really wish, they can begin college courses early.

In America, you can be a happy kid even if you don't do well in school. In China, you get too much pressure from parents and teachers; you can hardly be happy if you're not doing well.

Chinese-American parents complain American schools throw the burden of moral education onto parents' shoulders. In China, schools watch student behavior more carefully.

Hours In China, typical elementary-school kids have 5 hours of class a day: 9AM to noon, then 2PM to 4PM.

They get a 2-hour lunch break, when they can eat from their own lunchboxes (or at home if they live nearby). At night they have 1 hour of homework. 6th-grade students study harder and longer, to enter a good middle school. Kids aren't allowed to watch much TV except during weekends.

American students have less homework. Schools start earlier and end at 2PM. Kids have just 30 minutes for lunch.

Classrooms In America, students go to different classroom for different teachers. Each classroom is decorated according to the subject and the teacher's style.

In China, students stay in the same classroom while different teachers come to teach them. The only different rooms to go to are the music classroom, the science lab, and the gym or playground for PE.

Control In China, teachers have more control over the class. Students are required to keep quiet while their teacher talks.

American students are more active in class. They discuss more. They can even walk around.

In America, teachers try to make their lessons easy and fun. Teachers tend to make students feel good. They encourage more than criticize. Getting an A is pretty easy if students work at it.

In China, teachers are stricter. They always try to let you know you still have far to go to reach the goal. It's hard to get an A, even you work hard. In the 2nd grade, students already learn multiplication & division. Chinese textbooks are among the hardest in the world.

Insulting the poor students? Some classes in China post final total scores and ranks on the wall, so the students all know their classmates' ranks.

Once or twice a semester, all parents have a group meeting with the teacher. Parents sit in their kids' seats and see the posted ranks. Some feel proud. Some get embarrassed & shamed and beat the kids when they get home.

American schools think it's against human rights to post student ranks. An American student may say, "You have no right to insult me just because I'm not smart enough in something."

In China, students have extracurricular math groups where teachers teach more advanced math. Math competitions and other science competitions are held for cities, provinces, and nationwide. Chinese students often win first place in international "math Olympic" competitions.

American teaching emphasizes problem-solving strategies. Chinese style is to feed students as many facts as possible.

Life experience American students get lots of work experience *before* graduating from college. They feel more confident to deal with the competitive job market. They feel more at ease getting along with bosses, fellow workers, and customers. They're outgoing, good at discussing things, solving problems, expressing their ideas, and using machines & computers.

Before the 21st century, most Chinese students never got any work experience before college graduation (except in rural areas, where kids worked from a very young age to help on the farm). Chinese students in U.S. colleges are often among top students and always aim at higher degrees but are still nervous about competition.

American students are more sports-loving. Chinese students are more book-loving. Few Chinese students know how to play baseball or surf.

American students have cared little about what happens in the rest of the world (except after 9/11). They may not know where Iraq or Hong Kong is. Chinese students are the opposite: they know the name of France's foreign minister and the name of Leonardo DiCaprio's newest American movie.

Student dating

Traditionally in China, parents don't let teenage students date.

If dating happens, teachers & parents go all out to stop it. They argue that dating will harm a kid's studying and eventually destroy the kid's future. But in recent years, things have been getting looser.

In America, most kids aged 16 & up have some sort of experience dating. Teachers & parents don't want to invade their privacy. Schools even give students birth-control pills. All a mom can do is to warn her daughter not to get pregnant.

In an American shopping mall, I came across a woman I knew with 2 kids. She introduced her 15-year-old daughter to me, then introduced the boy as her daughter's "boyfriend." I thought the boy was the girl's younger brother.

In China, if teenagers want to date, they usually date secretly. Since most *good* kids don't date, kids feel guilty if they do.

In America, a schoolgirl may feel bad if she has no boyfriend. She might wonder, "Is something wrong with me? Why do other girls have boyfriends while I don't? Am I unattractive?"

How parents handle kids

Your opinion of life depends on how your parents treat you.

Saying "love" Chinese people feel embarrassed to say "I love you." That's why Chinese parents & kids hardly ever say "I love you" to each other, and they seldom hug each other when kids grow up.

Many American parents & kids say "I love you" almost every day.

Investing in kids Chinese parents eagerly pay for a kid's college education, computer, and piano. Some parents even buy a house for a kid's wedding present.

American independence American parents raise kids to be independent and responsible.

I saw a 2-year-old American boy in a raincoat walking in the rain, followed by his mom. The boy splashed a lot of water, as he stepped hard into the puddle on the cement ground. His mom just

watched and followed. When he fell, he looked back at his mom, but she just said "get up."

When American kids grow up, they sometimes pay rent to their parents if they live in their parents' property. Some parents pay their kids to do house chores.

Chinese worry Chinese parents worry about their kids, endlessly:

Do the kids get A or B in school? What kind of friends are they hanging out with? Are they good enough to get into a good high school and then a good college? Are they bad enough to be secretly dating in school?

When kids finally graduate from college and get good jobs, then parents worry whether the kids are dating enough and when the kids can get married.

Here's an ancient Chinese saying:

Everything is low compared to education.

Parents hope their son will become a "dragon" and their daughter a "phoenix" (meaning "outstanding").

American parents let kids choose what to do and what kind of schools to attend. The kids' futures are in their own hands.

Spoiling? Many Chinese parents shelter their kids from doing any household chores. They spoil kids in everyday life.

But Chinese parents believe ancient Chinese philosophy:

An uneducated son is his father's fault.

An undisciplined student is the teacher's fault.

That's why many Chinese parents are strict about their kids' early education, beginning at age 3 (in reading, arithmetic, art, musical instruments, ballet, and computer), making the kid's life either promising or miserable.

In America, children are spoiled differently. Parents don't force their kids to do much. Parents can't beat kids, even if for drugs. From their early years, kids get a good sense of freedom. But since parents leave kids alone, some kids play hooky, some don't work hard at school, and some get sexually involved and pregnant. (Exception: my American neighbors, Flo & Gene Fitzgerald, are very strict. Flo stayed home until her 2 kids graduated from high school, to take care of them and watch them. Now their son's an M.I.T. professor and world-renowned scientist & entrepreneur, and their daughter's a very good schoolteacher.)

Chinese have a saying similar to the American one, "spare the rod, spoil the child." But most Chinese parents today don't beat their kids as in the old days. If they do, it's because they "hate if the iron doesn't become steel." Chinese don't think "parents beating their kids" is abusive.

Serious dating and marriage

Up through the 1970's, the typical Chinese girl would marry the first man she dated. If a girl dated 3 boys, she'd get a bad reputation. Hardly any man & woman lived together unmarried.

From the 1990's on, things changed a lot. Now there's not much difference between China and the U.S. You see girls & boys live together as "girlfriend & boyfriend," unmarried. "Out-of-marriage relationships" and "third relationships" have appeared.

Singles There are more singles in America than in China.

If a Chinese man or woman is still single at age 30, the parents and other relatives get very worried. Friends & relatives go all out to help introduce somebody to this person.

Americans don't worry much about their single relatives. They think single people may enjoy that lifestyle.

Personal ads Chinese dating ads concentrate on education, job, salary, property, looks, and height. (The Chinese prefer tall people.)

Americans concentrate on looks, personality, hobbies, and weight. (Americans prefer skinny people.)

Now more and more Chinese are dating through the Internet, "chat" through the Internet, and send messages through cell phones.

Divorce America's divorce rate is much higher than China's. Chinese couples are more likely to put up with a marriage even if it's unhappy. Americans aren't willing to suffer from an unhappy marriage: they keep just happy marriages.

A divorced Chinese couple doesn't pay lawyers to decide child visitation rights. The couple just talks and decides for itself. Americans spent money on lawyers for everything!

Crazy sex Americans are usually good at obeying laws. They pay taxes, behave themselves in public, and act helpful and friendly. But for sex, even some very good Americans try crazy things (which seem strange to the Chinese!), such as the 1960's sexual freedom, today's bondage & domination, and nudist beaches. I heard this comment:

American culture is a culture of sex.
Chinese culture is a culture of food and gambling.

Americans have strip bars. Chinese nightclubs have "3-companion girls" instead (a companion for drink, singing, and dance).

Prostitutes are forbidden in both countries. But secret ones are always there.

Extra wives In China now, some rich people and officials illegally live with a second "wife," sometimes even a third "wife" or more. Some even have kids with those extra "wives."

No normal American woman is willing to be an illegal "wife" to a married man, even if he's rich.

Relationships

How do you relate, if you're Chinese?

Your in-laws If you're Chinese, you call your mother-in-law "Mom" and your father-in-law "Dad." You'd feel awkward and disrespectful to call them by their first names as Americans do.

Indirect expression Chinese express feelings indirectly. Example:

A girl is sick and hopes her boyfriend will come see her. But on the phone she says, "I'm all right. You don't have to come." Later, she gets upset because her boyfriend didn't come see her.

Who pays? In America, a boyfriend & girlfriend share the cost of rent, utilities, and food but buy presents for each other to show they care for each other.

In China, a man's supposed to take care of his girlfriend. When dating, a Chinese man often spends lots of money for restaurants & presents. A good girl's supposed to be proud & well-treated. If a girl chips in half of the rent to live with a man, she's considered a desperately lowly cheap date.

Old people

A good old Chinese tradition is to respect the old and love the young. 3 generations often live together. If an old person lives alone, people take pity and think the children are unkind.

In America, old people usually choose to live by themselves, even though their children love them dearly.

Retirement age In China, men are traditionally retired at age 60 (professional) or 55 (non-professional); women are retired at 55 (professional) or 50 (non-professional). But now people are retired even earlier. Some get laid off with partial wages before the age of retirement.

In America everybody's legal retiring age is 65 or 62.

Chinese activity In a Chinese city's parks in the early morning, you see old people doing exercises (such as *chi-kong* air exercises, *tai-chi* exercises, playing with swords, and dancing). In the late afternoon & evening, some old folks do group dancing in parks and inexpensive nightclubs. Some go to an "Elder's College" or "Elder Association" to learn art, dancing, cooking, gardening, calligraphy, and photography.

That's just in the cities. In rural areas, old people usually don't have retirement income, so they depend on their children and live a less cultured life than their city counterparts. Just recently have some rural areas started getting retirement systems.

American activity Some Americans choose to keep working part time after age 65. They're active and energetic. Some have volunteer jobs. Elder communities often have parties, seminars, and club activities. Some elderly people like to travel. Some drive cars even in their 80's and 90's.

Who looks younger? From babyhood until turning 40, Chinese people look younger than Americans. But after turning 55, Chinese look older than Americans. An 80-old Chinese guy looks much older than an 80-year-old American guy.

Other differences

The Chinese use language differently and have a different sense of "variety."

Names Americans have too many people called "Michael," "Peter," and "Mary." (Americans are called by their first names.)

Chinese have too many people called "Wang," "Chen," and "Zhang." Chinese are called by their last names, like "Xiao Wang" (which means "little Wang") or "Lao Zhang" (which means "old Zhang").

Calendar Americans use words such as "Monday," "Tuesday," "January," and "February." Chinese use numbers such as "Day 1," "Day 2," "Month 1," and "Month 2." Just "Day 7" has a name, also meaning Sunday.

Chinese use two different calendars. The main one's the same as the American. The other is the "lunar calendar." China's most important holiday is Chinese New Year Day, which is the first day of the lunar calendar.

Backwards Old-style Chinese books are written in vertical columns, from right to left, backwards. To decipher addresses on American envelopes, Americans read from bottom to top, upside-down.

Music Chinese has a simple music notation (besides the professional notation used by Westerners). The simple music notation uses numbers for notes: 1 for *do*, 2 for *re*, 3 for *mi*, 4 for *fa*, 5 for *so*, 6 for *la*, and 7 for *ti*.

For a higher octave, put a dot above the number. For a lower octave, put a dot below the number.

Homogeneity All small American cities look the same, having the same shopping malls with same stores. Streets are lined by the same restaurant chains.

In China, each city is different!

I don't recognize China anymore

China is far, and China is close. It's tens of thousands of miles away, and it's just at the other end of my phone.

Here are reports I wrote, in several years. See how China changes!

Report from year 2000

It's the year 2000. On the Internet, I'm reading news in Chinese every day from Yahoo China and many other Chinese websites. I'm amazed to see how fast China is changing. China now is so modern that I hardly recognize it anymore.

DVD or VCR When I went back to China in 1998, I saw people using DVDs. I never heard about it at that time. When I

said I was using a VCR, my friends laughed and said they weren't using VCRs anymore.

My mom came to the U.S. to visit us in June 2000. While she flew across the Pacific Ocean, photos of her boarding at Shanghai's airport were already sent by digital camera to our computer, from my relatives in China.

China is dressy Every time I returned to China, the first things to do were perm my hair and buy new clothes. My dear relatives would indirectly suggest I wasn't dressed well enough, though I was wearing the same dress praised by my American friends.

One thing I like about the U.S. is you feel okay wearing anything you want. Nobody cares much if you're poor or rich.

In China, city women seem dressed up all the time. Many buy expensive clothes & makeup and go to salons every week for hair & face treatments.

Newly rich Though most people in China aren't rich yet, some did become rich as a result of China's ex-leader Deng Xiaoping's policy: "Let some people get rich first."

Some Chinese-Americans who went back to China (to work or do business) complained they couldn't bear China's lifestyle of "banquet every night." They missed their quiet American lifestyle, which they feel is better for their kids & families.

People in China criticize overseas Chinese (especially those returning to China from America) by saying "They talk fancy (they speak Chinese with English words here and there) but look & act cheap." The overseas Chinese reply, "If you people who got newly rich by staying in China had to pay high taxes like us, you wouldn't criticize us like that."

Open door to outside Between 1949 (when Communist China was founded) and 1976 (the end of the Cultural Revolution), nobody in China had private property: everything belonged to the public. Everybody worked for the "country" and earned some money for a basic life. People gradually forgot about getting rich; they cared more about how to survive political class struggles. Some tried to enjoy a rich spiritual life in arts, literature, and science.

In 1976, continuous political class struggles finally ended, and the country started to open her door to the outside. To her shock, China found a different world outside: in developed countries, people work for themselves and enjoy a wealthy life.

Advanced, rich, modern Western countries aroused China. Smart Chinese, who'd been too proud of their great ancient science, art, long history, and rich cultures to bother learning from other nations, now longed for advanced technology & management.

For a long time, the Chinese government kept arguing about "Socialism or Capitalism?" Finally, Deng Xiaoping's famous "cat theory" ("Black cat or white cat, the one that catches mice is a good cat") led China into today's economic reform and prosperity, called "socialism China-style."

Report from year 2002

China's "booming economy" and "weak foundation of laws" have caused lots of bad phenomena: corruption, bribery, smuggling, robbery, and prostitution have become serious problems.

Corruption In the 1970's, a mayor made not much more money than a factory worker. An official who embezzled 1000 yuan (one U.S. dollar equals about 8 yuan) was considered to have committed a big crime and would face severe punishment. But now corruption cases appear in Chinese news websites every day, some involving millions or tens of millions of yuan. A few high officials were sentenced to death for big corruption, but even the death penalty seems unable to stop corruption.

Prostitution After 1949, the Chinese government prohibited prostitution, and for decades it was dead. The only case I remember seeing was in 1985, when a middle-aged countrywoman was sentenced to death for the crime of "underground organizer of prostitution."

But the new fast-growing economy has brought prostitution back to life. Though it's still prohibited, it flourishes in some nightclubs, salons, inns, and streets.

Second wife Another strange phenomenon is "er nai," meaning "second wife." A small number of men with money or power secretly live with an illegal "second wife" in a second home, even having a kid.

In the old days (1940's or earlier), some wealthy Chinese men married 2 wives or even more. Now some newly rich men ignore the law and try to follow their forefathers. They get a lot of criticism and will have legal trouble.

Sex China used to be very conservative. Up through the 1970's, I think most people married the first person they dated. A girl who dated more than 3 men usually got a bad reputation. In those horrible "class struggle" years, anybody having extramarital affairs or adultery was treated like a "class enemy" or criminal — and thereafter lived a shamed life, if not in jail.

Now nobody feels strange about seeing a man & woman live together before or without marriage. Changing boyfriends or girlfriends constantly is normal. Many movies are XXX. TV talk shows discuss sex. TV ads claim to make breasts bigger.

Report from year 2003

China doesn't look like a communist or socialist country anymore. 5 years ago, the government still insisted it was trying "socialism China-style," but now it's stopped mentioning that. Instead, materialism dominates the whole country. One Chinese commentator said, "Beijing's streets are full of people dreaming of getting rich."

Privatized From 1949 (when the Communist party came to power) until 1976 (the Cultural Revolution's end), China had no private business. After 1976, small private businesses appeared. Now most businesses are owned privately (except a few big government-owned enterprises).

New buildings are built by private builders. Many factories, stores, restaurants, and hotels are owned privately. Real estate is priced 5 times higher than 5 years ago.

Gap The gap between the rich & poor keeps growing. Many people earn just 10,000 yuan per year (1 U.S. dollar equals about 8 Chinese yuan); some rich people earn several million.

Many people in their late 40's or early 50's got laid off with a pension of between 2000 and 8000 yuan per year. 2000 yuan isn't enough for even a simple rural life; 8000 is barely enough to live in a small city.

People in the countryside have no pension. Some country areas are still very poor and get limited help from the government.

A few of the super "newly rich" enjoy the rich lifestyles they never dreamed of: some travel around the world, play golf, ride horses, drive Benz cars, have parties in fancy restaurants & nightclubs, live in fancy houses in different cities, have maids for housework, send their kids to the best schools overseas, and even buy millions of dollars' worth of houses overseas, paying cash.

Back in the 1970's, Deng Xiaoping proclaimed, "Let some people get rich first." Now most Chinese folks cynically call the newly rich the "Rich First" and call themselves the "Rich Later," to kid they themselves might get rich later according to Deng Xiaoping's proclamation. If they get rich soon, China will be the best country in the world.

Most Chinese people think they live much better than 20 years ago, so the reformation's good. But some think it's worse because, in "Mao's time," you all worked for the country or the public; you felt and were called "masters of the country," especially the working class; but now you suddenly must work for a person who used to be your fellow worker or someone who was no better than you except for luck. He becomes a big boss and gets rich, while you become his worker and stay poor.

The original idea of Communist society was:

All businesses and all properties belong to the public. Society should be highly developed, materially and spiritually. Its citizens should work their shares according to their abilities and get paid according to their needs.

That would be the ideal world to live in if it could come true. Unfortunately, when Communist parties came to power in the Soviet Union & China, instead of focusing on economic development they kept fighting "class struggle." Meanwhile, since those who worked hard got paid about the same as those who worked less, there was no incentive to work hard. Moreover, some intellectuals were named "class enemies" and lost opportunities to contribute their knowledge; others had to use "half the heart" worrying whether class struggles would crush them. As a result of all that, the economy crashed, and the country plunged into poverty.

The Chinese people and their government were smart enough to change that situation before it was too late. Now they're doing well — better than anyone expected. The recent success of sending an astronaut into the space and having him return shows Chinese technology's great potential!

Report from year 2004

Russ & I went to China on January 19th. It had been 6 years since my last personal visit. It was Russ's first time to go. Both of us were excited.

Russ said he was looking forward to the long flight, so he could finally sleep without interruption. Poor guy!

Travel through China Our first surprise was the airports in Beijing & Chengdu: must be brand-new! They're very modern & beautiful, like the great ones in the U.S.

Then we took a bus through Chengdu. The city wasn't familiar to me anymore! Workers had constructed tall buildings & huge billboards, all new to me. So many cars, bicycles, pedestrians.... The city looked busy, lively, prosperous.

On the way to Jiangyou (2 hours north of Chengdu), we saw about 35 broken cars, all lined up on the highway and facing Chengdu, apparent victims of a chain-reaction car accident.

It was Chinese New Year's Eve. Drivers were standing by their cars, looking sad, their New Year's Eve family parties ruined. But I noticed most of the people were dressed well, and some of the cars were fancy. They must be the "new rich." (Six years earlier, less than 1% of the Chinese drove cars, since cars were owned just by state-run companies.)

Condo My family welcomed us with a grand meal and brand-new condo!

3 months before this trip, my mom told us about the condo being for sale, so we'd bought it: 3 bedrooms, 1½ baths, on the 5th floor of a 7-story building. Now we finally got to see what we bought!

Upon entering, after lots of hugs and greetings, we were awed by the beautiful floors, windows, ceilings, fancy lights, and outside views. Russ said this was as beautiful as New York City's best! But it cost just \$22,000, even including major furniture! (That's because it's in Jiangyou, a medium-size city. Housing prices are more than twice as high in Chengdu, and more than 5 times as high in Beijing and Shanghai.)

Living it up Basic life is wonderfully inexpensive in Jiangyou and even in Chengdu. Every other day, my brothers and sister took us out for dinner. Then Russ wanted to treat my whole family:

We reserved a dinner for 20 people in a private room in a nice restaurant. 2 huge round tables (each having 2 layers, the top one turning) were piled with delicious, beautiful dishes to share. There was so much food we could hardly finish half of it. It cost just \$85 to feed all 20 of us.

Jiangyou is still a paradise of bargains for consumers like us, though fancy restaurants & hotels in Beijing and Shanghai can get as expensive as in the U.S.

But even in Jiangyou & Chengdu, a few stores are expensive. A shirt can cost \$200 in some foreign-influenced clothing stores & department stores, which are so beautifully modern I thought I was in America.

Street scenes Traffic was a mess. Every time I took a taxi, I was scared to see that the driver constantly drove across the yellow center line to pass other cars.

Some streets weren't clean. Trees, flowers, and plants were covered with dust. You'd just have a desire to grab a hose and spray water on them.

In front of our building was a huge new park inside a traffic rotary, about the size of a football field.

At night, colorful lights shone on the grass. In the mornings, people did all sorts of exercise there — walking, dancing, Tai Chi boxing, Chinese traditional swordplay, Chinese drum-team practicing, and colorful Chinese fan dancing.

The first morning, when Russ looked out our window, he was so excited to find activities there even in winter! I asked him, "You want to go?" He said "Sure," hurriedly put on his coat, said "Maybe too late," then looked out again and said "Some people are leaving. Too late!" We ran downstairs, crossed the road, and were still in time to join a group doing swordplay. Seeing Russ, a "foreign guest," they stayed longer and showed us their fan dance. Russ even had a photo taken with them!

People dance there every night also (except when unusually cold). Anybody can join and learn to follow their steps.

On sunny days, people come to sit around the flower gardens, take a walk, and fly kites. Too bad there's some litter.

Retiring I have some "retired" relatives & friends who used to be teachers, accountants, and officials.

They look too young to have anything to do with retiring. They're smart, professional, full of experience & energy. But they were "early retired" from organizations that downsized.

Every morning, they get up late. Some take a walk, then breakfast. After breakfast, they shop for lunch groceries, then cook lunch. Playing **mahjong** (a popular 4-person gambling game resembling poker) becomes their major activity.

They don't feel good about themselves. They envy me because I work and I'm still "useful."

Happy farmer Sichuan has a new kind of eatery, called a **happy farmer**.

Those eateries started in a farmer's house but got bigger & fancier. Some are as big as a school and include many buildings, open areas (with tables for tea and mahjong), natural beauties (plants, flowers, and ponds), and restaurants. One in my hometown includes entertainment like the "Tibetan bonfire dance."

Those eateries charge much less than regular restaurants. You can spend a whole day there, drinking tea and playing, with a meal, for just \$3 total.

Is China poor? I visited a happy-farmer eatery with my former colleagues, who were teachers. We talked about America & China. While playing mahjong, one retired teacher complained, "An unemployed person in America must get more money than me." I laughed and replied, "Look, you're wearing nice clothes and own a nice condo. You have pork, chicken, fish, rice, bread, vegetables, milk, and eggs on your table. You have health insurance. And you don't have to work at age 55!"

Some Chinese think everybody in America is rich, and some Americans think all Chinese are poor.

Some regions of China are still very poor. Many people who got laid off are still poor.

Today the gap between the rich & poor is very big, among the biggest in the world. China needs to work on it. That's what I bothered me most on this trip.

Report from year 2006

In August 2006, I returned to China for another 2-month vacation. I'd normally gone in winters, to catch the Chinese New Year holiday season; but my mom suggested I return in autumn instead, for a change, so we'd have more outdoor activities. So I went in August, even though I own a restaurant in New Hampshire and it was the restaurant's busy season.

I was surprised to see American culture has crept more and more into Chinese daily life.

Pricey drinks I already knew China was changing daily, and I wouldn't have been surprised if I'd seen a naked body-artist in the street. But what really surprised me was a Beijing outdoor pub selling a tiny glass (maybe 6 ounces) of mixed drink for 100 yuan (\$13). My New Hampshire restaurant sells a 14-ounce mixed well liquor for just \$4. Is China always as cheap as it's famed to be?

Those Beijing pubs, over a hundred of them, sit along the beautiful royal lake in Beijing's center. When we were there around midnight on a weekday, the pubs were packed and bands were loud, reminding me of New Orleans' French Quarter.

3 of us each ordered a drink, totaling 300 yuan. I never drink alcohol, so I couldn't tell whether the drink was good, but I was surprised at the fancy American-sounding names and tiny portions!

Pricey housing In Beijing in 2006, a normal person makes between 2000 and 5000 yuan a month (\$260-\$650), but a 3-bedroom condo costs between 1,000,000 and 2,000,000 yuan.

In China, houses are sold by the square meter. 10 years ago, Beijing's houses were about 2000 yuan a square meter. They started going up to 3000, 4000, 5000 yuan.

3 years ago, my daughter suggested we buy a unit there, for about 5000 yuan a square meter. I replied, "But you're planning to take a job in Japan. Who's going to live in Beijing?" When the price went up to 8000 yuan a square meter, she moved to Beijing. Again, I said it was too expensive.

But now no house in Beijing is under 10,000 yuan a square meter!

Millions of homeowners who bought earlier become millionaires! But now people complain that even if they'd saved money for 100 years, they still couldn't afford a place in Beijing.

Shanghai is even more expensive. But the high prices aren't just in big cities like Beijing & Shanghai. In the city where I grew up (Chengdu) and other medium and small cities, house prices all went up dramatically.

Pricey department stores Shopping in China's department stores can be extremely expensive. American and European upscale brands such as Nike, Adidas, Lancôme, Maybelline, and L.A. Bag cost more in China than in America.

You'll see a young guy who makes 2000 yuan a month spend 700 yuan for a pair of Nike shoes. Girls often use a month's salary to buy expensive facial stuff.

Department stores look like those in the U.S., even fancier.

American intrusion American culture is intruding in every corner of China's city life.

Businesspeople meet in Starbucks. Kids' favorite place is always McDonald's. Pizza Huts are usually packed. Pubs are full of young people who colored their hair blond. Valentine's Day, Mother's Day, and Christmas Day have become big events for commercials and ordinary folks. Sometimes you wonder whether you're in America or China.

The first 3 days in Beijing, I felt sad, wondering how regular people could afford Beijing living. But I gradually discovered, to my relief, there were still some stores, supermarkets and restaurants that are less expensive.

Teaching English In China, English has been hot for the last 15 years. It's getting even hotter.

Many native English speakers from the U.S., Britain, Canada, and Australia have gone to China to teach English. 5 years ago, they were making about 7000 yuan a month, while a Chinese college graduate would make only about 1000 yuan.

Recently, more and more foreigners have come to China to teach English. Now they make just 4000 or 5000 yuan a month, even less in small cities. They still make a bit more than regular Chinese people, since English is still hot.

Of course, Americans teach English in China not for the money but for a thrilling experience.

In Chengdu, I met two young college graduates from California, Mike and Cathy.

They told me teaching in China was the most exciting experience in their lives. They just finished their first-year contract and decided to renew for another year. They said they felt very respected, appreciated, useful, and even admired. They also said they lived very well, with a free room, much better than average Chinese people. They went to restaurants often to try different "real" Chinese food; and if they went with Chinese friends, they didn't even have a chance to pay. They didn't have to worry about paying rent, car loans, or credit-card bills. The only problem was they sometimes felt a little homesick.

Many retired folks teach English in China. The only requirement is to be a "native English speaker."

Teaching Japanese Some Japanese people teach in China, too. My daughter studies Japanese from a retired Japanese couple living in Beijing and says they're very nice, don't even charge her tuition.

American-global culture Most students in China's colleges, high schools, and even middle schools are familiar with Michael Jordan, Michael Jackson, Madonna, Tom Cruise, Tom Hanks, Julia Roberts (nicknamed the "big-mouth beauty"), the Clinton couple, George Bush, Condi Rice, the Red Sox, the New York Yankees... Teenagers wear belly-baring jeans and wide, long T-shirts. They sing rap songs. Many people worry that China's 5000-year culture will gradually fade away.

Though the U.S. hasn't existed for even 300 years yet, it has a strong holiday culture, mostly borrowed from older European countries. No holiday can compare to Christmas, which overwhelms you completely with the holiday season's atmosphere for a whole month, with so many songs and music to make your heart tender and peaceful. America's stores, public places, and even homes seem always decorated for the next holiday. That idea's been picked up now by China's businesses & commercials, though Chinese New Year's Day is still decorated with red lanterns, red-door "duilian" (like poems and calligraphy), and red carved pictures on the windows, accompanied by plenty of food and lion dances.

Living in a global village, each family borrows someone else's ideas. The more you learn from others, the smarter & stronger you'll become. That's the case with today's China.

Report from year 2008

In April 2008, I went to China to visit my mom for 2 months.

The airline lost my luggage. When I arrived at my mom's home in Jiangyou, my relatives told me she'd suddenly died.

A few days later, China's biggest earthquake hit:

It measured 8 on the Richter scale, with 69,000 people confirmed dead, plus 374,000 injured, plus 18,000 missing and 5 million homeless. The city the earthquake picked as its center was mine, Jiangyou, population 900,000: the whole city was wrecked, including our high-rise condos, so everybody had to camp outdoors, shuddering in makeshift tents made of scraps of cloth, without food or sanitation.

My husband tried to cheer me up by saying God had treated me to a camping trip.

Not a pleasant trip! Friends died. I don't want to talk more about it. It was a trip to forget.

Report from year 2011

In April 2011, I returned to China again. This time, the trip was uneventful, which means successful! I stayed 10 weeks.

I began by visiting my daughter Mimi in Beijing. She recently married a Chinese guy who calls himself "Simon" to honor the singer Paul Simon.

I've always thought of Mimi as my little girl who needed my care, but now *she* took care of *me*! During the 3 weeks I was with her, she & Simon piled as many nice treats as possible on me.

They got me 2 dental appointments and a health checkup. They took me to the theater and to play badminton. They took me to **798**, which is the most famous art gallery district, converted from an abandoned factory; there she bought me a beautiful artistic shawl. We went to see a movie, from America, about a panda (Kung Fu Panda 2). She got me a perm & facial.

Hot pot China is famous for its hot-pot restaurants, where a waitress brings you a pot of spiced water to boil at your table. Then you submerge meats, fish, and vegetables: just dip the goodies in the pot, wait for them to heat, then pull them up to eat.

Sichuan had a tiny hot-pot seafood restaurant called "Ocean-Bottom Pull-Up," which grew to become a national chain and a case study by the Harvard Business School. Since I'd read a book about it and got curious, Mimi & my brother took me to its outlet in Beijing.

That outlet is huge: several hundred tables, plus a waiting area holding about 30 tables, where you can play checkers, get free snacks & drinks. The staff also polishes your shoes and does your nails, free! You have so much fun in that room you forget you're waiting for your main meal.

Finally, the hostess tells you your meal's table is ready. Then you place your order. Prices are moderate: the price per person is just 60 yuan (\$9). It's a good place to take friends & family, though not quite upscale enough for business meetings.

Pricey tiny China's restaurant portions used to be big, as in the U.S., but now they're so tiny they look like they're from France. And of course, prices have soared.

In China, is eating cheap? Not anymore. Restaurant bargains are history.

Japanese in China Mimi & Simon took me to a nice Japanese restaurant in Beijing.

The food was presented very attractively. Udon noodles, sushi — everything tasted so good! — and seemed better than Japanese food served in the U.S. But the portions were tiny: to satisfy 3 or 4 people, you must order at least 6 items, so the cost per person is about 100 yuan (\$15), which is pretty high for a Chinese budget.

Mimi said that in Japan, where she worked a year, the food tastes really good, even in a small restaurant, but looks simpler. Here in Beijing the presentation is fancier.

Orchard Restaurant We visited the Orchard Restaurant, on the outskirts of Beijing.

It's in the middle of an orchard, with a pond you can walk around.

It looks like an American family restaurant, with an American chef managing Chinese cooks. The dining room looks Chinese, with Chinese waitresses walking around, incense burning in a corner, and Buddha statues to protect wealth; but the food is very American: huge portions and tasty, too!

To my surprise, a meal of rib-eye steak cost 365 yuan (\$56), not including soup or salad. I own a restaurant in New Hampshire, where we charge just \$17.99 for the same meal but include soup or salad.

But at least you get an orchard to play in, so the restaurant acts as a compromise between an American family restaurant and Sichuan's happy-farmer outdoor restaurant. Sichuan's happy-farmer restaurants have lots of outside activity — you can play mahjong & poker and drink tea under the trees all day.

It's a nice place for weddings: 370 yuan (\$57) per person for a wedding buffet that includes beer and some wine.

Clothes Sadly, the Chinese in-crowd doesn't like Chinese-branded clothes. They prefer foreign brands: European, American, Japanese, and Korean.

When Chinese people visit Western countries, they shop a lot at Louis Vuitton, Macy's, and America's outlet malls. When Mimi & Simon came to visit us in New Hampshire, they bought lots of stuff at the local outlet mall and saved over \$1000 that day.

Even students on low budgets try foreign brands that are less expensive: \$25 per item from budget-fashion chains such as Uniqlo (based in Japan) and H&M (based in Sweden).

Housing On days when we didn't go out for dinner, Mimi & Simon took me for walks in their walled-off, gated community, which featured a scenic garden with streams, waterfalls, bridges, and all sorts of trees & flowers.

People tell this joke:

If you own a condo in Beijing, you're qualified to immigrate to the USA.

That's because the U.S. will give you a "green card" if you invest \$500,000 in the U.S.

Beijing's housing is expensive, advertised at 30,000 to 40,000 yuan per square meter (\$430 to \$575 per square foot). When I walk down the streets, I see real-estate-office windows advertising homes for 2,000,000-7,000,000 yuan (\$300,000-\$1,100,000). The closer to Beijing's center, the higher the price.

Everyone who's bought a home is thrilled at the investment. Two years ago, my sister bought a condo in the Sichuan city of Chengdu, and its value has already doubled. Mimi bought in Beijing, and hers doubled also, in a year and a half.

But folks who haven't bought housing yet face a huge burden. The housing market is tough for youngsters who want to marry. People say:

If you're just a factory worker, you'd have had to work ever since the Qing dynasty (over 100 years ago) to save enough to buy a condo.

If you work on a farm in the countryside, you'd have had to work ever since the Tang dynasty (over 1000 years ago).

The government's tried many times to stop real-estate speculators. For example, China now has a law that if you buy real estate you must keep it at least 5 years before selling it. To buy housing in Beijing, you must prove you've lived & worked in Beijing for 5 years and paid your income taxes. But government's restrictions are too late, since prices have already soared to the top.

In Beijing, people have built more net worth from housing bought a year ago than from a whole lifetime of earnings from hard work.

My brother has a friend who worked in Beijing for 25 years. When housing there cost 2,000 yuan per square meter many years ago, he thought it was "expensive." Then he watched it go up fast and said, "No, no, no!" Now housing is up to 40,000 yuan per square meter, 20 times as high. He gave up on Beijing and turned back to Chengdu, where he got a nicer, bigger place for less money. I guess he feels sorry he missed the big chance to get rich.

2 years ago, when Beijing's housing prices dipped briefly then started to rise again, Mimi thought of buying a 1-bedroom condo. I suggested 2 bedrooms instead. While she was looking, she discovered prices were soaring every day, so she took the 1-bedroom condo and said the delay cost her a car, because the price had gone up that much in just 2 weeks. But she still wound up happy, because her condo's value doubled afterwards.

Chengdu You might already know these famous sayings about Chengdu (Sichuan's capital):

Chengdu's a place that once you come, you never want to leave.
Chengdu is developing fast, living pace slow.

Chengdu is like a beautiful lady: warm, charming, elegant, relaxing.

Chengdu's won 2 awards:

In a rating of Chinese cities, Chengdu's become rated the best to live in.
In a survey measuring people's happiness in China, Chengdu's become #1.

In Chengdu no season's bad for outdoor activity. Sure, summer is hot and winter is cold, but not extreme.

Sit outside? Impossible in Beijing's freezing, windy winter! But Chengdu is okay: if you wear a coat, you can sit outside playing checkers & mahjong and sip tea at an outdoor teahouse, and you can do all sorts of exercise outdoors.

In Chengdu you can live luxuriously; but if you have less money, you can still lead a colorful life.

On Chengdu's outskirts, many small towns have turned themselves into scenic spots. They've fixed up ancient buildings, to create quaint "ancient towns".

Each ancient town has its own theme: one has peach blossoms, some have lakes, rivers, flowers, food. I visited a nice one where you can admire a river, play mahjong, and get a 2-bedroom motel suite cheaply, just \$10 per night, with views of the river, boats, open-door teahouse, and lanterns. So beautiful!

Downtown Chengdu's restaurants can be very fancy & expensive, but you can pay less by visiting smaller restaurants that are cheaper.

On a quiet street in one of the ancient towns, I found a small restaurant whose specialty is the **1-noodle bowl**. Your bowl contains just 1 noodle, very long, handmade by the staff, who make a performance of throwing it into boiling water and winding it into your bowl. Eat it hot or cold. Lovers have fun eating it: one lover eats from one end of the noodle, the other eats from the opposite end, and when they meet in the middle they kiss. It costs just 8 yuan (\$1.25).

Clothes for me My brother Guangdi & his wife took me to a nice department store in Beijing to buy me clothes.

I got scared at the high prices: mostly 1500-2000 yuan (\$230-\$310). I said, "No, no, no!" But they insisted, "Try one! We have a coupon."

Eventually I found an inexpensive blouse for 800 yuan (\$125). I said "I like this" and tried it. Everybody said "You look good!" so I got it.

When I went to Chengdu I bought some clothes for just 150-550 yuan (\$23-\$85) but still very good quality & beautiful. I feel a lot more comfortable buying in Chengdu.

Relationships My trip consisted of too much social life.

When I visited China, my friends & old classmates came to see me. I had parties with relatives & friends almost every day. I felt they treated me as an honored guest but felt awkward being always the guest. I enjoyed coming back to New Hampshire, where I can finally relax in my own home, though I feel lonely here.

My trip's main pleasure was seeing that my daughter Mimi, after she married, grew up.

Never before had I felt she was so considerate & caring. Now, wow! She took care of me so much! The day before I left, she & Simon took me to the Japanese restaurant and gave me a diamond ring. "Oh, my God," I said, "You shouldn't have done that, you guys."

I didn't expect that at all, but I learned that a girl who gets married can immediately grow.

Touching devotion I want to talk about the woman who touched me most this time.

Her name is **Xiao Shū**. Back in 1994, she married **Xiao Pei**, who had a son from a previous marriage. That son had lived with his mother but moved in with Xiao Pei when he was 10 years old. At that time, the son, named **Wei**, was a rebellious boy who listened to nobody, gave a lot of back talk, wasn't respectful, and didn't care for school or anything else.

Xiao Shū didn't want to deal with Wei and his problems. She wanted to have her *own* baby. But her father (a college professor) gave her this piece of advice: "You know the saying **ai wu ji wu** (which means love something, love what's similar). If you love Xiao Pei, you should love his son. Just treat this boy Wei as your own. Then you'll have a happy family & happy marriage."

She obeyed her father and started caring for the boy. But she discovered he was difficult: he wasn't respectful, wasn't working hard, and had a "just give up" attitude. Many times she asked him, "What do you want? What can we

do for you? We'll do our best to make you happy." But he didn't improve.

Finally, she told him, "If all your friends like name-brand clothes, we'll buy the same for you. If they want some sports game, we'll buy it for you. But in return, you must get A's in school. Okay? A deal?" Wei agreed.

She started buying what she promised. She got him name-brand clothes, sports shoes, everything, dangerously doing her part of the bargain first. Little Wei went to school with a better schoolbag, better clothes, and better shoes. He suddenly looked different. He was very happy! He had more friends, who came to his home. She always treated them with good food.

Every day after school, she looked at his homework assignment and did it in parallel with him. She worked on it by herself, while he worked on it separately, then they compared their answers and decided who was wrong. She taught him. That routine lasted many years. She also read good books with him, together.

Gradually his grades went up. He turned into a good student. He got admitted to a good middle school, one of best high schools, and one of best colleges. Now he's in Switzerland, going for a doctorate in chemistry, alongside his girlfriend (who's also from Chengdu and in Switzerland for a doctorate).

Every week, he phones Xiao Shū from Switzerland. "Hi, Aunt Shū...."

"Do you want to talk to your father? He's here."

"Oh, okay."

Xiao Pei's friends asked, "What's your son doing?" He fibs, "I don't know. Maybe he's a security guard somewhere."

Xiao Pei's a light-hearted, relaxed guy. His ancestors had been a prestigious family. His grandfather was a Sichuan high official. The family lived very richly before 1949, so **Xiao Pei's mom** lived in high style when she was a kid. You can see some old rich family traits in Xiao Pei.

After the Communist Party came to power in 1949, the family's wealth was confiscated, so the family suffered a poor life for many years.

But strangely enough, Xiao Pei's mom continued to live in high style, even though she no longer had much money. In her whole life, she never did any housework, not even laundry. She'd rely on maids to take care of such things. To make ends meet, she had to work in a factory for many years and spend conservatively. But she kept up the appearance of a high lifestyle: folks joked that she was the kind of person who'd take a taxi even when she had just 20 yuan in her pocket, rather than doing what us normal people would do: take a bus or walk.

In spite of her craziness, she managed to raise 6 kids, and none became bad! In fact, as soon as they earned any money, they gave lots of it to her. That's a Chinese principle: a child's #1 responsibility is to respect parents, be nice to them, make them happy.

So her 6 kids all tried hard to make her happy. That's why we say, light-jokingly, that she worries about nothing; her whole life, she's always light-hearted, relaxed.

She has a generous heart: she lets everybody come to her house to eat and relax. When my own parents had a hard time in early years, they went to her home, to get peace of mind.

Recently, she built a small teahouse in her yard. She invites her friends & neighbors to come enjoy it, have tea, play mahjong, and eat. Normally, about 40 people eat there. She charges them nothing, but people who win at mahjong there contribute some of the winnings to her to help her cover expenses. She doesn't want to make any profit.

For many years, she had a maid, whom she needed to help handle her growing clan: 6 kids, plus now the kid's wives and their new families, all coming to visit her. She put money into the maid's hand and said, "Go buy stuff, don't bother reporting to me." She trusted the maid to manage all the household expenses. But after the teahouse was built and the number of visitors increased to 40 per day, the maid said "Oh, that's too much!" and quit.

She tried to find another maid but gave up. Her family jokes that whenever she interviewed an applicant for the position of "household maid," the applicant would say, "Sure, how many people are eating daily?" Finally the problem got solved when one of her sons become a full-time cook for her. The food tastes much better than restaurants! The whole family is a happy, party family. Chinese families are more closely knit than American families, but *this* family is even closer!

Xiao Pei's sister moved to the USA and told me, "The family is too luxurious! I must phone them to say hey, you guys gotta watch your health, don't eat so much!" Here in the U.S. she's adopted a simpler life.

Xiao Pei (whose son is in Switzerland) inherited his mother's noble side and relaxed attitude about life. He loves to joke. He

philosophizes, “Relax, don’t worry about a thing! Enjoy life! No matter how rich or poor, just enjoy life!”

His wife Xiao Shū loves him so much. She says, “When I come home, I see all the in-laws helping run his mother’s teahouse, so I just roll up my sleeves and pitch in. Everybody’s happy, so why should I complain? I do things happily too! I come to enjoy the family. I help with his mother’s housework; I clean & cook. It doesn’t bother me.”

So visiting her mother-in-law means lots of work, but she enjoys it.

Sometimes she complains to her husband Xiao Pei about things, but Xiao Pei doesn’t lose his temper or talk back. “What can you do if he doesn’t join the battle?” she sighed. But I see happiness written on her face. She’s proud of son Wei and carries his picture in her wallet. She showed me his picture: “My son, isn’t he handsome, like a movie star?”

Xiao Pei is my relative. When I visited his big family, they all talked about Xiao Shū. I feel she’s a hero. She’s smart and kind, and Xiao Pei is smart too, to marry her. She touched my heart.

Report from year 2013

In January 2013, I went back to China and stayed 6 months.

I became a grandma



Mia at 2 months

My daughter Mimi was pregnant. I arrived just 40 days before her expected delivery. I’d always hoped to go sooner to take care of her; but she always replied, “I’m all right. Don’t worry.”

My own baby, Mimi, had grown up and was going to have *her* own baby! Time flies!

Mimi, like most others in her generation, is an only child, part of China’s **1-child generation**. An “only child” is usually considered more fragile than the parents, who were strengthened by learning to master more hardships in their lives. Nowadays, some pregnant Chinese women even quit their jobs soon after getting pregnant and stay home. But not Mimi, who kept working. To my surprise, she didn’t throw up during her pregnancy, which I guess was good for the baby. Whenever I asked Mimi “How are you feeling?” she always replied “I’m okay.”

Mimi would deliver by Caesarean section. I was worried and nervous. I asked “Are *you* nervous?” She said no.

When I was waiting for her to give birth, my palms were sweaty. I prayed silently, “God bless us. Keep safe both mother and baby, beautiful baby.” I repeated that prayer again and again and again, hoping God heard me and wouldn’t think I asked too much. Mimi’s husband said, “Don’t be nervous. They’ll be alright.”

Thank God, they *were* both alright! A nice cart was pushed toward me by 2 smiling nurses. In it was a beautiful baby! With the nurses’ “wow!” and “oh!” I saw, for the first time, a little baby wrapped in a pink baby blanket with a tiny pink face, closed eyes, and thick black hair! I’m a grandma now! I was thrilled this new little thing from now on would be an important part of my life and the tenderest part of my heart!

First month of life Traditionally, the first month after birth is the most important period for the new baby & mother. We call it *zuo yuezi*, meaning post-delivery 30-day care.

According to traditional *zuo yuezi*, the mother is supposed to:

relax (stay in bed or at least in the room)

keep warm (wear long-sleeved clothes, plus a hat to block breezes, avoid touching or drinking cold water, avoid eating cold foods such as fruit & salad, and for the first 2 weeks don’t take showers or wash hair)

eat lots of protein (6 meals a day, with lots of eggs, chicken, other meat, chicken soup, and all good stuff, not spicy)

That will help her recovery and prevent pains when she grows old.

Years ago, when most people were short of food and money, a new mother would take that month of fine food as a big treat. Alas, at the end of month, she’d find herself twice as fat.

During those 30 days, the baby’s not supposed to be carried outside. The baby’s wrapped in a little blanket, with legs & arms straight down so the baby can grow straight, shaped well.

Modern ideas have changed that tradition a bit: the 30 days can be shortened to just 2 weeks, depending on the woman’s health, assistants, and finances. People still do the *zuo yuezi* month care but often obey the old rules just halfway.

In Western countries (such as the U.S.), a new mother can leave her bed and care for the baby on the 3rd day, drive a car on the 7th day, and take the baby out to a restaurant or party; but Chinese women aren’t so brave: they think Western women might be stronger physically. It’s *unthinkable* to take a Chinese baby out by the 7th day. The most a Chinese mother will do at that time is walk around the room and help the baby a little, while a grandmother and other relatives normally come to help. Sometimes a **yue shao** (professional first-month nanny) is hired.

Mimi got out of the bed on the 3rd day, as ordered by her doctor. She walked, with difficulty, in her hospital room, to do little exercises. She acted much braver & stronger than I expected. We came back home on the 5th day.

Mimi hired a *yue shao* nanny to help her through the important first month.

A *yue shao* isn’t a nurse from a medical institute, but she’s professionally trained for the special job of first-month baby management. The typical *yue shao* is very experienced.

Hiring a *yue shao* is becoming popular & expensive. In 2013 Beijing, a *yue shao* earns about 12,000 yuan (\$2000) per month, whereas a regular maid makes just 4,000 yuan (\$655) per month, just slightly higher than a regular store clerk.

Our *yue shao* was a 49-year-old woman from a rural area 100 miles from Beijing. We called her “Sister Ma”. She’d done *yue shao* work for 10 years. She proudly showed us dozens of photos of babies she’d taken care of.

She turned out to be very good. My granddaughter Mia stopped crying as soon as in Sister Ma’s arms. She took care of the baby (with feeding & washing) and cooked some of Mimi’s food. Everything went great.

Mimi bought a miniature swimming pool. Mia was put into the water, with a float around her neck, when she was just 2-weeks old!

I was nervous when Mia was first put into water. Her big bright eyes were wide open; she dared not move and didn’t know what was going on. A few seconds later, she started to stretch her little legs and arms, seemed to feel: oh, no harm. Then she felt more comfortable moving around, with music & camera & exciting faces around her.

I thought I'd be a big help to Mimi during this period. I was ready to do anything to help. But since Sister Ma did most of the work, I had an easy time and lots of fun admiring the baby. I guess Mimi just didn't want me to work too hard.

Mimi's husband said I laughed more times the last couple of weeks than all last year. I guess so. I can't think of anything in the world more beautiful than a baby. A flower, a pet, anything? Nothing's like a baby! A new life, she can yawn, look around, hiccup, cry, eat, and sleep peacefully like an angel — let alone she's related with me, an extension of my life. I could never move my eyes away from her. When I held her, I sang one song after another for her; I just couldn't stop.

Sister Ma was an excellent cook. She was proudly told us how she used to own a small restaurant, where she & her husband worked hard for 10 years, making some money but not much. When she found the opportunity to become a *yue shao* nanny, they closed the restaurant. After training for several months in classes, she became a *yue shao* nanny. She was proud she was now making a lot more money than a regular maid and more money than her husband, who was working for another restaurant.

The couple has 2 daughters: the older graduated from college, got a good job, and would marry happily soon; the younger was still in college. Sister Ma hoped her daughters would be professionals and have better lives than hers.

Sister Ma and I had lots of fun together taking care of my granddaughter. We also had a good time cooking and discussing how to make their North China food.

At the end of the month (actually 26 days), Sister Ma left us for her next job. She was reserved for 6 babies coming in the next 6 months.

Nanny Zhang When Sister Ma left us, Mimi hired another nanny, a pretty 38-year-old woman named Zhang.

Most nannies are from rural areas, but Zhang was from a city (in Hubei Province). Unlike a typical maid, Zhang was dressed in modern city style, and she's pretty. She said she'd done different jobs in her life: her last job before coming to Beijing was running a small clothing store.

To our surprise and disappointment, she didn't know how to cook. She didn't even know how to cook rice! So I decided to do all the cooking, while she mainly took care of the baby.

When she had time, she came to the kitchen and watched me cook.

I showed her how to make Chinese noodle soup, cold noodle salad, and simple stir-fry dishes. I even showed her how to make simple Western food, such as French toast and grilled-cheese sandwiches. She enjoyed learning those skills and knew it would help her future job interviews.

Every day, she & I took Mia out to the yard for a walk.

It's a big new housing development, with all kinds of trees and flowers, many pavilions, and a stream with small bridges across it. Mia started to enjoy seeing the outside world. We came to the kids' playground, to watch other kids playing and chat with other nannies & grandmothers.

Zhang had a 12-year-old son living with his grandma back home.

Zhang was trying to make money to save for her son to go to college. She didn't talk about her husband. I asked her if she missed her son & husband. She said that's okay, she got used to it. I asked if she planned to go back to see them at Chinese New Year. She said maybe not, but I guess she missed them.

She lived in one of our 3 bedrooms, like Sister Ma had.

Being a migrant, like Zhang, can be lonely. Fate brought her to Beijing and at my daughter's home. I hoped she'd be happy here.

Hunt for money Nowadays, many Chinese have gone crazy about making money. They think nothing's more important than making money: having lived in poverty for decades, now's the time to end it!

Parents from rural & poor areas come to big cities (such as Beijing), leave their young kids behind with grandparents, and return home just for the Chinese New Year, if at all.

I know a couple (husband & wife) who came to Beijing and rented a run-down shabby room, in a neighborhood of migrants. The husband took a job as a construction worker, while the wife cleaned for a household. They made a lot more money than they could in their hometown. They saved the money instead of renting a fancier place. The only good thing about crowded living is the opportunity to meet lots of neighbors who become friends, so the couple decided to keep living in tiny rooms without AC in summers, without heat in winters. They saved money for kids' educations and to buy a big new house in their hometown if not possible in Beijing.

So many rural kids live with their grandparents and don't see their parents except a few days each year!

3 stages of life I often heard this saying:

The USA is **heaven** for children, a **battleground** for the middle-aged, and a **tomb** for the elderly.

I don't know if that saying is by Chinese or Americans. By contrast, people say:

China is **heaven** for the elderly but a **battleground** for people from kindergarten until retirement.

Why the difference?

The USA is considered heaven for children because all babies can grow up healthily. If parents are poor, their babies can get free food, free diapers, and free medical care.

The USA is considered a tomb for the elderly because most old people live & die lonely.

Of course, there are exceptions — in the USA, *some* kids are short of food, and *some* old people get good care —but that saying has some truth.

Are Chinese kids thrown into a battleground as soon as they enter kindergarten?

You may think so if you see all sorts of early-education centers, bilingual kindergartens, and piano daycare centers in every commercial center in Beijing and other cities, too. Elementary-school kids often go to after-school tutoring to learn English, Olympic math, Chinese writing, ballet, piano, painting, and more. "Don't lose at the starting line!" has become a popular slogan in China.

As for Chinese old folks, are they living in a heaven? That depends on what you think a heaven is, and of course it's not for everybody. A good thing in China is that people retire earlier — women at 50 or 55, men at 55 or 60 — so they get 6 to 16 more years than Americans to enjoy retired life.

Americans are more independent in their lives.

American kids leave home at 18 years old; some work for their own college tuition; you rarely see 3 generations living together, with grandparents taking care of grandkids.

Chinese are born to be more closely tied to their families. Chinese people have a habit of being together, so Chinese old people are more scared of being alone than Americans are.

When Chinese retire, even though some are just 50 years old and look so young and so good, they want to find ways to spend time *together*, enjoy life, be healthy and feel good.

That's why you see, in all Chinese cities, big and small, in all their public parks, squares, and other nice spaces, old people are doing all sorts of exercises in the early morning. Some are doing air tai chi, some are doing kung fu, some are dancing, some just walk around stretching arms & legs. After finishing the exercises, they scatter into markets then home to do housework. In the evening, dance parties are everywhere, joined by more people, even middle-aged ones.

Chengdu entertainment One evening when I was in a bus in Chengdu (Sichuan's capital), I saw many groups of women dancing in front of big department stores, since the stores have big spaces in front. One group had about 50 people, waving big beautiful Chinese fans (made of pink silk) and shaking to the beat of beautiful Chinese folk-dance music. I wished I could jump off the bus to watch.

Chengdu's old people are more "crazy" about entertainment than people in other cities. Chengdu is famous for its relaxing lifestyle.

Chengdu's weather is good for outdoor activities all year around, unlike Beijing, whose winter is full of snowstorms & strong winds. Chengdu has dozens of beautiful historic parks & resorts, with open-air teahouses where families & friends gather together, chat, and play chess & mahjong. Chengdu is also famous for great food. Chengdu's cost of living & housing is lower than Beijing's & Shanghai's. In Chengdu, people are more relaxed & more fun-seeking. Chengdu's long history of rich culture gives its people a more cultured personality.

I'd often heard about the entertainment in **Chengdu People's Park**.

I finally went there with my sister & her husband, on a sunny afternoon. Before we entered the gate, we already heard music floating out into the street. The first thing we saw was a long covered walkway. Music came from there! Several groups of people sang karaoke there. Anybody could grab the microphone and sing, while people sat on the bench & listened. But each loudspeaker tried to outblast the others. They bothered one another. Only people near a loudspeaker could hear better. But people didn't mind: since there was music and someone singing, that was good enough.

As we walked along, we were attracted to big crowds. Oh my God! I can almost use the Chinglish expression "people-mountain, people-sea" to describe the crowds. There must have been 20 groups of shows going on along the way. Each group had its own banners & flags. Banners displayed names such as "Chengdu Red Sunset Dancers" or "Happy Old Folks Singing & Dancing Group."

Most groups consisted of women, 45 to 60 years old, plus some men, too. They wore face paint, like on stage. Some were so serious that they dressed up differently for each dance. (They took the trouble to enter a small concealed area to change costumes for next dance.) The colorful Chinese folk-dance costumes were fancy & beautiful, just like professional shows' costumes on big stages.

As we walked along, we saw different shows. Some were singing folk songs, accompanied by dancers; others were just casual line dances. One group was teaching people how to dance. Each group had a big audience. Some groups warmly provided small plastic stools for the audience. Unfortunately, each group's announcers & music was so loud that the cacophony from all the groups created a battle in your eardrums. But it was so much fun to watch those shows. The performers were so excited and serious that their faces were glowing and sweating. That's part of their retired life, a part that makes them feel good & young.

We were attracted by another view. In a big round playground, many people were dancing like in a nightclub or bar. The music was Western-modern style, with a strong beat. Dancers were all ages, men & women. Many were foreigners (whites & blacks), whose dance moves — fiery, vigilant, and exotic — attracted the most eyes. The foreigners must be enjoying Chengdu's life style. Chengdu is a place where, once you come, you never want to leave!

Beijing entertainment Back in Beijing, I was impressed by some retired people's singing groups.

Every other morning, I went to a big market for fresh vegetables, fruits and other stuff. That market's behind a subway station, which in turn was behind a huge square with a fountain, statues, and flower gardens.

Nearby was a long line of small exercise devices for people to work on their legs, arms, backs, and waists. Next you saw small karaoke groups, musical-instrument players, and one or two small dancing groups. Young people were roller skating. Kids with grandparents were flying kites.

But the most attractive group was a big chorus group, over 100 people, with a conductor and small band practicing old songs.

The songs were so familiar to my ears. Every time I passed by, I'd stop and watch them awhile. Each person in the group held a songbook and stood in lines. Nearby stood folks who were less serious or too shy, some singing along, with or without books.

Women who stood in the first line often dressed up more than others and seemed so joyful, proudly looking at the conductor and singing with big smiles. That chorus was exciting & grand!

When the weather was bad, I was disappointed to see the grounds empty. I missed that!

One Sunday afternoon, I went to the famous "**Zizhu yuan**" Park to meet my brother's family.

Beijing's such a huge city that it took me almost 2 hours to get there.

While we were walking along the scenic lake with willows trees caressing the water, beautiful music floated over from across the lake. The music was not like other groups I'd heard; it was so harmonic, so peaceful, so warm. As we walked closer, we saw the music was coming from a pavilion. A small group of old folks in their fifties was singing, accompanied by an accordion. They were singing world-famous classic songs, in harmony. They looked at their books and knew their parts. They must be good at music, or at least be music lovers (like me). This time I wanted to join! But I was shy and hesitated. My sister-in-law encouraged me to go.

I saw 2 women, sitting on the side, with a bag of books. I guessed they were selling the songbooks. I went over and asked. I saw a set of nice books with lots of famous songs and their harmony parts. I was delighted, bought 2 books, and dragged my sister-in-law (who's a good singer) with me to the group. Everybody was friendly to us. With an instructor and the books, we started singing with the group.

I hadn't been so happy with music for a long time! I love music. I love singing. I have good voice. I just enjoyed it!

We kept singing one song after another. I could feel each person had good voice and good sense of music.

The music was written in the simplified Chinese way, which uses 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 to stand for do re mi fa sol la ti. We're all good at it and know which part to sing, when to sing, and when to stop. It came out beautifully. We sang many songs, for 2 hours, until we had to say goodbye.

They invited us to come again, but unfortunately it was too far from where I live in Beijing, let alone New Hampshire.

That singing experience was short but so nice! I miss it. I wonder: when I go next time, will the group still be there?

Traveling oldsters Besides musical entertainment, old folks like to travel.

More and more retired people get together to go to famous places they hadn't seen yet. To do so, they don't have to be rich, just lucky enough to have good health and not be poor. Each year, they can explore a different place, to enjoy their many years of retirement.

Unfortunately, there are still many poor folks in China, as in every other country. Let's pray that people all over the world, young & old, have good lives — no poverty, no war, all peace & happiness!

Report from year 2016

In 2016, I saw China's shiny WeChat future and the ghost of John Chen from China's painful past.

WeChat: diamond or disaster? If you ask me what's hot in China today, I'd say **WeChat**. From 3-year-olds to 90-year-olds, everyone seems to have things to do with it.

WeChat's a social network that I feel combines functions of Facebook, Twitter, Facetime, Skype, Weibo, blogs, cameras, camcorders, phone-text messages, answering machines, and free phone calls through Wi-Fi. Friends pass around news, videos, movies, shows, jokes, photos, articles, chicken-soup-for-the-soul tales, health tips, and so on.

Yesterday my 86-year-old second cousin showed his beautifully made music album (with his calligraphy & photos) on WeChat's friend circle and got a lot of "likes." Today, I sent many friends my karaoke video, since singing's my hobby.

I talk to my brothers & sisters back in China weekly, either by WeChat video or just audio (like an ordinary phone), free!

Friends traveling to Europe & Africa share photos & videos instantly to friends all over the world. My other cousin, with her brothers & sisters and their families of over 40 people, had a group chat about what restaurant to go to, by writing & voice & mixed.

My Chinese singing group here in the USA, with 60 members, is such an active WeChat group that every few minutes someone sends up something funny or touching.

In WeChat, you have individual contacts and all sorts of groups, each with from 3 members to 300 or more. Some groups are so big that most people in it don't even know each other. Plus,

you have a biggest friend circle automatically with all your individual contacts. When you publish or forward something to that circle, all your individual contacts can see it, and you can see their responses.

It seems everyone in China (plus every overseas Chinese, like me) is heavily involved in WeChat. Every morning, I wake up to grab my phone, and every night I fall sleep with my phone still in my hand.

Now there are warnings:

The “**Head-Down Clan**” (what WeChat users are called) is starting to suffer bad consequences. People walked into car traffic and lost their lives; people walked into water and lost their lives; people ignore their families.

The critics called WeChat a “new opiate” that will hurt China more than the old one, which caused the Opium Wars over 100 years ago. They warn people: put down your phone and pick up your books!

A cartoon says:

It took millions of years for human beings to stand up from crawling. Now we’re going to bend down again and eventually go back to crawling?

But people are just so hopelessly addicted to it. Old folks who never saw their kids & grandkids now can see them and talk face-to-face over WeChat. For old folks, lonely & lost, retired life becomes more fun.

In the past, how could you see the world or China’s top arts, top singers, top tourist places? Where could you see the newest fancy flying cars, moving foldable houses, the world’s most famous magician acts?

Nowadays everybody becomes a medical consultant. Everybody’s seeing the smartest new & old articles, world-famous events, and histories. People were never so smart!

Dark sides are exposed: officials’ corruptions, secret wives, fake name brands, poisonous foods, crimes, cheatings, poverties, and so on. People express their opinions more freely. Some praise WeChat for helping promote democracy.

That’s WeChat! Good or bad, it entered and changed Chinese-speaking people’s lives, in China and all over the world.

My teacher: John Chen Recently an old classmate wrote an article to memorialize John Chen, our phys-ed teacher in middle school almost 50 years ago. The article caused a sensation among the old schoolmates. More articles, comments, sighs, and tears followed. Before my eyes, Mr. Chen’s suntanned face, Sichuan-accent voice, and winking smiles came alive.

Hello Mr. Chen, are you happy in the other world? You’d be almost 100 years old now, if you didn’t kill yourself...

In 1966, when I was in middle school, the “**Cultural Revolution**” started. Suddenly all schools, from elementary to colleges, all over the country, stopped normal classes. The Big Connection started:

College and middle-school students started going to Beijing to see Chairman Mao in Tiananmen Square and see what the revolution was about. They traveled by train, free! “Going to Beijing” had been every student’s dream and now became reality!

Beijing’s students went out to different places to stir up the revolution’s fire, and so the exciting & fanatical revolution storm was spread to every corner of China.

All school authorities were knocked down. Teachers & professors were vulnerable. Those who were outstanding in the academy, born in a rich family, associated with the ousted GMD Party or government, were targets of this revolution.

In 1968, the Working Class — China’s leading class — entered schools nationwide to help control the mess & riots in schools. Ordinary factory workers became the heads of schools & colleges. So it was in my school.

One sunny morning in September 1968 in my school’s small playground, the whole school was having a meeting. Suddenly the loudspeaker yelled “Grab out the anti-revolutionary, the

flying devil J. Chen!” Suddenly a group of tough-looking working men, like sweeping thunder & lightning, grabbed one of the teachers at the back of the meeting, as if grabbing a chicken. Everyone looked back. Chen — his arms twisted & yanked behind him, his head pushed low — was rushed down the aisle, like a rumbling typhoon, up to the stage in a few seconds, while the loudspeaker was yelling “Down with the anti-revolutionary J. Chen! Down with the flying devil J. Chen!”

On the stage, Chen was grabbed by 2 guys into a “**jet plane**” (they typical way in those years, pushing a person’s head very low and raised the person’s arms back high, as if a jet plane). A paper dunce cap, tall & pointed, was put atop his head. A big wooden board with a red X on his name and marked “anti-revolutionary” and “flying devil” was hung on his bent neck.

Whenever I thought of that moment, I wondered how Teacher Chen was feeling, if he could feel at all. Hearing those shouting “down with” and “grab out” with his own name, did he feel thunderstruck shocked, or heartbroken grief, or liver-cracking frightened, or drowning in despair? What was like to fall into an “18-floor-deep hell” in just in one second?

The middle-school teenagers soon recovered from the first shock, telling themselves: it’s great to ferret out a hidden enemy from the revolutionary stronghold. As this was not the first “class enemy” ferreted out from the school, they got used to it immediately. They joined in the deafening slogan-yelling. The crime Chen committed was announced: he was a pilot in the GMD air force during the anti-Japanese War. (The GuoMinDang government was led by Chiang Kai-shek but overthrown and fled to Taiwan in 1949.)

After accusing him of all sorts of “crimes” at the meeting, a parade started.

The route was to pass a big factory’s worker-housing area, then cross a bridge, pass a few villages to the train station, then return. It took about 2 hours to walk the round trip.

The day was hot, with the sun shooting straight down.

Red flags, banners and loudspeakers were in front. Next came the enemy and the group of big strong men who grabbed him. Then came the revolutionary students & teachers & staff.

I was among the main group of about 400 people, raising arm and yelling slogans. I felt numb, unable to think. My throat was so dry that it was about to be on fire! My back was wet with sweat. It was terribly hot!

How did Chen go through the parade? This had only been seen in a movie: grabbed by hair, with head bent but face up, arms raised back high, and a heavy board hung from his neck, pushed on like a hunted animal. That attracted people all along the way — kids following & jumping around, adults pointing & talking.

A “people’s teacher,” an energetic middle-aged man, a heroic air-force veteran, had he ever been insulted like that before? Dignity & self-respect were swept into trash! In just one second, he’d suddenly become the people’s enemy!

If Chen at that moment had any ability to think, I guess he must have just been looking for a hole in the ground to dive into.

After that day, he was put into the “**Monster’s Room**”, a small dark room, together with other “Monsters” ferreted out before him: 1 was the headmaster, plus 2 teachers and a quartermaster.

Occasionally they were taken to a meeting to be tortured, either as the main target or just to accompany someone else. Sometimes one of them was chosen by a group of “revolutionary little fighters,” just to practice revolutionary struggle. Once I saw Chen was surrounded by a group, pushed around and whipped with a belt in the cafeteria. Some of those “revolutionary little fighters” were my classmates!

Often we saw the “Monsters” run around the small playground while chanting “Down with anti-revolutionary ___,” inserting their own names. Students, having no classes those days, stood around or stuck their heads out from surrounding classrooms, to watch. Day after day, neither the “Monsters” nor the watchers felt shame or unease anymore. Everybody got used to it.

Most days, things were not too bad: the “Monsters” did just physical labor, but I guess they’d rather do that. They did the entire school’s farmer work, which had been done by us students. They did all repairs & construction jobs, which also had been student jobs. So it was the first time students got off easy, fooling around.

I often saw Chen carry 2 buckets of excrement to water a big vegetable garden at the school.

Once, when I passed by the garden, he saw me and nodded, smiling, “Dahmer, Shawmer” (“big sister, little sister”, which were nicknames of my sister and me). Although he seemed to whisper from distance, I heard it.

I looked at him, just moved the corner of my mouth a bit, and continued on my way.

If Chen could get through a few more years, he’d have gotten out of that dark hell and come back to the sunny world. Unfortunately, he couldn’t see that. He chose to give up his hopeless, endless, dark, humiliated life. He hung himself in his room.

Chen’s oldest son was notified to come deal with the “aftermath issue.”

The son was much taller than his father, with the same suntanned skin and chiseled facial features. A handsome guy in his 20’s, strong build but intellectual looking!

I don’t know how the “aftermath issue” was handled, but things were quiet. No fighting, no pursuits, nobody in school discussed it. No tears or emotions could be seen. It seemed like dealing with a normal issue.

After finishing that, the son took a train to return to Chengdu to see his mom, brothers, and sisters. He probably lacked money, so someone took him to a caboose at the back of a train. I & a few classmates happened to be on that caboose that day also, so I said “hi” to him and exchanged a few words. Then, for the 4-hour trip, he said nothing, his eyes looking at nothing in front.

Teacher Chen had been a young army man in the famous **Expedition Army air force** during the World War 2.

That army went to Myanmar to fight the Japanese and had great success. At that time, the Expedition Army was most popular national hero in China. Chen didn’t hide that part of heroic history. But since the old GMD government was overthrown, Chen became “flying devil” and a “historic anti-revolutionary” in the “Culture Revolution.”

A remarkable anti-Japanese hero was prosecuted to death in a small country middle school!

Today everything there is quiet and peaceful, that part of bloody history gone forever with the wind.

The school was moved, buildings were torn down, new buildings built up. There’s nowhere to find the old school and small playground and classrooms and “Monster Tent.”

Those teachers? Some dead, some very old.
The school’s teenagers became gray-haired.

My classmate’s article brought me back to those days. In my mind, I saw Teacher Chen playing basketball, doing the horizontal bar, marching our teams, blowing a whistle at sports meet... and the scene where he was beaten and made a “jet plane.”

I hope, I pray: the Cultural Revolution will never happen again. Never!!!

Report from year 2020

The **novel coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic** makes the world a disaster hell, plus makes the U.S. the horrible enemy of a big portion of Chinese people again!

The **Korean war** (1950-1953) and **Vietnam war** (1955-1975) made the U.S. be China’s enemy. China’s **Cultural Revolution** (1966-1976) also made the U.S. scared of China. But in 1969, leaders of China and the U.S. both expressed a desire to get friendly and get out of Vietnam. In 1972, **President Nixon visited Mao**; they and their assistants had friendly chats. When **Deng Xiaoping** became China’s leader in December 1978, he started reforming the economy and **opening the door**. In 1979, formal diplomatic relations began between the U.S. and China, and they opened embassies in each other’s country. Then the 2 countries became friendly. For the first time since 1949 (when

Mao founded the People’s Republic of China), the Chinese could go abroad!

Discovering the world When the first group of Chinese “stepped out of the door,” they discovered the world was different than expected. When I was growing up in China, school taught us ⅓ of the world lives in “deep water and hot fire” and our task is to liberate those people when we grow up. But then “rumors” came back that Americans live in beautiful, fancy, single houses with backyard swimming pools, and everybody has a car!

Then the Chinese fell in love with Michael Jackson, Michael Jorden, Hollywood movies & stars, McDonald’s, Coca-Cola, bikinis, and disco. Young people became more familiar with Michael Jackson than with Confucius.

Learning English became hot! So did English songs.

America was admired and longed for! America became our friend.

People tried every way to find opportunities to get into the U.S. Students, officials, and entrepreneurs came to the U.S. to learn many things, especially how Americans run businesses.

Even my mother was surprised to see everybody pushing carts in supermarket aisles, when she visited me here in New Hampshire in 2000. But when she went back to China one year later, she found supermarkets were everywhere in big & small cities, with customers pushing the same shopping carts in stores.

It’s been 40 years since China opened its door. The desire to go to the U.S. hasn’t decreased, though more and more students return to China after graduation. Yes, Chinese parents still dream of sending their kids to the U.S. to study, even though that costs some parents a whole lifetime of savings! For parents who are rich, no problem!

Now Americans seem more tolerant of non-democratic China. Some Chinese joke the Sino-American relationship is like a pair of lovers, who can’t be without each other and can’t be with.

What went wrong In 2020, things changed. Now China seems to have a big stormy anti-U.S. feeling, spreading through **WeChat** (the world’s most-used social media, with more users than Facebook & Twitter combined).

Almost everyone in China, from teenagers to 90-year-olds, uses WeChat and joins some sorts of WeChat groups. The groups come in all sizes, from 3 people to over 500. Groups have different social circles, some for families, friends, colleagues, management groups, school or classmates, teacher-parent groups, merchant-customer groups, former army men, hobby friends, and travelers. News & opinions spread like lightning! Videos, pictures, shows, movies, music, and jokes — *everything* can be passed around.

The coronavirus pandemic was one such story, which caused hatred against the U.S., because China and the U.S. blame each other for starting the virus.

Publicizing the virus On December 30, 2019, eye doctor Li Wenliang posted a warning (to his former medical schoolmates’ WeChat group), saying several people in **Wuhan** (a big city of 11 million residents) were diagnosed with a SARS-virus kind of disease. The next day, he was forced to go to the local police station, where he got criticized for creating a rumor and had to sign a paper promising to stop rumoring. The next day, the hospital talked to him and 7 other doctors, telling them all to stop.

Those 8 doctors were criticized on **CCTV** (China’s biggest TV network), which said the disease was *not* spreading and those doctors created a false rumor.

Around Chinese New Year’s Day (January 25, 2020), Wuhan held many parties, including a 100-family banquet and a big Chinese New Year Show. Then the virus spread quickly.

Dr. Zhong Nanshan, a top medical academician of China, came to Wuhan to investigate. CCTV announced his investigation's result: this is indeed an extremely dangerous virus spreading among humans. Then Wuhan was sealed off: no traffic was permitted, and no vehicles, trains, or airplanes were allowed in or out. No people were allowed in the street.

That was explosive news! The whole country and whole world were talking about Wuhan. WeChat talked of nothing but the virus.

FangFang's diary Among all those reports, one online diary has attracted tens of millions of eyes. That diary was written by **FangFang**, a 63-year-old woman who heads the professional writers' association of Hubei Province. She wrote about her daily life in Wuhan during the 60 days when Wuhan was sealed off. She also wrote about people's fears, despair, and death. She wrote about what she heard from her families, doctor friends, and other friends.

To her and everybody's surprise, Fangfang's diaries (written on the **Weibo** blog) were passed around like a gust of wind through WeChat to every corner of the country. People started to know what was going on in Wuhan.

Her diaries had tens of millions of readers. For many people, the first thing to do every day was searching for her diary on the Internet. People loved reading its entries and felt those stories sounded true.

Gradually, things changed. The Chinese government sent 6000 medical personnel to Wuhan. In 10 days, 2 huge temporary hospitals were built; all people suspected of having the virus were taken in and treated. All Chinese cities were ordered stay-at-home. In short time, Wuhan's situation was controlled; the turning point appeared. In a little more than two months, the pandemic had ended throughout the whole country!

From initial anger, people's feelings turned to be excited and proud!

But people looking again at FangFang's diaries began to criticize them a lot, and the criticisms became stronger every day.

Some said:

You're quarantined at home. How do you know what's going on? All your diaries are full of "I heard." How can you use "I heard" as a fact? And why do you write just about bad news?

When they heard Fangfang's diary would be translated to many languages and published in many countries including U.S., more severe attacks came. I'll explain why, but first take a peek at the diary yourself!

Here's part of her diary's first day (January 25, 2020, Chinese New Year's Day):

...I never expected Wuhan to have such a serious problem that it's become the spotlight of China; the city is sealed and Wuhan people are disliked everywhere. Today Wuhan's government issued another order: from midnight, no cars are allowed to drive in the city's central area. I live in that area, so I'm sealed in the city! Many people showed me their concern, some texted me, asking if I'm okay; that made us "sealed" people feel warm.

Just now Mr. Cheng YongXin from Harvest Magazine sent me a message saying, why not write something like a "Diary from Sealed City"?

If my Weibo blog can continuously publish articles, I should keep writing, so everybody will know what's going on in Wuhan. But I don't even know whether this page can be viewed or not. If anybody's read it, please leave a message so I know it's viewable. Weibo has a "technology": you thought you published something, but nobody can see it. When I knew such "technology" was there, I realized if "technology" tries to do bad thing, it's no less harmful than the virus.

Here's part of her diary's entry on January 29:

Lying in bed and looking at my cellphone, I saw this message from my friend who's a physician: "Take care, don't go out, don't go out, don't go out!" That repeated emphasis made my heart beat fast. Maybe the pandemic's peak is here.

I immediately called my daughter, who was about to go out for some prepared meals from the grocery store. I urged, "Don't go! Even if you must eat just plain white rice, don't go out for next few days."

On Chinese New Year's Day, when I first heard the city would be sealed, I sent her enough food to keep her alive for 10 days. I guess she must be too lazy to cook, so she tried to go out for boxes of cooked meals. Good thing she's afraid of death too, so after I said "No," she agreed to not go out. Soon afterwards, she contacted me to ask how to cook bok choy. In her home, she'd never cooked!

[A paragraph here about her daughter's cooking, then she continues...]

Quarantined at home, Wuhanese don't feel too bad, so long as not ill. But the poor sick ones and their families are having a very hard time, since hospitals don't have enough beds. The new Huoshenshan Hospital is under construction day and night, as fast as they can, but "water far away can't wipe out fire nearby."

Those sick people are the biggest victims. I wonder how many families are broken by deaths so far. Major media are recording it, so are individuals. What else can we do? Just record.

This morning I read an article saying a mother died on Chinese New Year's Day, and the father & brother were also infected. My heart felt clogged. That family probably belonged to the middle-class. What about the lives of lower-income patients? When seeing videos of terribly worn-out medical doctors and nurses and collapsed patients, my sadness & helplessness were overwhelming. Professor Chuan Er, from Hubei University, said he wanted to cry aloud every day. Who wouldn't? I always told my friends we can see clearly what portion of this disaster is manmade. After this is over, we won't forgive those bad officials — not one! — but now we must plow through the hardship.

[A paragraph here about how she tries using a Chinese herb to protect herself, then she continues...]

By the way, my previous Weibo article was "shielded" from the public, but it had lived longer than I expected. To my surprise, many people forwarded it.

I like writing directly in my small space on the Weibo screen. I write very casually. I like this casual feeling. I write whatever comes to my mind, without much editing, so of course there are some mistakes, for which I apologize to Wuhan University's Chinese Language Department; I beg your pardon!

Actually, I never plan to criticize anybody at this moment. There's the old Chinese saying, "Settle accounts after the autumn harvest," right? After all, our major enemy now is just the virus. I'll stand side-by-side wholeheartedly with the government and all Wuhan people, fighting against the virus together. I'll 100% co-operate with whatever the government requires us to do. But while I was writing, I sometimes felt a need to reflect, so I reflected.

The 60-day diary's other pages are in the same style, taking about more people dead, more daily bad news, then some good news, anger at bad officials, and praise for the medical staff & volunteers coming from all China & around the world.

Left versus right FangFang faced many curses and then even threats to her life. When her diary was to be published in the U.S., a big battle started! "For or against Fangfang" became a dividing line. Is FangFang a sunlight or a witch? That's a big question among friends, classmates, acquaintances and family members. It rips social harmony apart. WeChat and Weibo became battle ground.

People against her are called **leftists**.
People who support her are called **rightists**.

Leftists think:

China's in danger of being overthrown by FangFang and her supporters. They're against the Communist Party and the government.

Rightists reply:

After the virus started, why did Wuhan's government delay warning people that the virus was spreading dangerously? Why did they punish Dr. Li Wenliang for warning us?

Leftists think:

FangFang is a traitor, helping the U.S. and other Western imperialist countries, who use her diary as a “bullet & knife” to attack China.

Rightists reply:

If the U.S. and other Western countries want to attack China, they don't need Fangfang's diary. Even if she hadn't written her diary, Wuhan's situation would still have gotten known worldwide. If someone got killed, do you blame the killer or blame the store selling knives?

Leftists complain:

FangFang writes just about what she *heard*. Since she never *saw* anything with her own eyes, her writings can't be trusted, and they aren't true.

Rightists reply:

Her diary honestly *says* that's what she heard, besides the part about her own life. She used good judgement about what to believe, because she lives in Wuhan; her Wuhan doctor friends, Wuhan family members, and other friends in Wuhan told her what's going on around them, so she has good reason to believe that's the truth.

Leftists think:

Fangfang was born and grew up in new Communist China. She got good education, then a high position; she got good income, lives very well. She should be thankful to the government. She should write about positive things in life, like how hard the government tried; she should praise the medical heroes in Wuhan. She should sing praise about what we've *achieved!* Why must she highlight the *dark side*?

Rightists reply:

Fangfang's diary isn't about just the dark side. She also praised the bright side. China's not short of people who sing praise, but way too few people write about mistakes. For any writers with humanity, it's their responsibility to reveal the dark side and criticize bad things.

When Western countries talk about having China compensate their virus losses, **leftists** concentrate their anger on FangFang. They emphasize she's a big traitor, bringing huge loss to China. One artist wants to make a statue of her kneeling down to apologize to the whole country, in a public park. One kung-fu leader openly suggests kung-fu guys give her a beat-up lesson whenever they see her. She even got death threats. But **rightists** reply:

Instead of being a traitor, she really loves her country profoundly! If you love your country, you should help it become a better place to live in. By pointing out what's wrong, you help the government see it and correct it. Her diary emphasizes we should find out who was responsible for delaying control of the virus. If we don't punish those officials, similar disasters will happen again and again. Even Chairman Mao said: punishing wrongdoings can prevent the wrongs from reoccurring.

Leftists think:

There's a Chinese saying: don't show outsiders your family's ugliness. But Fangfang showed it to the whole world.

Rightists reply:

If you have cancer, do you just hide it? Then you're committing suicide.

Leftists are angry. They think:

In this disaster, she's the only winner, because she gained big fame, plus big money from publishing her diary. She's consuming our sufferings.

Both leftists & rightists tried hard to prove:

We're the only ones who care about the country and the people!

Leftists think:

We want stability, no turmoil, one center. Outside enemies want to destroy China all the time, so we should unite to fight against them.

Rightists reply:

If a country permits just one voice, that's bad! That would make us just fall back into poverty. China should not go backwards!

China has over 1.4 billion people. Now it seems more than half are leftist.

Be thankful I think *all* Chinese people realize:

During the past 40 years, we've achieved big progress. China is a whole different country now than before.

The 1.4 billion Chinese people now have enough food on their tables. Compared to 50 years ago, when people were half-starved, now people eat well and feel that, every day, they can eat like on a holiday.

Clothing used to just keep us warm. Now it's to look nice, fashionable, and beautiful.

In the past 30 years, 600 million people got out of poverty, though a few million stragglers are trying to catch up. In recent years, the government's been sending its employees, even schoolteachers, to impoverished regions to help families improve their lives, by giving them government subsidies, helping them grow crops or start small businesses. “Assisting the poor” has become an important task at all government levels. No other country has ever done that so much.

High-speed railways & highways are all over the country.

In cities, most families have cars. 40 years ago, hardly any families did.

Big cities have changed into advanced modern international cities. Medium & small towns have become comfortable & attractive, with local, stylish, beautiful, scenic places.

People have money in their pockets and banks. “Young-looking” retired people enjoy their colorful lives of traveling, partying, singing, and dancing. Chinese tourists are all over the world!

In the countryside, farmers are spared from taxation. For the first time in thousands of years, farmers or peasants pay no tax.

China's economy has grown; it's become the second biggest in the whole world.

When the virus suddenly destroyed the happy life, the Chinese government had the strong hand to end the virus fast.

People learned to trust their government, as strongly as ever! China's government should be proud of that! People trust the government so much that they don't want to hear any criticism. They're so proud of their country, they can't bear any threats from outside. Then the U.S. has become the worst enemy. And Fangfang was called the shameful minion helping destroy that success; her supporters are called “anti-government separatists.”

Some **extreme leftists** go so far as to say the 10-year **Cultural Revolution** (1966-1976) was necessary, even though the Chinese Communist party already declared 40 years ago that the Cultural Revolution was a disaster to China.

People would never forget those miserable, scary, red-horrible 10 years! Some people say those extreme leftists would have been those same bad people in those times.

Many intellectuals, professors, writers, and highly educated people say money's not everything! How about corruption at all levels and everywhere, cheating & dishonesty in all ranks and all corners? How about democracy, equality, and freedom, including freedom of speech? Do we need to rise to a higher level of a better society? They remind us: Americans have been China's friends. The U.S. has been the most helpful country to China, in all time. We 2 big countries need each other to create a better future for both of us and for the world.

Do we need to make the U.S. our worst enemy?

Americans' helping hands

Americans are warm and helpful.

Bleeding bicyclist

Recently, I read a revealing news item on a Chinese website: A girl on a bicycle was knocked down by a bus in a Chinese city. While a shocked crowd stared at her and didn't know what to do, a blonde girl rushed in and told a bystander in English to call 119 (like 911 here). Then the blonde sent the bleeding bicyclist to a nearby hospital and waited there until the bicyclist was taken good care of.

Later it was discovered that the blonde was an American teaching English in a college in that city. When a reporter eventually asked some witnesses why they didn't help, they said they thought the 2 girls must have known each other.

But that's something a typical American would do anytime anywhere.

Banker's bathroom

The first time I received an American helping hand was about going to the bathroom. When I first came to the U.S. and was walking in a Kansas town, I felt a pain in my belly. I needed to go to a ladies' room right away.

I looked around anxiously. Just a bank building was nearby. I hesitated and went in.

It was a beautiful bank. A very professionally dressed woman stood up, smiled at me, and asked how she could help. Embarrassed, I asked if the bank had a ladies' room.

She said "sure" cheerfully, without losing her smile. She pointed in the direction and said something I didn't quite catch. She saw my puzzled look and said, "I'll show you." She left her desk and led me across the hallway, turned, and walked all the way to the door of the ladies' room.

My heart was touched. It was a small thing, but you couldn't expect such a "small thing" to happen in China. A beautiful professional lady walks a stranger, a non-customer, to a bathroom!

Gradually I found "being helpful" is Americans' spirit. Many times when I asked somebody for directions, I found myself in the center of several people discussing and showing me the way.

Baggage

The first time I went to New York City, the bus arrived about 1:00AM. Getting off with 3 big cases and 2 small ones, I didn't know what to do. I dragged the cases step by step, one at a time.

A black guy passing by offered to help. He carried 2 cases and walked in front. I followed, my heart beating fast. At that time of night, with New York City's fame, I was scared.

We walked a long way out to the street.

He stopped a taxi; said "Good luck," and walked away. Before I said thanks, he disappeared into the darkness.

Everywhere

Americans can't bear breakdowns, bullying, and broken lives.

Americans can't bear watching cars stuck along the highway in the snow: they jump to help. Americans can't bear watching one nation bully another: they try to stop it. Americans can't bear watching African skin-and-bone kids go hungry: they donate money for food and school education.

Americans' helping hands are everywhere. They're the best thing about this country.

Tricky languages

Chinese is hard to learn — and so is English.

English is the easiest language to speak poorly

I've been the Queen of Poor English.

What's in that egg roll? When I worked in a Chinese restaurant some years ago, a customer asked me what was in the egg roll.

I said, "Chicken, pork, onion, celery, and..."
I hesitated. I suddenly forgot how to say "cabbage." I tried, "Gabbage? garbage? cabb...?"
The customer said, "Cabbage!"
I said, "Yes, yes, cabbage, cabbage!"
The customer laughed, "You don't mean *garbage*, do you?"

Another time, I thought I remarked to a customer, "Americans like to go to restaurant."

But as soon as I spoke, my face turned red because I saw the customer was puzzled.
"Restroom? You mean *restaurant*!" he corrected kindly, smiling.
I was so embarrassed! I said, "I'm sorry, I meant *restaurant, restaurant, not rest...room*. I'm so sorry I didn't pronounce it well."

The long road to English I learned most of my English in China. When I first came to the U.S., people thought I must have been here 10 years.

But later, after I'd actually been here 10 years, I still made all sorts of mistakes when speaking English. Even worse, I still had a hard time understanding TV and movies. I couldn't enjoy TV shows, good movies, or news on the radio. That made my boring life even more boring. I was frustrated.

English is difficult. I know many Chinese people who've lived here over 20 years, worked in Chinese restaurant kitchens all that time, and can hardly speak any English. Even those who got master's degrees or doctorates in the U.S and lived here many years still occasionally say "he" when meaning "she."

The Chinese language is much easier.

You don't have to worry about tense: to talk about working, you just say "work," maybe with an adverb. You don't have to say "*work, works, worked, working, have worked, have been working, and has been working*" — which drive me crazy! I feel so lucky that when I speak Chinese I don't have to worry about whether a table is a male or a female, as in German or Russian. I wonder how those people can remember the sex of every lifeless object.

In China, students start taking English courses in the 7th grade — now some schools start from the 3rd grade, some even from kindergarten — and continue all the way through college. But they learn English mainly by reading books, with little chance of listening and speaking to native English speakers. That was also my way of learning English.

Listening comprehension is even harder than speaking.

I asked Russ why I could understand him perfectly but not TV or radio. Russ said he slowed down a bit when talking to me. But that's almost not true! We've talked about everything, every topic, though sometimes he had to repeat what he said.

Speak like a snake Russ decided to improve my English.

I told Russ, "One of my girlfriend in China is retired."
"Girlfriends," he corrected.
"Okay, one of my girlfriends is retired. She's just 45 years old."
"Really? That's pretty early," Russ said.
"Because too many people, not enough job."
"Jobs," Russ added.
"All right, I know 'jobs.' Now she read a lot of books every day."
"Reads!" Russ corrected.
"S-s-s, I become a snake!" I laughed at myself. I knew all grammar very well; I'd corrected the same mistake for my students in China before. But when I spoke, I sometimes just forgot.

Russ felt amused at my created sentences, like "I'm *so* eager to sleep." (He told me to say just "I'm so sleepy.")

Russ said instead of my English getting better, his English was getting worse. He found himself sometimes using strange words, and he picked up some of my accent, like "*So* nice!" and "*So* fast!" and "*So* beautiful!"

Peanuts or penis? Once, I was supposed to sell peanut M&M's to raise money for the Special Olympics. I told Russ I was scared to say "peanuts," for fear of being misunderstood as "penis." Russ burst into laughter and pronounced the 2 words for me. I couldn't tell much difference. He pronounced again.

Then he tested me.

He put a can of peanut butter on the table. I stood 10 feet away from him.
"Peanuts," he said. I pointed to the peanut butter. He nodded.
"Penis," he said. I pointed to the can again. He shook his head.
"Peanuts," he said. I hesitated, pointing to the can, and said "not this." Russ shook his head.
"Penis," he said. I pointed to the peanut butter. Russ shook his head and sighed, "My poor deaf wife."
"Your poor *dead* wife?" My eyes were wide open.

Improving, bit by bit Eventually, Russ rented movies and trained me by explaining them to me. He stopped every few minutes and asked if I understood. Though I hated too much interruption, I enjoyed some very good movies and felt I understood better.

My English was improving, bit by bit. One day, after talking a long time without being interrupted by Russ's correction, I said proudly, "Hey, Russ, have you noticed I made less mistakes recently?"

Russ said, "Y-y-y-yes. But... it should be '*fewer* mistakes,' dear."

American clichés

Some everyday dialogues are so familiar to our ears that we don't have to think twice when we talk. They become verbal form letters.

It's amazing! Everywhere in the U.S., you hear the same dialogues, even with the same accents — to my ears:

Comment:	"Nice day, isn't it?"
Standard response:	" <i>Beautiful!</i> "
Comment:	"It's raining hard."
Standard response:	"It's <i>pouring!</i> " or " <i>We need it!</i> "
Comment:	"It's cold out there."
Standard response:	"It's <i>freezing!</i> " or " <i>It's nice and warm here.</i> "
Comment:	"I'm hungry."
Standard response:	"I'm <i>starving!</i> "
Comment:	"How are you doing?"
Standard response:	"Good. How about yourself?"
Comment:	"Have a nice day!"
Standard response:	"You too!"

Maybe I'm the only person who pays attention to those everyday simple conversations. The reason is: you can't find the same situation in China.

Chinese dialects

People in one Chinese province might not understand a single word from people in another province, though all Chinese people use the same written language. People from different provinces can communicate just if they both agree to speak Mandarin.

There are 5 main dialects in China's 29 provinces:

The most-used and official dialect is **Mandarin**. It's part of the **Northern** dialect, used mainly in northern and central China.

The second dialect is **Cantonese**. It's used in Guangdong province and Hong Kong (southeast China).

The third is **Shanghai** dialect, used in the Shanghai area (eastern China).

The fourth is **Fujian** dialect, used in Fujian province.

The fifth is **Min Nan** dialect, used mainly by Taiwan's native people.

All 5 of those dialects are used by China's majority "**Han**" nationality. There are still 53 other minorities (such as **Tibetan**, **Hui**, and **Uyghur**), who have their own languages; some even have their own *written* languages!

Even in Northern provinces, people speak Mandarin with all sorts of provincial accents. Beijing's Mandarin is considered the basic Mandarin.

I'm from Szechuan province. Szechuan dialect belongs to the Northern dialect, close to Mandarin but still different. I can speak Mandarin. I understand very little Cantonese and Shanghai dialect. I understand no other dialects at all.

China's only cliché?

Maybe there's just one old common everyday cliché in China: "Have you eaten?" That's because China has a well-known saying: "For common people, food is heaven."

Chinese way to succeed

Here's how my Chinese girlfriends succeeded when they came to America. (To protect their privacy, I've altered their names here.)

Restaurant owner

My friend "Ying" came from my Sichuan hometown 10 years ago when she was 25 years old. She was so sweet and beautiful that she immediately attracted the men in the New York City restaurant where she worked as a busgirl. The restaurant was busy. It was a totally different life from China, where she'd been a magazine editor. All the restaurant guys, from the owner to the dishwasher, were very friendly and helpful. Everybody tried to do some part of her job, which made that first American job easier and less stressful.

Finding a husband Her mom told her to find a good guy in America and get married, so she started getting to know some guys: restaurant workers, owners, a businessman with properties in Long Island, a writer and magazine publisher, a European student from the same English school she went to, and a Ph.D. student; but she hated those who tried to touch her when first meeting in a restaurant.

Finally, her future husband showed up: a handsome guy, 2 years younger, happy and confident. He worked in a Chinese restaurant as a cook and delivery guy. He was very nice but had no green card. I told her to think twice: without a green card, you can't visit China, because you're not allowed to come back. One day shortly after they met, she phoned me and said "I got married." I thought she was joking. "To whom?" "Who else do you think it could be?"

Later, she told me the guy had never dared to touch her hand for a whole month, even alone with her in a car or walking her home at night after work. He was so respectful and sincere, he touched her heart. (Her mother later joked that he was the smartest suitor.)

Newlyweds When they were first married, they lived in a basement in the New York City's Flushing section (which is part of Queens). After the first baby was born, they moved to an apartment with shared kitchen and bathroom; even the living room was occupied by somebody. When the baby girl was 8 months old, she was sent back to China to be taken care of by her grandparents.

Owning a restaurant Ying borrowed 80,000 U.S. dollars from her rich parents in China and bought a Chinese restaurant in New Jersey. That was in 1999; ever since, she and her husband have worked 7 days a week, 10 to 12 hours a day — except she had another two babies, both sent back to China.

She worked as a hostess and cashier. She also took phone orders, bussed tables, and packed takeout orders. I suggested that on slow days, she should take time off; but she just couldn't. Even when she went out shopping, she had to rush back, for fear that something would happen while she was away.

After 2 or 3 years, she felt tired. She started to complain that she felt like she was in a jail. She griped, "Even if you were to make over a million dollars in 10 years, would anybody be willing to stay in jail for 10 years for a million dollars?" She felt it wasn't worth it. She missed China badly.

Fortunately, the business has been improving, up 30%, up 40%, doubled, more than doubled! She started to enjoy working and knowing customers. She started to get use to it.

Buying houses They bought their first townhouse, big and brand new with hardwood floor. They bought beautiful, fancy furniture. They had a beautiful fence built. Later, they bought a second house to rent out. With \$15,000 a month income, they plan to buy more houses.

Happy reunion Recently their three kids (ages 9, 7, and 3) came back from China. The family is reunited.

Ying says she's doesn't miss China any more. "I might not find a nice job there and make so much money. I'm better off realizing my American dream here!"

Nurse

My friend "Hui" is in her late 40's. She's been in America for about 20 years.

Jobs She's a registered-nurse supervisor. Like most Chinese students in America then, she'd worked in America's Chinese restaurants. Even after she became an RN, she still kept a part-time waitress job and lived in a cheap rented room.

Singing She sings well. She was the soloist in a Chinese singing group in Boston. They performed even in the theaters of Harvard and M.I.T.

Finding a husband When she was almost 40 years old, she married a medical guy. He'd been a medical doctor in China but couldn't work as a doctor here in America, so he became a medical technician.

Investments The couple bought a small condo in Boston for about \$90,000. Soon after, they also bought a 2-family house: they lived in one unit and rented out the other. They also rented out the condo. They used the rent to pay the mortgage, so they lived somewhat free.

A couple of years later, house prices in Boston soared. They sold their condo and made over \$270,000 dollars profit! Then they bought more property in Florida.

At the same time, they invested in a 401-K plan, whole-life insurance, and a mutual fund. She says they've been very lucky. Their mutual fund's been doing great. Their money doubled in 5 years; maybe it will double every 5 years. The couple made about a \$100,000 total salary a year, and they were lucky investing money. When they reach retirement age, 15 years from now, they'll have more than \$2,000,000 worth of property and money, she estimated.

Family life Recently, I visited her home: 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, not fancy, but comfortable. Their 7-year-old son practices piano and, like a typical Chinese kid, also goes to Chinese-language school on Sundays, art class on Saturdays, swimming class, and so on.

The family looks just average and living paycheck-to-paycheck, but actually they're doing *great!* They feel good about it.

5 principles

Seeing those girlfriends and many other Chinese-American friends, I figure that the Chinese way to succeed is follow these 5 principles:

Be persistent. No matter how hard your life is, no matter what happens, just work, work, work, to make money and work towards your goal.

No job is too low. A professor can work as a dishwasher, and a doctor can be a nanny if necessary, following the Chinese saying "Be able to take a high position or low position." If they do just things they like or take just jobs they feel are fun, they might stay poor. Here's another Chinese saying: "Those who went through the hardest life can rise above others."

Adjust your goal. Always look for the best opportunity. In different situations, try different jobs and different businesses. There's always one that suits you.

Live thriftily before you're rich. Never spend more money than you make. Don't spend more than your budget, even on Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas Day, New Year's Day, birthdays, Valentine's Day, Easter, and vacations. Actually, Chinese people often give *big* gifts; but when they do, they try to save on other things.

Always save money.

But not *all* successful Chinese-Americans did those good things. Some Chinese don't care much about regulations or laws: they take big advantage of Uncle Sam and get rich fast. That's a different issue, which I'll discuss in future editions.

Arts

Artsy-fartsy, let's get smartysy.

Monk-Penn art

Thelonious Monk (the jazz pianist & composer) said:

A genius is the one most like himself.

Penn Jillette (the talkative half of the "Penn & Teller" magic show) elaborated:

Here's the quote I always use, an important quote, kind of lost to history: Thelonious Monk (the great jazz pianist) said "genius is the one most like himself." That sums up all art.

Art includes Picasso. It also includes reality shows. It also includes porno. Anything you're doing after the chores are done is art.

In art, what you want to give is a little glimpse of your heart.

He said so at the beginning of this Fox Business News interview:

<http://video.FoxBusiness.com/v/4384668462001#sp=show-clips>

Picasso's advice

Pablo Picasso, the greatest modern painter, gave great advice about art & life.

To become a great artist, you should look at the works of others, learn from them, incorporate their ideas into your own thinking, grow, and never stop growing. Picasso said:

Bad artists copy. Good artists steal.

To copy others is necessary, but to copy oneself is pathetic.

I'm always doing what I cannot do, in order that I may learn how to do it.

Every child is an artist. The problem is how to remain an artist once you grow up.

The idea of the top quote ("Bad artists copy. Good artists steal.") is itself stolen from Lionel Trilling, who said:

Immature artists imitate. Mature artists steal.

George Balanchine (the dance choreographer) elaborated:

God creates, I don't. I assemble and steal everywhere — from what I see, from what the dancers can do, from what others do.

Art can be superficial or deep. Picasso asked:

Are we to paint what's on the face, what's inside the face, or what's behind it? Who sees the human face correctly: the photographer, the mirror, or the painter?

Art doesn't have to be literal. He said:

Art is a lie that enables us to realize the truth.

The world today doesn't make sense, so why should I paint pictures that do?

Some painters transform the sun into a yellow spot. Others transform a yellow spot into the sun.

Art should begin with reality, then go beyond it. He said:

There's no abstract art. You must always start with something. Later you can remove all traces of reality.

When you start a painting, plan it but don't over-plan: jump in, start creating it, and then let it take on a life of its own and grow by itself. He said:

You must have an idea of what you're going to do, but it should be a vague idea. One never knows what one's going to do. One starts a painting and then it becomes something quite different.

Get abstract, but not *too* abstract. He warned:

When you try to find a portrait's true form by abstracting more and more, you must end up with an egg.

A painting should have a grand purpose. He said:

Painting is not done to decorate apartments. It's an instrument of war against brutality and darkness.

He admitted:

I don't own any of my own paintings, because a Picasso original costs several thousand dollars — it's a luxury I can't afford.

He also admitted:

The "refined," the "rich, professional do-nothing," and the "distiller of quintessence" desire just the peculiar, sensational, eccentric, and scandalous: that's today's art.

Since the advent of cubism, I've fed those fellows what they wanted and satisfied those critics with all the ridiculous ideas that passed through my head. The less they understood, the more they admired me!

Now I'm celebrated and rich; but when I'm alone, I don't have the effrontery to consider myself an artist at all, not in the grand meaning of the word. I'm just a public clown. I've understood my time and exploited the imbecility, vanity, and greed of my contemporaries.

That's a bitter confession, more painful than it may seem; but at least — and at last — it's honest.

I hope you liked Picasso's advice & confessions, but his wife said:

If my husband ever met a woman on the street who looked like the women in his paintings, he'd faint.

Stoppard's rebuke

Tom Stoppard is a British playwright who pokes fun at modern art. He said:

It's not hard to understand modern art. If it hangs on a wall, it's a painting; and if you can walk around it, it's a sculpture.

In his play *Artist Descending a Staircase*, a character (Donner) says:

Skill without imagination is craftsmanship and gives us many useful objects, such as wickerwork picnic baskets. **Imagination without skill** gives us modern art.

In his play *Travesties*, a character (Carr) says to an artist:

When I was at school, on certain afternoons we all had to do what was called **Labor**: weeding, sweeping, sawing logs for the boiler-room, that sort of thing; but if you had a chit from Matron, you were let off to spend the afternoon messing about in the **Art Room. Labor or Art.**

And you've got a chit for *life*? Where did you get it?

What's an artist? For every thousand people, there's 900 doing the work, 90 doing well, 9 doing good, and 1 lucky bastard who's the artist.

But Stoppard admitted:

I write plays because dialogue's the most respectable way to contradict myself.

Comedy's 2 skills

To be completely funny, you need 2 skills:

The first skill is to have a funny thought, turned into sentences, then turned into paragraphs or dialogue.

The second skill is to physically act ridiculous, by displaying funny mannerisms, facial expressions, accents, accidents (such as tripping or stumbling), exaggerated body movements (such as big hugs, big grabs, and sudden head turning), and suddenly changing your voice's volume.

People argue about which skill makes you a "comedian" and which skill makes you a "comic." My own preference is to say the first skill makes you a comedian; the second skill makes you

a comic. Ed Wynn once agreed with me and said (according to a 1961 article):

A comedian says funny things.
A comic says things funny.

(But at other times, he said the opposite.) He was inspired by an earlier quote from Fred Allen.) His thought was reprinted in *The Wall Street Journal* (on July 29, 2021, page A18, in a letter from David Weisberg).

If you have *both* skills, you're great and called a **complete comedian**. If you have enough skill to stand up and amuse an audience briefly but not enough skill to make a whole movie, you're called just a **stand-up comic**.

Music

Many people spend lots of time trying to create music. Like basketball, music is fun & healthy but rarely leads to a successful career.

Music versus art

Americans treat music differently from art. The typical art class encourages kids to create their own art by using crayons, paint, and other media. The typical music class does *not* encourage kids to compose their own music; instead, the class encourages kids to imitate (perform) music composed by others. Kids are taught to slavishly "play the right notes," not invent their own.

This miseducation affects our adult lives. While we're chatting on the phone, we let ourselves do creative artwork, called "doodling," but not creative music. In the shower, we try to sing correctly, not creatively.

Indian philosophy

At Wesleyan University in Connecticut, I heard a musician explain how to improvise on the **sitar** (a guitar from India). He said that if you play a "wrong" note, don't get embarrassed; instead, consider that the sitar is talking to you. Play off the error. Play the wrong note again and again, on purpose, as if you meant it, as if you were purposely trying to surprise the audience and shockingly lead the audience into a new theme.

To be more sophisticated, repeat not just the wrong note but also the entire phrase that contained it, then make that phrase lead up to a climactic phrase that's even more bizarre and exciting.

Famous music

Would you like to become a famous composer? Would you like to become like Beethoven or the Beatles? If so, here's something humbling to remember...

What's the most popular piece of music in the whole world, the piece of music that more people around the world know than any other?

No, it's not by Beethoven, it's not by the Beatles, and it's not by Britney Spears (thank God).

The next time you're at a party, ask your friends to answer that question. Then reveal the answer ("The Happy Birthday Song") and sing it to the daily victim!

That song is known all over the world. Yes, even in strange countries — like France and China — they sing that song, with the same notes, in their own languages!

The song was invented in 1893 in Louisville Kentucky. The melody was by a kindergarten teacher, **Mildred Hill**. The original words were by her sister, **Patty**, the principal, and went like this:

Good morning to you.
Good morning to you.

Good morning, dear children.
Good morning to all.

They were to be sung by teachers (and were published in a songbook called "Song Stories for the Kindergarten"), but soon the kids started singing it back to the teachers and changed the words to:

Good morning to you.
Good morning to you.
Good morning, dear teacher.
Good morning to you.

Much later, some wiseguy changed the words to:

Happy birthday to you.
Happy birthday to you.
Happy birthday, dear _____.
Happy birthday to you.

Those "Happy birthday" words were finally published in a songbook edited by Robert Coleman in 1924. Afterwards, the song spread by word of mouth, radio, movies, Western Union's singing telegrams, and other crazed comedians.

Eventually, the Hill family sued for copyright infringement. The copyright was eventually sold to bigger publishers.

It was legal to sing the song at family birthday parties privately; but you were supposed to pay royalties if you performed the song publicly, such as in a restaurant or sports arena or movie or — according to lawyers — at the following:

anyplace "open to the public" or where gather a substantial number of people outside a normal circle of "a family and its social acquaintances"

The eventual copyright owner (Time Warner) collected 2 million dollars per year in royalties, which it split with a foundation established by the sister's family.

But in 2015, a judge finally declared the copyright was invalid.

Moral: if you want big fame and big bucks, write happy songs, for kids! I wonder how much money Barney generates by singing:

I love you. You love me.
We're a happy family.

I prefer the popular parody:

I hate you. You hate me.
We're a dysfunctional family.

Sing it whenever mom yells at you. Then you'll *really* piss her off!

What if classical composers (such as Beethoven) had become even more famous, by composing "Happy Birthday" themselves? Watch Nicole Pesce play, on her piano, "Happy Birthday" in the style of Beethoven, Chopin, Brahms, Bach, normal Mozart, and drunk Mozart:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=OaZveHbxAYS](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaZveHbxAYS) (that's the letter O, not zero)

Elaborating on Nicole Pesce's humor, watch Salut Salon (3 German string players & pianist) play other pieces competitively:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=BKezUd_xw20](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKezUd_xw20) (limited number of views)

Beautiful simplicity

If you teach a class in music composition, play this trick on the students.

Tell them you want them to write a musical composition that's hauntingly beautiful, also relaxing, yet so sad it can make even the toughest men cry.

Give them a few minutes to start working on the project, then say:

Oh, by the way, I want the composition to be short: no more than 25 notes.

Watch them rethink.

Then say:

And I want no lyrics and no harmony. The melody alone must be the whole composition. Remember it must be "hauntingly beautiful, relaxing, and so sad it makes even the toughest men cry."

A few minutes later, say:

Oh, by the way, one more restriction: you're not allowed to use any sharps or flats. The whole composition must be playable on the piano's white notes, without using any black notes.

At this point, some of the students will start cursing you as they rewrite again.

A few minutes later, add:

Oh, by the way, one more restriction: you can't use the notes D, F, A, or B. The only notes you can use are C, E, and G.

At this point, the students will probably start saying "You're nuts," "You're crazy," "Why didn't you tell us that before," and "It's impossible."

A few minutes later add:

Now I'm going to impose a further restriction: the only notes you can use are middle C, the G just below it, and the E & G just above it.

You'll hear more cursing, but some of the students will start wondering what the point of all this is, what game you're trying to play.

A few minutes later, if the students have enough patience, add this command:

Now here's a final restriction: after each note (except the last note), you must write a note that's the same, or adjacent, or starts repeating a phrase. For example, after E, you must put E again or the G above it or the C below it or start repeating a phrase that's been heard already.

Now everybody wonders how you can make a song that's "hauntingly beautiful, relaxing, and tearfully sad" even though it's so restricted (shorter than 25 notes, without lyrics, without harmony, restricted to the notes of a C chord around middle C, and without jumps except for repetitions).

Say this:

Millions of Americans know a piece of music that has all those properties and restrictions. Do you know which piece of music that is?

If nobody guesses, start giving hints.

Here's a hint: what musical instrument plays only a C chord?

If still no answer, give further help.

What's the saddest thing that can happen to somebody?

If still no answer, give further help.

What's the most relaxing thing that can happen to somebody?

If still no answer, give further help.

What government organization dominates the lives (and therefore the music) of millions of Americans?

If they still have no clue, just give up and say, "Now I'm going to play the music that meets all those criteria." Then play "Taps" on a bugle.

To end the lesson, give the class this moral:

The art of writing music is to put restrictions on yourself, then successfully maneuver within those restrictions.

How to improvise

Try this experiment...

Make the piano cry Walk up to the piano. Press a key near the middle of the keyboard. Then remove your finger from that key. Press the key that's immediately left of the key you pressed before, regardless of color. (For example, if you pressed E before, press E flat; if you pressed C before, press B.) Notice that this second key sounds slightly lower than the first. Keep doing that: keep moving down to the left, pressing each key, regardless of color. (For example, if you started at E, press E flat, then D, then D flat, then C, then B, then B flat, then A.) That's called **going down the chromatic scale** (or **chromatic decline**). Keep doing that, until you've played 8 notes altogether.

Now start at some other key on the keyboard and go down the

chromatic scale from that new key, so you've played 8 new notes. (Now you've played 16 notes altogether!)

Hop to a third key on the keyboard and go down the chromatic scale from that key, so you've play 8 further notes. (Now you've played 24 notes altogether!)

Going down the chromatic scale makes the piano sound like it's crying: oh, such a mournful melody!

To increase the effect, get several friends to join you at the piano: all of you play simultaneously, so each of you goes down the chromatic scale simultaneously. (If you don't have any friends with you at the moment, try making your two hands pretend to be two people.)

The person who's farthest left is called the **bass**. For best results, have the bass player play twice as slowly, so he goes down one note while the other players go down two notes. Those long notes in the bass create a steady, sticky "glue" that holds the composition together.

Break free To avoid monotony, let each player be free to "break the rules" occasionally. For example, instead of taking an 8-note run, try taking a 4-note run or a 2-note run. Try letting the bass player play even slower — while the other players play even faster.

To avoid making the composition sound too depressing, let each player occasionally go up the scale instead of down, to create a glimmer of hope — before resuming the doom of descending into darkness.

Let each player be free to occasionally play any note or pattern. For example, instead of going down in boring scales, let your fingers wander in both directions (up and down), like a staggering drunk who's indecisive about which direction to walk in. (That's called a **random walk**.)

Add teamwork Let each player occasionally stop to listen to the other players (silence is golden!) and then imitate their patterns (so the group sounds like an attentive ensemble doing teamwork, instead of a disorganized mess).

Folk music To create folk music, play just on the black keys (that's called the **pentatonic scale**) while doing a random walk.

Chinese music To make that folk music sound Chinese, make each non-bass player do this: instead of pressing one black key at a time, press two black keys that are fairly close together (so just one black key is between them). That's called **pentatonic parallel thirds**.

Mozart To create Mozart music, do Chinese music but play on the white notes instead of the black (that's called **diatonic parallel thirds**), so each non-bass player is playing a pair of white notes that are fairly close together (and just one white note is between them). Then try this improvement: when playing a pair of notes, if the top note is a C, make the pair's bottom note be E instead of A.

Warning: when producing Mozart music, use fewer players than with other types of music, so you keep your composition as simple as a music box and avoid clashes.

Debussy On the keyboard, the black notes come in clumps. Some clumps contain 3 black notes. Other clumps contain 2 black notes. Try this restriction: let yourself play the 3 black notes that come in a 3-black-note clump, and also let yourself play the 3 white notes that are near the 2-black-note clump. Restricting yourself to those notes is called the **whole-tone scale**, which sounds like the impressionist harp music composed by the French composer Debussy. For best results, go *up* that scale instead of down (except for variety).

12th Street Rag

The **12th Street Rag** is a popular ragtime jazz composition.

It was originally written for piano, but now it's also played on guitar and by full jazz bands, in Kansas City and New Orleans.

In its main theme, the notes are boringly repetitive, and so is the rhythm. But the notes and rhythm intersect each other in a fun way.

The notes consists of just going down the scale (playing C then B then A), 5 times, like this:

CBA CBA CBA CBA CBA

Then play C, then do the scale 3 more times, so altogether you have this:

CBA CBA CBA CBA CBA C CBA CBA CBA

Looks boring!

The rhythm consists of playing "a Long note (a dotted eighth note) then a Short note (a sixteenth note)," 12 times, like this:

L SL SL SL SL SL SL SL SL SL SL SL S

Then play a long note, so altogether the rhythm looks like this:

L SL SL SL SL SL SL SL SL SL SL SL SL

Looks boring!

But when you play those boring notes using that boring rhythm, the result is fascinating:

C BA CB AC BA CB AC BA CC BA CB AC BA

That was composed back in 1898 by Euday Bowman in Kansas City. Back then, he was walking with his friend on 12th Street, where the friend planned to open a pawn shop. The symbol for a pawn shop is 3 balls. Euday told his friend, "If you get rich on those 3 balls, I'll write a piece on 3 notes to make *myself* rich."

Before the main theme, the composition includes an intro. After the main theme (which is played twice), you hear variations and a coda.

Most musicians play the notes slightly higher: instead of "C then B then A," they play "E flat then D then C."

YouTube shows many performances of the 12th Street Rag, by various musicians. Enjoy them all!

Besides the 12th Street Rag, Euday also wrote the 6th Street Rag, 10th Street Rag, and 11th Street Rag. All those streets were near the bordellos where he worked (as a pianist).

Was Dr. Seuss the first rapper?

I wonder whether rap music was influenced by Dr. Seuss. The beat's the same:

As I think about the music that is driving me insane,
And I wonder if I blunder when I call it such a name,
And the oink-oink little piggy blew the house down — such as shame! —
I'm a rapper and a crapper playing Seuss's little game.
Da-da-da-da! Da-da-da-da! Da-da-da-da! Da-da-da!

Rap music is upsetting. The rap version of "Silent Night! Holy Night!" would be:

Night of silence! Night of holes!
Kick some butt and grab your goals!
Snatch fine "gifts" from ev'ry shop.
Do not pay! Run! Do not stop!
Christ almighty, beat that cop!
Yeah, become a famous whammer!
Braggin' time in ev'ry slammer!

Nasty musician jokes

Musicians make cynical comments about each other.

Most think the **drummers** should be paid less, since they don't have to think about pitch and tend to be immature.

What do you call a drummer with half a brain?
Overqualified.

What does the average drummer get on an IQ test?
Drool.

A store sells brains, each in a glass jar. The sign on the scientist's brain says \$100, electrician's brain says \$1000, and drummer's brain says \$10,000. A customer asks, "Why should I buy a drummer's brain for \$10,000 when I can buy a scientist's brain for \$100?" The shopkeeper replies, "Because the drummer's brain has never been used."

What's the best way to confuse a drummer?

Put a sheet of music in front of him.

Little Johnny tells his mom, "When I grow up, I want to be a drummer." Mommy says, "I'm sorry, Johnny, but you can't do both."

How does a savings bond differ from a drummer?

The bond eventually matures and makes money.

Why is a drum machine better than a drummer?

It keeps better time and won't sleep with your girlfriend.

What do you call a drummer that breaks up with his girlfriend?

Homeless.

If a hundred dollar bill was laying on the floor and Santa Claus, the Easter Bunny, a drummer with good time, and a drummer with bad time were standing nearby, who'd get the hundred dollars?

The drummer with bad time, because the other 3 don't exist.

What do a sneeze and a drummer have in common?

You know when they're coming, and there's nothing you can do about it.

But the **conductor** should be paid even less, since he doesn't have to play anything himself:

If a musician can't handle his instrument, they take it away, give him 2 sticks, and make him a drummer. If he can't even handle 2 sticks, they take 1 away and make him a conductor.

How's a moose the opposite of an orchestra?

The moose has his horns in the front and the asshole in the back.

Some **drummers are proud**, especially in jazz bands, because the drummer's beat holds the whole band together. Drummer Panama Francis said:

The drummer drives. Everybody else rides!

In a band, musicians wish the **saxophonists** would get fewer solos and go away:

What's the range of a soprano saxophone?

The world's record is 57 yards.

What do you call 600 saxophones at the bottom of the ocean?

A good start.

How can you tell if it's a sax player at the door?

He doesn't know which key to use or when to come in, and the door drags.

But saxophonists, in turn, wish **accordions** would go away. Saxophonist Al Cohn said:

A gentleman is someone who knows how to play the accordion, and doesn't.

Trumpet players are too loud & proud, especially when they're practicing.

What do lawyers and trumpet players have in common?

People are happiest when their cases are closed.

What's the difference between a trumpet player and God?

God knows he's not a trumpet player.

Trombone players are disliked also.

What do you call a beautiful woman on a trombone player's arm?

A tattoo.

In a band, the **tubas** often play just oompah music, alternating between the notes C and G.

A young kid returned from his first lesson on how to play the tuba. His dad asked him, "How did it go?" He replied, "Great! I learned how to play a C."

The next week, the kid took another lesson. His dad asked how it went. He replied, "Terrific! I learned how to play a G."

The third week, the kid didn't come home until 2AM. His dad screamed, "Where in hell were you?" He replied, "Out giggling."

In a string quartet, the **viola** is the least useful instrument.

What's the difference between a chainsaw and a viola?
If you absolutely had to, you could use a chainsaw in a string quartet.

Musicians are often told to use the **back door**:

Saint Peter is checking ID's at the pearly gates.
He asks the first soul in line, "What did you do on Earth?" The soul replies, "I was a doctor." Peter says, "Okay, go through the gates then turn left."
He asks the next soul, "What did you do on Earth?" "I was a teacher."
"Okay, go through the gates then turn left."
He asks the third soul, "What did you do on Earth?" "I was a musician."
"All right, go around to the back door, up the freight elevator, and through the kitchen."

The typical musician gets **paid little**:

What do you call a musician with no lover? Homeless.

How to become a millionaire.

Step 1: become a billionaire.

Step 2: become a musician.

Saint Peter, at the pearly gates, asks the first soul in line, "What was your last job and annual salary?" The soul replies, "\$200,000. I was a trial lawyer."
The second soul replies, "\$95,000. I was a realtor."
The third soul replies, "\$10,000." Saint Peter says, "Cool! What instrument did you play?"

But musicians don't mind. Trumpeter Jack Daney said:

To be a musician is a curse.
To *not* be one is even worse.

He also said being an **unemployed musician** is not so bad:

One of the perks of being an unemployed musician is that you get to play much less bad music.

But playing **pop music** has its advantages. Bandleader Xavier Cugat said:

I'd rather play Chiquita Banana and have my swimming pool than play Bach and starve.

What does a rock artist say to a **jazz** musician?

Take me to the airport, please.

How does a **blues** player differ from a jazz player?

A blues player uses 3 fingers and has many listeners.
A jazz player uses many fingers and has 3 listeners.

If you know **musical scales & chords**, you'll understand this:

C, E-flat, and G go into a bar.
The bartender says "Sorry, we don't serve minors," so E-flat leaves, and C & G have an open fifth between them. After a few drinks, the fifth is diminished; G is out flat.
F comes in and tries to augment the situation but isn't sharp enough.
D comes in but heads straight for the bathroom, saying "Excuse me. I'll just be a second."
A comes in, but the bartender thinks this relative of C is a minor. Then the bartender notices B-flat hiding at the end of the bar and yells, "Get out! You're the seventh minor I've found in this bar tonight."
The next night, E-flat comes to the bar in a 3-piece suit. The bartender says, "You're looking sharp tonight! Come in. This could be a major development." That proves to be the case, as E-flat takes off the suit and is now au naturel.
Eventually, C sobers up and realizes in horror that he's under a rest. He's guilty of contributing to the diminution of a minor and sentenced to 10 years of DS without Coda at an upscale correctional facility; but, on appeal, he's found innocent of any wrongdoing, even accidental, and all accusations to the contrary are baseless.
The bartender decides he needs a rest — and closes the bar.

You can find more musician jokes at:

ViewFromTheMeadow.com/jokes%2012.html#125

How to sing the blues

A woman wrote a list of rules about how to sing the blues. Others made the rules fancier but forgot her name. She demanded credit and royalties but then disappeared.

Here's my edited version of those rules.

Begin Most blues begin "Woke up this morning" (not "I got a good woman" unless you add something nasty right away). Repeat that first line, then find something that sorta rhymes. Example:

I got a good woman with the meanest face in town.
I got a good woman with the meanest face in town.
She got teeth like Hillary Clinton and she weighs 500 pounds.

Transportation You can mention Chevies, Cadillacs, broken-down trucks, Greyhound buses, southbound trains, walkin', and fixin' to die. Not Volvos, BMWs, SUVs, jets, or motor pools.

Location The best places to have the blues are Chicago, Saint Louis, Kansas City, and New Orleans. You can have the blues in New York City, but not Brooklyn or Queens. Hard times in Vermont, Tucson, or North Dakota are just depression.

Good places to have the blues: the highway, a jailhouse, an empty bed, the bottom of a whiskey glass. Not golf courses, Tiffany's, Ivy League colleges, gallery openings, weekends in the Hamptons.

You can't have the blues in an office or shopping mall, because the lighting is wrong. Go outside to the parking lot or sit by the dumpster.

You can't get the blues where it doesn't rain.

To sing the blues, it's gotta be dark, preferably after midnight. Singin' da blues at noon is forbidden.

Who can sing? Just adults sing the blues. Not teenagers, because they ain't fixin' to die yet. You must be old enough to get the electric chair when you shoot that man in Memphis.

A man with male-pattern baldness ain't the blues. A woman with male-pattern baldness is.

You can't wear a suit, unless you're an old Black man in an old black suit.

Do you have the right to sing the blues? Yes if you shot a man in Memphis, you're blind, you're older than dirt, you can never be satisfied, and your first name is a southern state (like Georgia). No if the man in Memphis lived, your blindness got cured, you're deaf, you have all your teeth, or you have a trust fund or IRA.

The blues aren't about color, they're about bad luck. Ugly old white people can sing the blues. Julio Iglesias and Barbra Streisand will never sing the blues.

I don't care how tragic your life: if you own a computer, you can't sing the blues. You'd best destroy it, with a fire, shotgun, spilled bottle of Mad Dog, or your big-ass woman just sits on it.

If you can read, that's a big problem too. Most folks singin' the blues never had much chance for education. In the blues, the 3 R's are Railroads, Runnin', and Rehab.

Singer's name Excellent names for blues singers?

Female: Sadie, Big Momma, Bessie, and Fat River Dumpling.
Male: Joe, Willie, Little Willie, Big Willie, and Lightning.

But singers named Muffy, Sierra, Auburn, Alexis, Gwenyth, Sequoiz, Brittany, or Rainbow aren't allowed to sign the blues, no matter how many men they shoot in Memphis.

Here's how to build your own blues-singer name. Start with a physical infirmity (Blind, Cripple, Lame, Asthmatic), then a traditional name (from the list above) or fruit (Lemon, Lime, Kiwi), then a U.S. president's last name (Jefferson, Johnson, Fillmore). Examples: Blind Lime Jefferson, Cripple Kiwi Fillmore. Okay, maybe not Kiwi.

Drinks If you ask for water but baby gives you gasoline, it's the blues. Other acceptable blues beverages are wine, whiskey, beer, black coffee, and muddy water. Not mixed drinks, sparkling water, kosher wine, Snapple, Starbucks Frappuccino, or Slim Fast.

Food Rubber Biscuits and the Wish Sandwich are famous blues snacks, but better stick to common blues grub: greasy barbecue, fatback & beans, and government cheese. Not club sandwiches, sushi, or crème brûlée.

Colors These colors don't belong in the blues: violet, beige, mauve (unless you're truly desperate for a rhyme).

Disasters Breaking your leg while skiing ain't the blues. Breaking your leg when your broken-down pickup truck rolled over on it is.

Blues death occurs in a cheap motel or shotgun shack, or when stabbed in the back by a jealous lover, or from substance abuse or electric chair or denied treatment in an emergency room. It's not a blues death to die during liposuction or from tennis elbow.

The blues aren't about limitless choice. You stuck in a ditch, you stuck in a ditch; ain't no way out.

Final thoughts If none of those suggestions works, try one last, pathetic stab at authenticity: name your guitar. (But remember: "Lucille" is taken.)

Epitaph on a blues musician's tombstone: "I didn't wake up this morning."

Composer insults

Composers like to insult each other.

Tit for tat A composer who criticizes can get criticized back.

Rossini on Wagner's Lohengrin:

One can't judge Wagner's opera Lohengrin after a first hearing, and I certainly don't intend hearing it a second time.

Beethoven on Rossini:

Opera seria is ill-suited to the Italians. You don't know how to deal with real drama.

Vaughan Williams on Mahler:

A very tolerable imitation of a composer.

Copland on Vaughan Williams:

Listening to Vaughan William's 5th symphony is like staring at a cow for 45 minutes.

Berlioz on Handel:

A great barrel of pork and beer.

Mendelssohn on Berlioz:

Indifferent drivel, mere grunting, shouting, and screaming back & forth.

Stravinsky on Messiaen:

All you need to write like him is a big bottle of ink.

Stravinsky on Rachmaninov:

He was a 6½-foot scowl.

Prokofiev on Stravinsky:

Bach on the wrong notes.

Britten on Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress*:

I liked the opera very much. Everything but the music.

Brahms on Liszt:

The compositions are getting more and more terrible. My fingers often itch to pick an argument and write anti-Liszt.

Tchaikovsky on Brahms:

Brahms is just some chaotic and utterly empty wasteland.

More dumps on Wagner & Liszt Bizet on Wagner:

He's endowed with such insolent conceit that criticism can't touch his heart — admitting he has a heart, which I doubt.

Schumann on Wagner:

He can't write or think out 44 consecutive bars of beautiful or even good music.

Schumann's wife (pianist Clara Schumann) on Liszt:

That's just meaningless noise — not a single healthy idea anymore, everything confused. A clear harmonic progression is not to be found here any longer.

Dumps on Debussy Saint-Saëns on Debussy:

He cultivated an absence of style, logic, and common sense.

Louis Schneider on Debussy's *La Mer*:

The audience is expecting an ocean — something big, something colossal — but they were served instead some agitated water in a saucer.

Dumps beyond Tchaikovsky on Borodin:

He can't compose a single line without somebody's help.

Schoenberg on Strauss:

The expressions he uses are as banal as a cheap song.

Fauré on Ravel's string quartet in F major:

Truncated, ill-balanced, and in a nutshell, a failure.

Photos of all those composers, with sources of those quotes, are at:

cmuse.org/harshest-composer-on-composer-insults-in-classical-music

Switched classics

Classics are meant to be changed.

Railroad This classic song begins innocently enough —

I've been working on the railroad,
All the live-long day.
I've been working on the railroad
Just to pass the time away.

Can't you hear the whistle blowing?
Rise up early in the morn.
Can't you hear the captain shouting,
"Dinah, blow your horn!"

Dinah, won't you blow?
Dinah, won't you blow your horn?

But then it suddenly switches "Dinah" from being a locomotive to being a black maid:

Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah!
Someone's in the kitchen, I know!
Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah,
Strumming on the old banjo.

A detailed history of how that song developed and switched "Dinah" is at:

wikipedia.org/wiki/1%27ve_Been_Working_on_the_Railroad

Clementine The classic "Clementine" song has these verses:

In a cavern in a canyon, excavating for a mine,
Lived a miner (49'er) and his daughter, Clementine.

Light she was and like a fairy, and her shoes were #9.
Herring box-es without tops-es sandals were for Clementine.

Drove her ducklings to the water ev'ry morning just at 9.
Hit her foot against a splinter, fell into the foaming brine.

Ruby libs above the water, blowing bubbles soft and fine!
But alas, I was no swimmer, so I lost my Clementine.

But cynics added this verse:

How I missed her! How I missed her! How I missed my Clementine!
But I kissed her little sister. I forgot my Clementine.

Then I added some more:

Sister gladly to me married. Then she found in 9 months' time
A nice daughter. As we oughta, named the daughter "Clementine."

There's our daughter in the water. Suddenly, she gives a wail
At some red-stained herring boxes. Now I'm sitting here in jail.

In my dreams she still doth haunt me, robed in garments soaked in brine.
Once I wooed her. Now a loser singing songs while doing time!

Lamb Another classic song begins:

Mary had a little lamb.

But in English, that line could have 3 meanings.

The song means "Mary had a pet lamb," but an alternative meaning is "Mary ate some lamb," so I wrote this poem:

Mary had a little lamb
'Cause Jewish girls can't eat no ham.

If Mary were a Hindu now,
Mary couldn't eat no cow.

All religions: fine and dandy,
Even dentist's: "Eat no candy!"

Mom's religion makes me shiver.
That's why mine says: "Mom, no liver!"

A third meaning is "Mary was pregnant, and her child was a lamb," so cynics write:

Mary had a little lamb.
The doctor was surprised.

Mary Sawyer claimed the original song was based on a true event: in Massachusetts in the 1800's, she tried to take a lamb to school, but the teacher made her remove the lamb from the classroom. Details are at:

TheVintagenews.com/2019/01/17/mary-had-a-little-lamb/wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Had_a_Little_Lamb

Scrambled eggs Here are the original words to a famous song:

Scrambled eggs!
Oh my baby, how I love your legs,
Not as much as I love scrambled eggs!

According to Paul McCartney of the Beatles, those were the original words to the song that's now called "Yesterday." Later he changed the words to:

Yesterday
All my troubles seemed so far away.
Now it looks as though they're here to stay.

He changed the words because "yesterday" rhymes with more words than "eggs."

Pandemic In 2020, the world was hit by a coronavirus called Covid-19. To avoid spreading the virus farther, people were told to avoid big crowds and just stay at home, except for trips to buy food, after which people were told to wash their hands.

To create fun from the disaster, parodies were written of famous songs.

At baseball games, folks used to sing this famous song:

Take me out to the **ball game**.
Take me out with the crowd!

Buy me some peanuts and Cracker Jack.
I don't care if I never get back.

Let me root, root, root for the home team.
If they don't win, it's a shame.

For it's 1, 2, 3 and you're out
At the old ball game!

When the government told people to avoid ballgames (because coronavirus spreads among crowds), I wrote this updated version:

Take me out of the **bawl game**.
Take me out from the crowd.

Mail-order peanuts and Cracker Jacks.
I don't care if I ever get hacked.

Let me root, root, root for the home team.
If they can't play, it's a shame.

For it's 1, 2, 3 struck. Then cancel
The old ball game!

The song that made the Beatles famous begins this way:

I Want To Hold Your Hand!

Oh, yeah! I tell you somethin'. I think you'll understand
When I say that somethin': "I want to hold your hand!"
I want to hold your hand!

Oh, please! Say to me you'll let me be your man,
And please say to me you'll let me hold your hand.
I want to hold your hand!

And when I touch you I feel happy inside.
It's such a feelin' that my love I can't hide!
I can't hide! I can't hide!

The Internet contributed this parody:

I Gotta Wash My Hands!

Oh, yeah! I touched that somethin'. I think you understand:
Now I need a scrubbin'. I gotta wash my hands.
I gotta wash my hands!

Don't sneeze next to me. Watch where those droplets land.
To freeze this disease, I gotta wash my hands.
I gotta wash my hands!

'Cause if I catch it I'll feel crappy inside.
I even want my latex gloves sanitized!
Sanitized! Sanitized!

Hear & see it at

[YouTube.com/watch?v=OxOJ7hh3H-I](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OxOJ7hh3H-I)

This song is from *The Sound of Music* (the musical written by Richard Rogers and starring Julie Andrews):

My Favorite Things

Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens,
Bright copper kettles and warm woolen mittens,
Brown paper packages tied up with strings —
These are a few of my favorite things.

Cream-colored ponies and crisp apple strudels,
Doorbells and sleigh bells and schnitzel with noodles,
Wild geese that fly with the moon on their wings —
These are a few of my favorite things.

Girls in white dresses with blue satin sashes,
Snowflakes that stay on my nose and eyelashes,
Silver-white winters that melt into springs —
These are a few of my favorite things.

When the dog bites, when the bee stings,
When I'm feeling sad,
I simply remember my favorite things,
And then I don't feel so bad.

The Internet contributed a parody, which you can hear & see at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=1aAnPF0e11s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aAnPF0e11s)

I've edited it further here:

My Favorite Things

Watching old movies and raiding the kitchen!
Browsing online, I can fuel my addiction.
Staying in bed, having no alarms ring!
Nothing to do: that's my favorite thing!

Who can be lonely? With Netflix, there's oodles!
Stuffing my face with chips, lollies, and noodles!
Wild parties, singing, and living like kings!
Being in lockdown's my favorite thing!

Play Grand Theft Auto with guns and *car* crashes.
Not doing makeup or curling *eyelashes*!
We hate corona and all that it brings,
But "stay at home" is my favorite thing!

Lazy *long* nights! Days not working!
Home is not too bad.
I simply do all of my favorite things,
And then I don't feel so sad.

Food stops, and dozes, and dressing-down fashion,
Hours of keeping up with the Kardashians,
Using House Party and having a fling!
Self-isolation's my favorite thing!

Not caring whether it's Monday or Friday,
Ev'ry day's special, 'cause ev'ry day's *my* day,
Not shaving *my* legs, not curling my hair!
Showers? Who needs them? I don't have to care!

Not getting dressed! I stay in my pajamas,
Happily laughing at old workplace dramas.
We need vaccine just as soon as can be,
But until then, this is perfect for me!

Rhyme - surprise songs

These classic songs have rhymes that are surprises. You're invited to invent extra verses: do it yourself!

You Can't Get To Heaven

Chorus:

I ain't gonna grieve my Lord no more!
I ain't gonna grieve my Lord no more!
I ain't gonna grieve my Lord no more!

Famous verses:

You can't get to heaven by driving a car,
Because a car can't go that far.

You can't get to heaven by taking a train,
Because a train comes back again.

You can't get to heaven by taking a jet,
'Cause the Lord ain't got no runways yet.

You can't get to heaven in a ping-pong ball,
'Cause a ping-pong ball is way too small.

You can't get to heaven with a pot of gold,
'Cause nothing there is bought & sold.

You can't get to heaven in a Kleenex box,
'Cause the Lord don't like no dirty snots.

You can't get to heaven with powder & paint,
'Cause the Lord don't want you as you ain't.

You can't get to heaven in your girlfriend's bra,
Because her bra can't stretch that fa'.

You can't get to heaven on roller skates,
You'd roll right by those pearly gates.

You can't get to heaven on roller skates,
Gotta *work* your way to the pearly gates.

You can't get to heaven in a rocking chair,
'Cause a rocking chair won't go nowhere.

You can't get to heaven in electric chair,
'Cause the Lord don't take no fried meat there.

On one fine day — it won't be long —
You'll look for me, and I'll be gone.

If you get to heaven before I do,
Just tell the Lord I'm coming too.

If you get to heaven before I do,
Just punch a hole and pull me through.

If I get to heaven before you do,
I'll punch a hole and spit on you.

You can't get to heaven by the way of the well,
Because a well leads straight to...
Water!

That's all there is, Saint Peter said.
He shut the door. There is no more.

There's one more thing I forgot to tell:
If you don't go to heaven, you'll go to...
Bed!

And that's the end, Saint Peter said.
He closed the gates and went to bed!

Ain't Gonna Rain No More

Chorus:

Ain't gonna rain no more, no more!
Ain't gonna rain no more!
How the heck can I wash my neck
If it ain't gonna rain no more?

Famous verses:

A peanut sat on a railroad track.
Its heart was all aflutter.
Round the bend came the Number 10.
Toot-toot! Peanut butter!

A pig & hen went walking,
Just to stretch their legs.
From afar then came a car.
Honk-honk! Ham & eggs!

My gal lives in the mountains.
She's awful shy & meek.
She always dresses in the dark
Because the mountains peek.

A girl lay by a sewer,
And by the sewer died.
They couldn't call it murder
So called it "sewer-side."

My daddy is a doctor.
My mommy is a nurse.
And I'm the little needle
That gets you where it hurts.

My daddy built a chimney,
Built it oh so high,
Had to take it down each night
To let the moon go by.

Butterfly has wings of gold.
June bug? Wings of flame!
Bedbug has no wings at all,
Gets there just the same.

Mosquito she flies high,
Mosquito she flies low.
But if mosquito touches me,
She won't fly no mo'.

When Mr. Noah built the ark,
He said it was his duty
To save the beasts & birds & bugs.
But why'd he save the cootie?

The chicken is a wondrous bird,
The Baptist preacher said:
We eat him both before he's born
And after he is dead.

While boating, never quarrel:
You'll find without a doubt,
A boat is not the proper place
To have a falling out.

Some people say all fleas are black;
But I know that ain't so,
'Cause Mary had a little lamb
With fleas as white as snow.

Mary had a little lamb.
Her daddy shot it dead.
Still, Mary takes it off to school,
But on a slice of bread.

Mary had a little lamb,
So goes the tale of yore.
She loved that little lamb so much
She passed the plate for more.

Peter was a rabbit.
A rabbit he's no more,
For what he thought was rabbit hole
Was hole in outhouse floor.

My uncle was a chemist.
A chemist he's no more,
'Cause what he thought was H₂O
Was H₂SO₄.

Mary had a little watch.
She swallowed it one day.
Now all she drinks is castor oil,
To pass the time away.

Mary had a little lamb
And fed it very well.
One day she fed it dynamite
And blew it all to...
Whoa!

Mary had a little lamb.
The doctor was surprised.
When old MacDonald has a farm,
Doc can't believe his eyes!

Mary had a little Ford.
She liked it very well.
She drove into a phone pole,
And now it looks like...
Rain.

Mary had a steamboat.
The steamboat had a bell.
Mary went to heaven.
The steamboat went to...
Toot-toot!

Of all the fishes in the sea,
My favorite's the bass.
He climbs upon the seaweed trees
And slides down on his...
Hands & knees.

I hope I'm not misleading.
I've tried to make it plain
That even though your skies are dark
It isn't gonna rain.

It isn't going to rain anymore, anymore.
It isn't going to rain anymore.
That grammar's good but what a bore,
So sing it like before.

That song is quite old. A version was recorded in 1923, based on versions that were even older.

Mind-rhyme songs

In the following song, each verse wants to end with the dirty word "shit," but it's censored to become "shaving cream" instead. It's an example of a **mind rhyme**, where your mind says "shit" though the singer never mentions that word:

Shaving Cream

I have a sad story to tell you.
It may hurt your feelings a bit.
Last night as I entered my bathroom,
I stepped in a big pile of...

**Shhh-aving cream. Be nice and clean:
Shave every day and you'll always look keen.**

I think I'll break up with my girlfriend.
Her antics are queer, I'll admit.
Each time I say, "Darling, I love you,"
She tells me that I'm full of...

**Shhh-aving cream. Be nice and clean:
Shave every day and you'll always look keen.**

Our baby fell out of the window.
You'd think that her head would be split,
But good luck was with her that morning:
She fell in a barrel of...

**Shhh-aving cream. Be nice and clean:
Shave every day and you'll always look keen.**

An old lady died in a bathtub.
She died from a terrible fit.
In order to fulfill her wishes,
She was buried in 6 feet of...

**Shhh-aving cream. Be nice and clean:
Shave every day and you'll always look keen.**

When I was in France with the army,
One day I looked inside my kit.
I thought I would find me a sandwich,
But the darn thing was loaded with...

**Shhh-aving cream. Be nice and clean:
Shave every day and you'll always look keen.**

And now, folks, my story has ended.
I think it is time I should quit.

If any of you feel offended,
Push your head in a bucket of...

**Shhh-aving cream. Be nice and clean:
Shave every day and you'll always look keen.**

That song was written in 1946 by Benny Bell and originally sung by "Paul Wynn" (whose real name was Phil Winston), whom you can hear here:

youtube.com/watch?v=G8ffkDf0oI4

Second-story window

This elementary song is popular among elementary-school kids, especially Cub Scouts and Brownies. Just take any nursery rhyme you remember and change its ending to "threw it out the window," to make the song naughty:

Second-story Window

Chorus:

The window, the second-story window!
Throw it low or throw it high,
But throw it out the window!

Classic verses:

Mary had a little lamb.
Its fleece was white as snow,
And everywhere that Mary went
She threw it out the window.

Humpty-Dumpty sat on a wall.
Humpty-Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king's horses and all the king's men
Threw it out the window.

Little Jack Horner sat in a corner,
Eating his Christmas pie.
He stuck in his thumb, and pulled out a plum,
And threw it out the window.

Old Mother Hubbard went to the cupboard
To fetch her poor dog a bone.
When she got there, the cupboard was bare.
She threw dog out the window.

There was an old lady
Who lived in a shoe,
Had so many kids
She threw them out the window.

Old King Cole was a merry old soul,
And a merry old soul was he.
He called for his pipe and called for his bowl
And threw them out the window.

Jack & Jill went up the hill
To fetch a pail of water.
Jack fell down and broke his crown.
Jill threw him out the window.

Hey, diddle-diddle, the cat & the fiddle,
The cow jumped over the moon.
The little dog laughed to see such sport
And threw them out the window.

Little Bo Peep has lost her sheep
And doesn't know where to find them.
Leave them alone, and they'll come home.
Then throw them out the window.

A tisket, a tasket,
A green & yellow basket.
I wrote a letter to my love
And threw it out the window.

Little Miss Muffet sat on her tuffet,
Eating her curds & whey,
Along came a spider, who sat down beside her.
She threw it out the window.

Modern verses (by Russ)

Donald Trump sat on his rump
Hatching another tweet.
But then the court said to abort
And throw it out the window.

From Mexico come folks we know.
They try to cross the border.
But Trump gave an order to stop that disorder
And throw them out that window.

Cigarettes are bad for you
And so is vaping, too.
We recently knew your health they screw,
So throw them out the window.
But please don't litter.

This chorus is more sophisticated:

The window, the second-story window.
[Then repeat the verse's last 2 lines.]

For example, here's the sophisticated chorus after the "Mary had a little lamb" verse:

The window, the second-story window!
And everywhere that Mary went
She threw it out the window.

Sweet violets This mind-rhyme song is the most polished:

Sweet Violets

There once was a farmer who took a young miss
In back of the barn where he gave her a...
Lecture on horses & chickens & eggs
And told her that she had such beautiful...
Manners that suited a girl of her charms,
A girl that he wanted to take in his...
Washing & ironing; then if she did,
The two could get married and raise lots of...
**Sweet violets, sweeter than the roses,
Covered all over from head to toe,
Covered all over with sweet violets.**

The girl told the farmer that he'd better stop.
Then she called her father, and he called a...
Taxi, and so he arrived before long,
'Cause someone was doing his little girl...
Right for a change and so that's why he said,
"If you marry her, you are better off...
Single, I tell you, 'cause it's my belief
That marriage will bring a man nothing but...
**Sweet violets, sweeter than the roses,
Covered all over from head to toe,
Covered all over with sweet violets."**

The farmer decided he'd wed anyway
And started to plan for his nice wedding...
Suit, which he managed to get for one buck.
But then he found out he was just out of...
Money, and so he was left in the lurch,
Just standing & waiting in front of the...
End of the story, which just goes to show:
That all a girl wants from a man is his...
**Sweet violets, sweeter than the roses,
Covered all over from head to toe,
Covered all over with sweet violets.**

In that song, the 12 missing words are all clean:

kiss, legs, arms, kids, cop, wrong, dead, grief,
day, luck, church, dough

They're all part of popular clichés.

The chorus was written in 1882. The verses came later, popularized when Dinah Shore sung it in 1951, using an arrangement by Cy Coben & Charles Grean. Hear her sing it at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=LtnLvrmh3E](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LtnLvrmh3E)

For more fun, see Dorothy Collins sing it on TV in 1951 at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=5BVohLI7Syc](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5BVohLI7Syc)

See it at as a nice duet, sung by "Molasses Creek" at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=P41Hr4WzW8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P41Hr4WzW8)

Many other versions of "Sweet Violets" were written before & after Dinah Shore's, most of them obscene. Here's the best obscene version, sung by "The Naughty Nymphs":

There once was a farmer who lived on the rocks,
Who watched little boys as they played with their...
Marbles & toys as in days of old yore.
And for a companion he had a young...
Maiden who laid right down there in the grass.
She said that she'd show him the shape of her...
**Sweet violets, sweeter than the roses,
Covered all over from head to toe,
With sweet violets.**

The farmer was happy with all of his luck,
For she claimed she'd show him a new way to...
Bring in the children and teach them to knit,
For boys in the barnyard are shoveling...
Hay from the stables and filling the rick.
He said that he'd show her the length of his...
Long middle finger, which pained him a lot.
To soothe it he stuck it right into her...

**Sweet violets, sweeter than the roses,
Covered all over from head to toe,
With sweet violets.**

The farmer then left her and went off to hunt.
He said, "While I'm gone take good care of your...
Little pet rabbits which play in the grass.
And when I get home, I shall get me some...
**Sweet violets, sweeter than the roses,
Covered all over from head to toe,
With sweet violets."**

In that version, the 9 missing words are all dirty:

cocks, whore, ass, fuck, shit, dick, twat, cunt, ass

Hear it at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=1Dk83DYRgp0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Dk83DYRgp0)

(That's the number 1, not a small L.)

Instead of wasting time by singing a chorus about "sweet violets," this version squeezes in the most dirty words:

There was an old farmer who lived by a rock.
He sat in the meadow while shaking his...
Fist at some boys as they played by the crick,
Their feet in the water, their hands on their...
Marbles and playthings. And in days of yore,
There came a young lady. She looked like a...
Pretty young creature. She sat on the grass.
She pulled up her dresses and showed off her...
Ruffles and laces and white fluffy duck.
She said she was learning a new way to...
Bring up her children, and teach them to knit,
While boys in the barnyard were shoveling...
Refuse and litter from yesterday's hunt,
While girl in the meadow was rubbing her...
Eyes at the fellows, as girls sometimes do,
To make it quite clear that she wanted to...
Go for a nice, pleasant stroll on the grass
And hurry back home for a nice piece of...
Ice cream and cake that was 3 layers tall.
And after dessert, she was ready to...
Go for another walk down by the dock
With any young man with a sizable...
Roll of one hundreds and big bulge up front.
If he'd ask politely, she'd show him her...
Little pet dog who was subject to fits.
Then maybe she'd let him get hold of her...
Small tender hands, with a movement so quick.
Then she'd bend on over and suck on his...
Soda, so sweetly, till she finished it,
Then pull down her panties, to rub on her...
Hip that she bruised when she ran down the halls,
'Cause he tried to force her to lick on his...
Candy, so tasty, made of butterscotch.
And then he spread whipped cream all over her...
Cookies that she had been making all night.
If you think this dirty, you're fucking well right!

In that version, the 17 missing words are all dirty:

cock, dick, whore, ass, fuck, shit, cunt, screw,
ass, ball, cock, cunt, tits, dick, clit, balls, crotch

Hear it sung by Bird & Macdonald at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=RgvihRmyd5o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RgvihRmyd5o)

Polka-dot undies This mind-rhyme song praises underwear instead of violets:

Polka-dot Undies

I went for a drive in my nice pickup truck.
I picked up my girl, 'cause I wanted to...
Show her my gloves, 'cause she had on her mitts,
Then I blushed so bright when she showed me her...
Fancy perfume she buys when Avon calls.
I took off my pants, and I showed her my...

Polka-dot undies!

My polka-dot undies from Miracle Mart!
I said, "Look, be careful, I think I will...
Turn a sharp corner and go up on grass."
She leaned out the window, and I saw her...
Pointing to something that flashed by real quick.
She said, "Hey, see that! It looks just like your..."

Polka-dot undies!"

My polka-dot undies I wear back-to-front.
She smiled and she asked, "Have you seen my nice...
Brother's new car? It's the one that he stole."
Then told me to go ahead, look up her...
Whole damn big family. I got a shock:
I found out her sister just really liked...

Polka-dot undies!

I took her to dinner. But she was quite firm:
She'd swallow most anything, 'cept for my...
Stories her brother disliked all the birds
But hung around bars, and he liked to eat...
Fish & chips, and he still sucked on his thumb.
When I said, "I don't mind," she kissed on my...

Polka-dot undies!

This story's fine moral, a jewel it is gleamin'.
But you'll never find in a glass of warm...
Milk or tea. No, 'cause it never will fit,
And you probably think I am just full of...
Big innuendos and double-meant rhyme.
But I'll say obscenity's just in your...

Polka-dot undies!

In that song, the 15 missing words are all dirty (except the final word):

fuck, tits, balls, fart, ass, dick, cunt, hole, cock, sperm, turds, bum, semen, shit, mind

You've been reading my slightly improved version. The original was written by Bowser & Blue in 1986 and graphically videotaped by them later at:

YouTube.com/watch?v=RRSnND5rknY

Movies

Movies affect and distort our sense of reality. Here are some bizarre examples.

Extreme movies

To make your life more bizarre, **watch these extreme movies:**

Movie	What it's best at	Year Award
Romance movies		
The Philadelphia Story	best wedding movie about choosing the groom	1940 8
Casablanca	best movie about a past love	1942 8 A
The Seven Year Itch	best movie about being seduced by a neighbor	1955 7
The Bridges of Madison County	best movie about a fling	1995 8
Lost-soul movies		
It's a Wonderful Life	best movie about avoiding suicide	1946 9
Cast Away	best movie about being lost on an island	2000 8
The Artist	best movie about being jazzily silent	2011 8 A
Coming-of-age movies		
The Last Picture Show	best movie about growing up in Texas	1971 8
American Graffiti	best movie about growing up in California	1973 8
Big	best movie about finding your inner child	1988 7
Green-comedy movies		
Animal House	best movie about college pranks	1978 8
There's Something About Mary	best movie about peeking at women	1998 7
Sinister movies		
Citizen Kane	best movie about losing your principles	1941 8
A Clockwork Orange	best movie about British thugs	1971 8
The Truman Show	best movie about having your privacy invaded	1998 8
Horror movies		
Jaws	best horror movie about teeth, water, sharks	1975 8
The Shining	best horror movie about the effects of snow	1980 8
The Cook, Thief, Wife, Lover	best horror movie about a restaurant	1989 8
Popular-music movies		
Gold Diggers of 1933	only musical where the star sings in Pig Latin	1933 7
42 nd Street	best musical about impossible stage shows	1933 8
The Wizard of Oz	best musical about escaping from Kansas	1939 8
Holiday Inn	best musical about falling in love on holidays	1942 8
South Pacific	best musical about falling in love with foreigners	1958 7
The Music Man	best musical about salesmanship	1962 8
My Fair Lady	best musical about how to speak properly	1964 8 A
Cabaret	best musical about Nazi Germany	1972 8
Chicago	best musical about daydreaming	2002 7 A
Classical-music movies		
The Competition	best movie about a piano contest	1980 7
Amadeus	best movie about how Mozart was crazy	1984 8 A
Crazy-Jew movies		
Annie Hall	best Jewish movie about being in love	1977 8 A
Deconstructing Harry	best Jewish movie about being old and confused	1997 7
Life is Beautiful	best Jewish movie about laughing at death	1997 9
Illustrated-issue movies		
The Long Walk Home	best tale about desegregating Alabama	1990 7
Not One Less	best tale about school in rural China	1999 8

MadTV's parody of "The Wizard of Oz" is at:

YouTube.com/watch?v=6exm2Hi28Xw

The best way to learn about movies is to visit the **Internet Movie Database (IMDb.com)**. That Web site lets people rate how much they liked movies they saw, on a scale of 1 to 10. In the Award column, I show the movie's weighted-average score (which is computed by the Web site in a way to avoid vote stuffing). In the Award column, an "A" means "won the Academy Award's Oscar for Best Picture that year."

If you try to get one of those movies, make sure you get the correct year. Other movies with similar titles from other years are worse.

Popularity contests

On the **Internet Movie Database (IMDb.com)**, no movie's average score is 10. (That's because, no matter how great a movie is, there are still some people who hate it.) Here are the 51 movies whose average score is 9; **voters consider these the best movies to watch:**

Year Movies that are still rated 9

1931	City Lights
1936	Modern Times
1942	Casablanca
1946	It's a Wonderful Life
1954	7 Samurai, Rear Window
1957	12 Angry Men
1960	Psycho
1962	Hara-Kiri
1966	The Good the Bad and the Ugly
1968	Once Upon a Time in the West
1972	The Godfather
1974	The Godfather part 2
1975	One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest
1977	Star Wars a New Hope
1980	Star Wars the Empire Strikes Back
1985	Back to the Future
1988	Grave of the Fireflies, Cinema Paradiso
1990	Goodfellas
1991	The Silence of the Lambs, Terminator 2
1993	Schindler's List
1994	Pulp Fiction, The Lion King, Forrest Gump, Shawshank Redemption, Léon Professional
1995	The Usual Suspects, Se7en
1997	Life is Beautiful
1998	American History X, Saving Private Ryan
1999	The Matrix, Fight Club, The Green Mile
2000	Gladiator
2001	Spirited Away, Lord of Rings Fellowship
2002	City of God, Pianist, Lord of Rings 2 Towers
2003	Lord of Rings the Return of the King
2006	The Departed, The Prestige
2008	The Dark Knight
2010	Inception
2011	The Intouchables
2014	Whiplash, Interstellar
2019	Parasite

Some of those movies are old. Some are lowbrow. Some are immoral. Some are confusing. All are memorable. Most are American (because most of the voters are American). 1994 was the best year: it produced 5 top-rated movies!

In 2012, the **British Film Institute** asked 358 famous **movie directors**, from around the world, to each list the 10 greatest movies of all time. The directors tended to pick old classic movies that inspired their own work. These 10 movies were mentioned the most often:

Year	Movie	Director	Country
1941	Citizen Kane	Welles	USA
1948	The Bicycle Thief	De Sica	Italy
1953	Tokyo Story	Yasujiro	Japan
1958	Vertigo	Hitchcock	USA
1963	8½	Fellini	Italy
1968	2001 Space Odyssey	Kubrick	USA
1972	The Godfather	Coppola	USA
1974	Mirror	Tarkovsky	Russia
1976	Taxi Driver	Scorsese	USA
1979	Apocalypse Now	Coppola	USA

The British Film Institute also asked 846 **movie deciders** (critics, academics, distributors, and programmers), from around the world, to each list the 10 greatest movies of all time. The deciders tended to pick old classic movies that performed bold experiments. These 20 movies were mentioned the most often:

Year	Movie	Director	Country
1925	Battleship Potemkin	Eisenstein	Russia
1927	Sunrise	Murnau	USA
1928	Passion of Joan of Arc	Dreyer	France
1929	Man with Movie Camera	Vertov	Russia
1934	L'Atalante	Vigo	France
1939	Rules of the Game	Renoir	France
1941	Citizen Kane	Welles	USA
1949	Late Spring	Yasujiro	Japan
1951	Singin' in the Rain	Donen/Kelly	USA
1953	Tokyo Story	Yasujiro	Japan
1954	Seven Samurai	Kurosawa	Japan
1956	The Searchers	Ford	USA
1958	Vertigo	Hitchcock	USA
1960	Breathless	Godard	France
1963	8½	Fellini	Italy
1966	Au Hasard Balthazar	Bresson	France
1966	Persona	Bergman	Sweden
1968	2001 Space Odyssey	Kubrick	USA
1974	Mirror	Tarkovsky	Russia
1979	Apocalypse Now	Coppola	USA

How to be an actor

George Burns said:

Acting is all about honesty. If you can fake that, you've got it made.

Edward G. Robinson said:

The sitting around on the set is awful. But I always figure that's what they pay me for. The acting I do for free.

Alfred Hitchcock said:

When an actor comes to me and wants to discuss his character, I say "It's in the script." If he says "But what's my motivation?" I say "Your salary."

Stage names

If you don't like the name your mom gave you at birth (your **birth name**), replace it with a **stage name** that's more appealing, as done by these actors —

Stage name	His birth name
Albert Brooks	Albert Lawrence Einstein
Boris Karloff	William Henry Pratt
Buddy Hackett	Leonard Hacker
Cary Grant	Archibald Alexander Leach
Charles Bronson	Charles Buchinsky
Charlie Sheen	Carlos Irwin Estévez
Chevy Chase	Cornelius Crane Chase
Chico Marx	Leonard Marx
Chuck Norris	Carlos Ray
Douglas Fairbanks	Douglas Elton Thomas Ullman
Edward G. Robinson	Emanuel Goldenberg
Fred Astaire	Frederick Austerlitz II
Gene Wilder	Jerome Silberman
George Burns	Nat Birnbaum
Groucho Marx	Julius Henry Marx
Harpo Marx	Adolph Marx
Jack Benny	Benjamin Kubelsky
Jerry Lewis	Joseph Levitch
John Wayne	Marion Robert Morrison
Kirk Douglas	Issur Danielovitch
Louis C.K.	Louis Székely

Martin Sheen	Ramón Gerardo Antonio Estévez
Mel Brooks	Melvin Kaminsky
Michael Caine	Maurice Joseph Micklewhite, Jr.
Michael Keaton	Michael John Douglas
Nicolas Cage	Nicolas Kim Coppola
Omar Sharif	Michel Demitri Shalhoub
Peter Lorre	László Löwenstein
Phil Silvers	Philip Silversmith
Red Buttons	Aaron Chwatt
Redd Fox	John Elroy Sanford
Rock Hudson	Leroy Harold Scherer, Jr.
Rodney Dangerfield	Jacob Rodney Cohen
Roy Rogers	Leonard Franklin Slye
Stan Laurel	Arthur Stanley Jefferson
Tim Allen	Timothy Alan Dick
Tom Cruise	Thomas Cruise Mapother IV
Tony Curtis	Bernard Herschel Schwartz
Vin Diesel	Mark Sinclair
W.C. Fields	William Claude Dukerfield
Woody Allen	Allan Stewart Konigsberg
Yves Montand	Ivo Livi

these actresses —

Stage name	Her birth name
Anne Bancroft	Anne Italiano
Bea Arthur	Bernice Frankel
Diane Keaton	Diane Hall
Doris Day	Doris Mary Ann Kappelhoff
Greta Garbo	Greta Lovisa Gustafsson
Helen Mirren	Helen Lydia Mironoff
Judy Garland	Frances Ethel Gumm
Joan Crawford	Lucille Fay LeSueur
Lauren Bacall	Betty Joan Perski
Marilyn Monroe	Norma Jean Mortensen
Meg Ryan	Margaret Mary Emily Hyra
Miley Cyrus	Destiny Hope Cyrus
Mitzi Gaynor	Francesca Marlene de Czanyi von Gerber
Natalie Portman	Natalie Hershlag
Natalie Wood	Natalia Nikolaevna Zakharenko
Raquel Welch	Jo Raquel Tejada
Shelly Winters	Shirley Schrift
Sophia Loren	Sofia Villani Scicolone
Tina Fey	Elizabeth Stamatina Fey
Whoopi Goldberg	Caryn Elaine Johnson

these singers —

Stage name	Birth name
Bing Crosby	Harry Lillis Crosby
Bob Dylan	Robert Allen Zimmerman
Bruno Mars	Peter Gene Hernandez
Cher	Cherilyn Sarkisian
Danny Kaye	David Daniel Kaminsky
Dean Martin	Dino Paul Crocetti
Dr. Dre	Andre Romelle Young
Elton John	Reginald Kenneth Dwight
Elvis Costello	Declan Patrick MacManus
Eminem	Marshall Bruce Mathers III
Ethel Merman	Ethel Agnes Zimmermann
Fergie	Stacy Ann Ferguson
Gene Simmons	Chaim Witz
Iggy Pop	James Newell Osterberg, Jr.
Jamie Foxx	Eric Marlon Bishop
Jay-Z	Shawn Corey Carter
John Denver	Henry John Deutschendorf
Katy Perry	Katheryn Elizabeth Hudson
Lady Gaga	Stefani Joanne Angelina Germanotta
Lil Wayne	Dwayne Michael Carter Jr.
Madonna	Madonna Louise Ciccone
Meat Loaf	Marvin Lee Aday
Miley Cyrus	Destiny Hope Cyrus
Nicki Minaj	Onika Tanya Maraj
Patti Page	Clara Ann Fowler
Pink	Alecia Beth Moore
Psy	Park Jae-sang
Queen Latifa	Dana Elaine Owens
Ringo Starr	Richard Starkey

Movie clichés

Americans learn about life by watching TV and movies. Many movies distort reality by containing these clichés:

Rihanna	Robyn Rihanna Fenty
Snoop Dogg	Calvin Cordozar Broadus, Jr.
Stevie Wonder	Stevland Hardaway Judkins
Tina Turner	Anna Mae Bullock
50 Cent	Curtis James Jackson III

these authors —

Pen name	Birth name
Ayn Rand	Alisa Zinov'yevna Rosenbaum
Dr. Seuss	Theodor Seuss Geisel
George Eliot	Mary Anne Evans
George Orwell	Eric Arthur Blair
George Sand	Amantine Lucile Aurore Dupin
Joseph Conrad	Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski
Lemony Snicket	Daniel Handler
Lewis Carroll	Charles Lutwidge Dodgson
Mark Twain	Samuel Langhorne Clemens
O. Henry	William Sydney Porter
Toni Morrison	Chloe Ardelia Wofford
Voltaire	François-Marie Arouet

these special talents —

Talent	Stage name	Birth name
golfer	Tiger Woods	Eldrick Tont Woods
gunslinger	Annie Oakley	Phoebe Ann Moses
magician	Harry Houdini	Erik Weisz
TV host	Larry King	Lawrence Harvey Zeiger
wrestler	Hulk Hogan	Terry Eugene Bollea

these U.S. presidents (whose names changed when their moms remarried) —

Political name	Birth name
Bill Clinton	William Jefferson Blyth III
Gerald Ford	Leslie Lynch King, Jr.

and this First Lady (whose name changed when her mom remarried and changed again when she herself remarried):

Political name	Birth name
Nancy Reagan	Anne Frances Robbins

A long list of stage names is at:

http://en.WikiPedia.org/wiki/List_of_stage_names

Advice about how to invent a stage name for yourself is at:

WikiHow.com/Choose-a-Stage-Name

Fights

A bad guy's first shot always misses. It just announces that a fight will begin.

A hero always gets shot in the shoulder.

Evil men are too stupid to shoot heroes in the face. Instead, they aim for the bulletproof vest.

Even the thinnest piece of wood will shield you from all bullets.

When one man shoots at 20 men, he's more likely to kill them all than when 20 men shoot at one.

In a swordfight, you must find stairs to fight on, so the loser can roll down them to die at the bottom.

In a swordfight, jump up on a table. When the villain swipes at your legs, just hop over his blade.

When women fight, they pull hair, fall to the ground together, and roll over twice.

In a martial-arts fight, enemies surrounding you will wait patiently for you to kill them one-by-one.

A hero becomes invulnerable when he takes his shirt off.

When a villain captures you to kill, he kindly pauses for 5 minutes to tell you his life's plans.

Wars

Every army platoon includes a black guy who can play the harmonica.

You'll survive the battle unless you show someone a photo of your sweetheart back home.

The person with the most plans, prospects, and hopes will die.

During an artillery barrage, a kid or dog can safely wander around, but half the soldiers will die.

Escape

Every time bomb has a big red readout that shows how many seconds remain.

While a bad guy chases you, he kindly pauses to throw objects you can jump over.

When terrified, a woman always sticks her fist in her mouth.

Every woman who tries to flee insists on wearing high heels.

When being chased by an evil man, a woman always stumbles to the ground, even if the terrain is level.

To help a woman flee, a man hugs his arm around her, though hugging slows both of them down.

A person chased to a staircase is always stupid enough to run upstairs, not down to exit the building.

Injuries

A hero shows no pain when beaten but winces when a woman tries to clean his wounds.

When you're hit on the head and become unconscious, you never get a concussion or brain damage.

During a fight, a hero's only facial injuries are on his right cheekbone and his mouth's right corner.

A hero wipes blood from his mouth's right corner with the back of his hand, then looks at it.

If a hero's cheek gets injured, just put a Band-Aid on it, and it will heal completely by the next day.

Bibles, religious medals, and photos of loved ones stop bullets better than a bulletproof vest.

Dying

A good person dies only while friends are watching.

If a good person dies with eyes open, a friend will close them; but a villain's eyes stay open forever.

If you're dying, friends whisper lovingly to you or kiss you, instead of calling an ambulance.

If your friend is dying, try this cure: yell "You can't do this to me — I love you!" and "Fight!"

Bedroom antics

Whenever strangers have sex, they reach intense, simultaneous orgasms on the first try.

During sex, all women leave their underwear on, and they moan but don't sweat.

After sex, you never need Kleenex.

Every bed has a crooked sheet that covers up to a woman's armpit but just to a man's waist.

Whenever you wake up from a nightmare, you sit bolt upright and pant.

Every teenager's bedroom window comes with a drainpipe strengthened to hold the kid's weight.

Bathrooms

You can eat as much as you want and never need to go to the toilet.

When women wake up, they don't need to go to the toilet, but women must shower frequently.

The best way to tell when a woman is pregnant is to wait for her to vomit.

Women never menstruate.

If several people are in a bathroom, one of them must tell a secret while they all face the mirror.

Kitchen antics

Kitchens have no light switches. At night, you must open the fridge door and use that light instead.

All shopping bags are paper, topped off with French bread & carrots, which spill onto the kitchen floor.

Families are too rushed to ever finish breakfast, so dad and the kids always dash out, upsetting mom.

Buildings

In Paris, all the windows face the Eiffel Tower.

In New York, nice people getting low-paying jobs all live in luxury apartments.

You can pick any lock with a credit card or paper clip, except when a kid behind the door is trapped in a fire.

All elevator shafts are clean and well-lit, to make sure heroes won't get dirty or need flashlights.

Whenever you want an elevator, it's already at your floor, unless you're chased by an evil person.

Cars

When you drive to any building, you'll always find a parking space in front.
When you try to cross the street, you're delayed by traffic just if you're in a rush.
In New York, you can safely leave your car unlocked. Even convertibles with tops down don't get stolen.
Whenever you flee a villain, your car won't start — at least not on the first try.
While driving, you can dodge bullets by ducking your head.
When hitting a parked car, a speeding car goes up in the air, but the parked car won't even wiggle.
Every car chase through town will smash a fruit cart owned by a Greek, who'll curse but stay unhurt.
When you want a taxi, you'll get one immediately, except when you're in danger.
To pay for a taxi, don't bother looking at your wallet: the first bill you grab will be the exact amount.

Planes

Planes always depart on time and never require a boarding pass: just hop on.
If your plane contains a nun, it will crash.
You can land any plane easily if somebody in the control tower just tells you what to do.

Phones

You never need to look up phone numbers: you've memorized your whole city's phone book.
Whenever the phone wakes you up, you must knock it to the floor before answering.
When you phone friends, you never need to say "hello" or "goodbye": those courtesies take too long.

Music

Whatever you decide to sing, everyone around you already knows the tune & words and joins in.
If you start dancing in the street, everyone you bump into already knows all the steps.
You can play wind instruments and accordions without moving your fingers.

Alcohol

Since bars are never busy, bartenders just relax, chat, wash glasses, and flip bottles in the air.
Whenever a bar plays country music, a fight will break out.
At a bar, don't bother saying which brand of beer you want: the bartender can always read your mind.
At the home of a friend who asks you "Want a drink?" say just "Yes": don't bother saying which type.
Strong whiskey makes a hero wince, wipe his mouth on his sleeve, then flash clenched teeth.
One swig of booze is enough to numb pain before the girl jabs a knife in your arm to remove a bullet.
When you have a hangover, putting an icepack on your head makes you become fun and not vomit.
Whenever you throw cold water or black coffee at a drunk, he'll immediately get sober.

Relationships

In any pair of identical twins, one of them is evil — or *both* are evil.
During emotional confrontations, people always talk back-to-back instead of face-to-face.
A feminist spurns a macho hero until he rescues her from death. Then she becomes his docile slave.
After a feminist becomes docile, a macho hero always softens up and tells her his tragic past.

Appearance

High-powered female executives always wear miniskirts and 5-inch heels to work.
Women always apply makeup before going to bed. It stays intact all night and while scuba diving.
Even in prehistoric times, women always shaved their legs and armpits.
Medieval peasants all had filthy faces, tangled hair, ragged clothes, and perfect teeth.
Whenever you knock out someone and steal the person's clothes, they fit you perfectly.
At night, everything turns blue.
When lightning appears, you hear its thunder instantly, and the rain starts then too.
Mexicans speak perfect English except they say *Señor* and *Gracias* instead of "Sir" and "Thank you."

Eyeglasses

Action heroes never wear glasses.
Your glasses will never fog, even when you come in from the cold.
Little girls wearing glasses always tell the truth. Little boys wearing glasses always lie.

Investigations

If you're a woman hearing a noise at night, you must investigate while wearing revealing underwear.
If you're a woman hearing noises at home, your cat will jump at you before you get strangled.
If a killer lurks in your home, you can find him easily: just take a bath.
A light bulb burns out (or flickers) just if someone hides in that room and waits to jump on you.
Every police investigation requires a visit to a strip club.
A police detective can't solve a tough case until he's suspended from duty.
Dogs know which people are bad and bark at them.
Incriminating evidence will always be in the next-to-bottom drawer or in photo #4 of a stack.
To access a computer's secret files, just type "ACCESS ALL THE SECRET FILES."
If a hero kills lots of bad guys, police won't question him about those murders.

For more info about movie clichés, see **The Movie Clichés List** (put onto the Internet by Giancarlo Cairella at MovieCliches.com) and watch a video called **CineMassacre's Top 10 Worst Movie Clichés**. That video is at:

YouTube.com/watch?v=PQWWFbaSch8

When you watch a TV broadcast of the news, you're actually watching a video that's full of clichés, illustrated at Charlie Brooker's **How to Report the News** (YouTube.com/watch?v=aHun58mz3vI) and The Onion's **Some Bullshit Happening Somewhere** (YouTube.com/watch?v=9U4Ha9HQvMo).

Math

Our lives are often dominated by math.

Funny math

Math can be funny.

Puzzles

Torture your friends by giving them these puzzles about arithmetic.

Apples If you have 5 apples and eat all but 3, how many are left? Kids are tempted to say “2,” but the correct answer is 3.

Birds If you have 10 birds in a tree and shoot 1, how many remain in the tree? Kids are tempted to say “9,” but the correct answer is 0.

Corners If you have a 4-sided table and chop off 1 of the corners, how many corners are left on the table? Kids are tempted to say “3,” but the correct answer is 5.

Lily pads In a lake, a patch of lily pads doubles in size every day. It takes 48 days for the patch to cover the lake. How long would it take for the patch to cover half the lake? Kids are tempted to say “24 days,” but the correct answer is 47 days.

Baseball A bat and a ball cost a total of \$1.10. The bat costs \$1 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost? Kids are tempted to say “10¢,” but the correct answer is 5¢.

Seven How do you make seven an even number? Remove the “s”.

Eggs Carl Sandberg, in his poem *Arithmetic*, asks this question:

If you ask your mother for one fried egg for breakfast, but she gives you *two* fried eggs and you eat both of them, who’s better in arithmetic: you or your mother?

Missing dollar Now that you’ve mastered the easy puzzles, try this harder one:

On a nice day in the 1940’s, three girls go into a hotel and ask for a triple. The manager says sorry, no triples are available, so he puts them in three singles, at \$10 each. The girls go up to their rooms.

A few minutes later, a triple frees up, which costs just \$25. So the manager, to be a nice guy, decides to move the girls into the triple and refund the \$5 difference. He sends the bellboy up to tell the girls of their good fortune and move them into the triple.

While riding up in the elevator, the bellboy thinks to himself, “How can the girls split the \$5? \$5 doesn’t divide by 3 evenly. I’ll make it easier for them: I’ll give them just \$3 — and keep \$2 for myself.” So he gave the girls \$3 and moved them into the triple.

Everybody was happy. The girls were happy to get refunds. The manager was happy to be a nice guy. And the bellboy was happy to keep \$2.

Now here’s the problem: each girl spent \$10 and got \$1 back, so each girl spent \$9. Altogether, the girls spent \$9+\$9+\$9, which is \$27, and the bellboy got \$2. That makes \$29. But we started with \$30. What happened to the missing dollar?

Ask your friends that question and see how many crazy answers you get!

Here’s the correct answer:

At the end of the story, who has the \$30?
The manager has \$25, the bellboy has \$2, and the girls have \$3.

Adding what the girls *spent* (\$27) to what the bellboy *got* (\$2) doesn’t give a meaningful number. But that nonsense total, \$29,

is close enough to \$30 to be intriguing.

Here’s an alternative analysis:

The girls spent a net of \$9+\$9+\$9, which is \$27.
\$25 of that went to the manager, and \$2 went to the bellboy.

Ten sticks Arrange 10 sticks (or pencils or pens) like this:



That’s 4 then 3 then 2 then 1.

Here’s the puzzle: move just 1 stick, so you have the reverse order: 1 then 2 then 3 then 4.

Here’s the solution: move the second stick, to fill the gap before the last stick:



Warning: when you set up that trick for your friends, make sure the gap before the last stick is narrow enough so it gets completely filled when you move a stick there.

Ten coins Try this task:

Arrange 10 coins so they form 5 rows, each containing 4 coins.

“5 rows of 4 coins” would normally require a total of 20 coins, but if you arrange properly you can solve the puzzle. Hint: the rows must be straight but don’t have to be horizontal or vertical. Ask your friends that puzzle to drive them nuts.

Here’s the solution:

Draw a 5-pointed star. Put the coins at the 10 corners.

Running A teacher told her 3rd-grade students to solve this problem:

If Sue runs around the track twice, and John runs around the track 4 times more than Sue, how many times does John run around the track?

The teacher thought the answer is 6, but some parents disagree, because “4 times more than” is vague:

If it means “4 more times than,” the answer is 2+4, which is 6.

If it means “4 times as often as,” the answer is 2 times 4, which is 8.

If it means “400% more times than,” the answer is 2 + 400% of 2, which is 2+8, which is 10.

If it means “4 times after,” the answer is just 4.

Statistics

Courses in statistics can be difficult. That’s why they’re called “sadistics.”

Lies Statisticians give misleading answers.

For example, suppose you’ve paid one person a salary of \$1000, another person a salary of \$100, another person a salary of \$10, and two other people a salary of \$1 each. What’s the “typical” salary you paid? If you ask that question to three different statisticians, they’ll give you three different answers!

One statistician will claim that the “typical” salary is \$1, because it’s the most popular salary: more people received \$1 than any other amount. Another statistician will claim that the “typical” salary is \$10, because it’s the middle salary: as many people were paid more than \$10 as were paid less. The third statistician will claim that the “typical” salary is \$222.40, because it’s the average: it’s the sum of all the salaries divided by the number of people.

Which statistician is right? According to the Association for Defending Statisticians (started by my friends), the three statisticians are *all* right! The most common salary (\$1) is called the **mode**; the middle salary (\$10) is called the **median**; the average salary (\$222.40) is called the **mean**.

But which is the “typical” salary, really? Is it the mode (\$1), the median (\$10), or the mean (\$222.40)? That’s up to you!

If you leave the decision up to the statistician, the statistician’s answer will depend on who hired him.

If the topic is a wage dispute between labor and management, a statistician paid by the laborers will claim that the typical salary is low (just \$1); a statistician paid by the management will claim that the typical salary is high

(\$222.40); and a statistician paid by the arbitrator will claim that the typical salary is reasonable (\$10).

Which statistician is telling the *whole* truth? None of them!

A century ago, Benjamin Disraeli, England's prime minister, summarized the whole situation in one sentence. He said:

There are 3 kinds of lies:
lies, damned lies, and statistics.

Intransitive voting Suppose you have 3 numbers, called A, B, and C. If A is bigger than B, and B is bigger than C, then A is bigger than C. That's because "bigger" is **transitive**.

But voting is *not* transitive. Here's why.

Suppose A, B, and C are candidates in an election. Suppose most voters prefer A over B and prefer B over C. You can't conclude most voters prefer A over C.

For example, suppose you have 3 voters.

Voter 1 prefers candidate A over B over C.
Voter 2 prefers candidate C over A over B.
Voter 3 prefers candidate B over C over A.

Here's the result.

Voters 1 & 2 both prefer A over B; so *most* voters prefer A over B.
Voters 1 & 3 both prefer B over C; so *most* voters prefer B over C.
Voters 2 & 3 both prefer C over A; so most voters do *not* prefer A over C.

Logic

A course in "logic" is a blend of math and philosophy. It can be lots of fun — and also help you become a lawyer.

Beating your wife There's the old logic puzzle about how to answer this question:

Have you stopped beating your wife?

Regardless of whether you answer that question by saying "yes" or "no," you're implying that you did indeed beat your wife in the past.

Interesting number Some numbers are interesting. For example, some people think 128 is interesting because it's "2 times 2 times 2 times 2 times 2 times 2 times 2." Here's a proof that *all* numbers are interesting:

Suppose some numbers are *not* interesting.
For example, suppose 17 is the first number that's *not* interesting. Then people would say, "Hey, that's interesting! 17 has the very interesting property of being the first boring number!" But then 17 has become interesting!
So you can't have a first "boring" number, and all numbers are interesting!

Surprise test When I took a logic course at Dartmouth College, the professor began by warning me and my classmates:

I'll give a surprise test sometime during the semester.

Then he told the class to analyze that sentence and try to deduce when the surprise test would be.

He pointed out that the test can't be on the semester's last day — because if the test didn't happen before then, the students would be expecting the test when they walk into class on that last day, and it wouldn't be a surprise anymore. So cross "the semester's last day" off the list of possibilities.

Then he continued his argument:

But once you cross "the semester's last day" off the list of possibilities, you realize the surprise test can't be "the day before the semester's last day" either, because the test would be expected then (since the test hadn't happened already and couldn't happen on the semester's last day). Since the test would be expected then, it wouldn't be a surprise. So cross "the day before last" off the list of possibilities.

Continuing in that fashion, he said, more and more days would be crossed off, until eventually all days would be crossed off the list of possibilities, meaning there couldn't be a surprise test.

Then he continued:

But I assure you, there *will* be a test, and it *will* be a surprise when it comes. Think about it.

Mathematicians versus engineers

The typical mathematician finds abstract concepts beautiful, and doesn't care whether they have any "practical" applications. The typical engineer is exactly the opposite: the engineer cares just about practical applications.

Engineers complain that mathematicians are ivory-tower daydreamers who are divorced from reality. Mathematicians complain that engineers are too worldly and also too stupid to appreciate the higher beauties of the mathematical arts.

To illustrate those differences, mathematicians tell 3 tales...

Boil water Suppose you're in a room that has a sink, stove, table, and chair. A kettle is on the table. Problem: boil some water.

An engineer would carry the kettle from the table to the sink, fill the kettle with water, put the kettle onto the stove, and wait for the water to boil. So would a mathematician.

But suppose you change the problem, so the kettle's on the chair instead of the table. The engineer would carry the kettle from the chair to the sink, fill the kettle with water, put the kettle onto the stove, and wait for the water to boil. But the mathematician would not! Instead, the mathematician would carry the kettle from the chair to the table, yell "now the problem's been reduced to the previous problem," and walk away.

Analyze tennis Suppose 1024 people are in a tennis tournament. The players are paired, to form 512 tennis matches; then the winners of those matches are paired against each other, to form 256 play-off matches; then the winners of the play-off matches are paired against each other, to form 128 further play-off matches; etc.; until finally just 2 players remain — the finalists — who play against each other to determine the 1 person who wins the entire tournament. Problem: compute how many matches are played in the entire tournament.

The layman would add $512+256+128+64+32+16+8+4+2+1$, to arrive at the correct answer, 1023.

The engineer, too lazy to add all those numbers, would realize that the numbers 512, 256, etc., form a series whose sum can be obtained by a simple, magic formula! Just take the first number (512), double it, and then subtract 1, giving a final result of 1023!

But the true mathematician spurns the formula and searches instead for the problem's underlying meaning. Suddenly it dawns on him! Since the problem said there are "1024 people" but just 1 final winner, the number of people who must be eliminated is "1024 minus 1," which is 1023, so there must be 1023 matches!

The mathematician's calculation ($1024-1$) is faster than the engineer's. But best of all, the mathematician's reasoning applies to any tournament, even if the number of players isn't a magical number such as 1024. No matter how many people play, just subtract 1 to get the number of matches!

Prime numbers Mathematicians are precise, physicists somewhat less so, chemists even less so. Engineers are even less precise and sometimes less intellectual. To illustrate that view, mathematicians tell the tale of **prime numbers**.

First, let me explain some math jargon. The **counting numbers** are 1, 2, 3, etc. A counting number is called **composite** if you can get it from multiplying a pair of other counting numbers. For example:

6 is composite because you can get it from multiplying 2 by 3.
9 is composite because you can get it from multiplying 3 by 3.
15 is composite because you can get it from multiplying 3 by 5.

A counting number that's not composite is called **prime**. For example, 7 is prime because you can't make 7 from multiplying a pair of other counting numbers. Whether 1 is "prime" depends on how you define "prime," but for the purpose of this discussion let's consider 1 to be prime.

Here's how scientists would try to prove this theorem:

All odd numbers are prime.

Actually, that theorem is *false!* All odd numbers are *not* prime! For example, 9 is an odd number that's *not* prime. But although 9 isn't prime, the physicists, chemists, and engineers would still say the theorem is true.

The physicist would say, slowly and carefully:

1 is prime. 3 prime. 5 is prime. 7 is prime.
9? — no.
11 is prime. 13 is prime.
9 must be just experimental error, so we can ignore it. All odd numbers are prime.

The chemist would rush for results and say just this:

1 is prime, 3 is prime. 5 is prime. 7 is prime.
That's enough evidence. All odd numbers are prime.

The engineer would be the crudest and stupidest of them all. He'd say the following as fast as possible (to meet the next deadline for building his rocket, which will accidentally blow up):

Sure, 1 is prime, 3 is prime, 5 is prime, 7 is prime, 9 is prime, 11 is prime, 13 is prime, 15 is prime, 17 is prime, 19 is prime, all odd numbers are prime!

Goldbach's conjecture

Now most textbooks define "prime number" to be "a non-composite number greater than 1." In 1742, Christian Goldbach made a guess (called **Goldbach's conjecture**), which in modern jargon is:

Every even integer greater than 2 is the sum of 2 primes.

For example:

Even integer	Sum of 2 primes
4	= 2+2
6	= 3+3
8	= 3+5
10	= 3+7
12	= 5+7
14	= 3+11
16	= 3+13
18	= 5+13
20	= 3+17
22	= 3+19
24	= 5+19
26	= 3+23
28	= 5+23
30	= 7+23

Is it really true that *every* even integer greater than 2 is the sum of 2 primes? Mathematicians still don't know! It's the oldest famous unsolved math problem! If *you* want to become famous, **prove Goldbach's conjecture or find an exception.** So far, computers have checked every even integer less than 4×10^{18} ; none of those integers are exceptions.

Why proofs?

Unlike physicists, chemists, engineers, and other scientists, mathematicians don't trust a bunch of experiments. Mathematicians demand **proofs**. Here are 2 examples of why.

Euler's lucky number Try computing x^2-x+41 , when x is different integers. Is x^2-x+41 always prime?

For example:

0^2-0+41 is 41, which is prime.
 1^2-1+41 is 41, which is prime.
 2^2-2+41 is 43, which is prime.
 3^2-3+41 is 47, which is prime.
 4^2-4+41 is 53, which is prime.
 5^2-5+41 is 61, which is prime.

Every x you try (0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, etc., up to 40) gives a result that's prime. Pretty impressive, huh? So maybe x^2-x+41 is *always* prime?

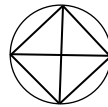
That's enough evidence to convince a lazy scientist or engineer, but not a mathematician, because when x is 41, x^2-x+41 is *not* prime: it's divisible by 41.

That example was discovered by Euler, who called 41 a **lucky number**.

Here's a different way to express the problem:

41 is prime.
 $41+2$ is prime.
 $41+2+4$ is prime.
 $41+2+4+6$ is prime.
 $41+2+4+6+8$ is prime.
That pattern keeps going, so even $41+2+4+6+8+10+12+14+\dots+78$ is prime. But $41+2+4+6+8+10+12+14+\dots+78+80$ is *not* prime, because mathematicians can prove $2+4+6+\dots+2x$ is $x(x+1)$,
so $2+4+6+\dots+80$ is "40 times 41,"
so $41+2+4+6+\dots+80$ is $41+40 \cdot 41$, which is divisible by 41.

Regions in a circle Try this experiment. Draw a circle. Put 4 points (dots) on the circle (not *in* the circle). Draw segments (short lines) connecting each of those 4 points to the other 3 points, like this:



Those point-to-point segments are called **chords**. Now the circle is divided into 8 **regions** (areas). So 4 points produced 8 regions.

What happens if you have more points, or fewer points? Try it! You get these results:

How many points How many regions in the circle

1	1
2	2
3	4
4	8
5	16

So it seems that each time you add a point, the number of regions doubles. It seems that if p is number of points, the number of regions is 2^{p-1} . It seems 6 points should generate 32 regions. But they don't! If the 6 points are equally spaced, they generate just 30 regions; if the 6 points are *not* equally spaced, they generate 31 regions; but they never generate 32.

If the points are very irregularly spaced (so no 3 chords meet each other at the same spot inside the circle), here's the result:

How many points How many regions in the circle

0	1
1	1
2	2
3	4
4	8
5	16
6	31
7	57
8	99
9	163
10	256

The number of regions is *not* always 2^{p-1} ; instead, the number of regions can be proved to be always $p(p-1)(p^2-5p+18)/24+1$, which by coincidence just happens to equal 2^{p-1} when p is 1, 2, 3, 4, or 5.

What's the formula when the points are equally spaced, so 6 points create just 30 regions? I haven't yet met a mathematician smart enough to create that formula. As far as I know, that problem is still unsolved.

Logger

Every few years, authors of math textbooks come out with new editions, to reflect the latest fads. Here's an example, as reported (and elaborated on) by *Reader's Digest* (in February 1996), *Recreational & Educational Computing* (issue #91), John Funk (and his daughter), *ABC News Radio WTKS 1290* (in Savannah), and others:

Teaching math in 1960: traditional math

A logger sells a truckload of lumber for \$100. His cost of production is $\frac{4}{5}$ of the price. What's his profit?

Teaching math in 1965: simplified math

A logger sells a truckload of lumber for \$100. His cost of production is $\frac{4}{5}$ of the price, or \$80. What's his profit?

Teaching math in 1970: new math

A logger exchanges a set L of lumber for a set M of money. The cardinality of set M is 100. Each element is worth \$1. Make 100 dots representing the elements of M. The set C (cost of production) contains 20 fewer points than set M. Represent the set C as a subset of set M and answer this question: what's the cardinality of the set P of profits?

Teaching math in 1975: feminist-empowerment math

A logger sells a truckload of lumber for \$100. Her cost is \$80, and her profit is \$20. Your assignment: underline the number 20.

Teaching math in 1980: environmentally conscious math

An unenlightened logger cuts down beautiful trees, desecrating the precious forest for \$20. Write an essay explaining how you feel about that way to make money. How did the forest's birds and squirrels feel?

Teaching math in 1985: computer-based math

A logger sells a truckload of lumber for \$100. His production costs are 80% of his revenue. On your calculator, graph revenue versus costs. On your computer, run the LOGGER program to determine the profit.

Teaching math in 1990: Wall Street math

By laying off 40% of its loggers, a company improves its stock price from \$80 to \$100. How much capital gain per share does the CEO make by exercising his options at \$80? Assume capital gains have become untaxed to encourage investment.

Teaching math in 1995: managerial math

A company outsources all its loggers. The firm saves on benefits; and whenever demand for its products is down, the logging workforce can be cut back easily. The average logger employed by the company earned \$50,000 and had a 3-week vacation, nice retirement plan, and medical insurance. The contracted logger charges \$30 per hour. Based on that data, was outsourcing a good move? If a laid-off logger comes into the logging company's corporate headquarters and goes postal, mowing down 16 executives and a couple of secretaries, was outsourcing the loggers still a good move?

Teaching math in 2000: tax-based math

A logger sells a truckload of lumber for \$100. His cost of production is $\frac{4}{5}$ of the price. After taxes, why did he bother?

Teaching math in 2005: profit-pumping math

A logger sells a truckload of lumber for \$100. His production cost is \$120. How did Arthur Anderson determine that his profit margin is \$60?

Teaching math in the future: multicultural math

Un maderero vende un camión de madera para \$100. Su coste de producción es \$80....

Winston Churchill

Winston Churchill (who was England's prime minister) said:

I had a feeling once about Mathematics — that I saw it all. Depth beyond Depth was revealed to me: the Byss and the Abyss. I saw — as one might see the transit of Venus or even the Lord Mayor's Show — a quantity passing through infinity and changing its sign from plus to minus. I saw exactly why it happened and why the tergiversation was inevitable — but it was after dinner and I let it go.

Terrorist mathematicians

A colleague passed me this e-mail, forwarded anonymously:

A teacher was arrested because he attempted to board a flight while possessing a ruler, protractor, and calculator. Attorney General Alberto Gonzales believes the man's a member of the notorious Al-gebra movement. The man's been charged with carrying weapons of math instruction.

"Al-gebra is a problem for us," Gonzales said. "Its followers desire solutions by means & extremes and sometimes go off on tangents in search of absolute values. They use secret code names like 'x' and 'y' and refer to themselves as 'unknowns,' but we've determined they belong to a common denominator of the axis of medieval, with coordinates in every country."

When asked to comment on the arrest, President George W. Bush said, "If God had wanted us to have better weapons of math instruction, He'd have given us more fingers and toes." Aides told reporters they couldn't recall a more intelligent or profound statement by the President.

Letters

These letters appeared on the Internet.

Dear Algebra,

Please stop asking us to find your x. She's never coming back, and don't ask y.

Dear Math,

I'm not a therapist. Solve your own problems.

Euclid poems

2 famous poems have been written about Euclid.

In 1922, Edna St. Vincent Millay wrote this poem praising him and titled "Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare":

Euclid alone has looked on Beauty bare.
Let all who prate of Beauty hold their peace,
And lay them prone upon the earth and cease
To ponder on themselves, the while they stare
At nothing, intricately drawn nowhere
In shapes of shifting lineage; let geese
Gabble and hiss, but heroes seek release
From dusty bondage into luminous air.

O blinding hour, O holy, terrible day,
When first the shaft into his vision shone
Of light anatomized! Euclid alone
Has looked on Beauty bare. Fortunate they
Who, though once only and then but far away,
Have heard her massive sandal set on stone.

But back in 1914, Vachel Lindsay wrote this simpler poem, titled just "Euclid":

Old Euclid drew a circle
On a sand-beach long ago.
He bounded and enclosed it
With angles thus and so.

His set of solemn greybeards
Nodded and argued much
Of arc and of circumference,
Diameter and such.

A silent child stood by them
From morning until noon
Because they drew such charming
Round pictures of the moon.

Like many poets, Vachel Lindsay committed suicide.

On the beach

Here's my *very* abridged version of Arthur Koestler's story about an event on the beach:

"What are you doing with your stick in the sand?"
"I'm drawing triangles."
"Why, after drawing one, do you wipe it out with your hand then draw a new one just like the other?"
"I don't know. I believe these triangles have a secret. I want to discover it."
"Do you suffer from bad dreams?"
"Yes."
"What's the dream?"
"I dream my wife and I watch athletic games where my friend Porphyrius performs. He throws the discus but in the wrong direction, so it hits my wife on the head. She faints, with a mysterious smile on her lips."
"I noticed that while you told your dream, your hand inadvertently drew in the sand. When you mentioned yourself, you drew a straight line. When you mentioned Porphyrius, you drew a second one at right angles to the first; and when you mentioned your wife, you completed the triangle by drawing the hypotenuse. You can solve the triangle's secret by asking about your wife's private life."
Pythagoras stomped on the last figure he drew then walked away. He felt relieved; the dark urge to draw triangles in the sand had left him forever; and so the Pythagorean Theorem was never found.

Arthur Koestler committed suicide.

For the full version of that Pythagoras story, labeled "Pythagoras and the Psychoanalyst," read Clifton Fadiman's anthology, "Fantasia Mathematica."

Pseudo-geometry theorems

Modern math: the number of horn blasts in a traffic jam equals the sum of the squares at the wheels.

Proof that a line is a lazy dog:

Take your pen and draw a line on your paper.
Now you have an ink-lined plane. But an inclined plane is a slope up, and a slow pup is a lazy dog.

Poster

Michael O'Donoghue was one of the founding writers of National Lampoon magazine, which in 1974 (or thereabouts) published a poster he invented. The poster shows a photo of a beautiful, bikinied girl jumping for joy at the beach, with this caption:

"How do I like my guys? Well, all I can do is tell you about Bill. I guess I *love* him because he's all man. I guess I *need* him because he needs me. I guess I *respect* him because he knows CALCULUS!"
It's true! Gals all over campus are "getting with" the big swing to MATH, because they realize a guy who knows his numbers is a guy you can count on. So why not:
ADD to your income
SUBTRACT dreariness from your life
MULTIPLY your opportunities for advancement
DIVIDE and conquer the girl of your dreams
Sign up for CALCULUS! You'll be glad you did. And so will she.

After National Lampoon magazine, Michael O'Donoghue started a newer form of comedy: in 1975, he became Saturday Night Live's first head writer.

Math frustration

Math can be frustrating. Here's my feeling:

Pick any number from 1 up to 10.
Double that number. Then double again.
Then multiply by the square root of pi.
If you can do it, go pluck out your eye.

Pluck it out faster and faster and faster.
If you can't do it, kid, you're a disaster.
Fry it with roots of the old mango tree.
God is in heaven. A math guy is He.

Algebra 2 is like algebra 1:
Double the trouble. So go get your gun,
Fill it with methods you need to remember.
If you forget them, repeat next September.

Calculus, next, can be really a hoot.
Infinitesimals crawl in your boot,
Climb up your leg and go into your crotch,
Go to the limit and then up a notch,

All while your calculus prof tells you fate
Makes your life hell when you go integrate.
Kid, if you don't feel such vectors amusing,
Switch to biology. It's much more soothing.

Emotional integers

Because of our culture, certain integers make people emotional.

This old man

Kids sing a **counting song** whose first verse is:

This old man, he played 1.
He played knick-knack on his thumb,
With a knick-knack, paddywhack. Give a dog a bone.
This old man came rolling home.

There are 10 verses, all similar, except for changing “1” to other numbers and changing the word that rhymes:

he played 1... on his thumb
he played 2... on his shoe
he played 3... on his knee
he played 4... on his door
he played 5... on his hive
he played 6... with his sticks
he played 7... up to heaven
he played 8... on his gate
he played 9... on his spine
he played 10... once again

As a result, kids associate 1 with thumb, 2 with shoe, 7 with heaven, etc. So 7 is considered a heavenly place to be!

English digits

What do these digits have in common:

1, 2, 4, 6, 8

Answer: they all sound like English words:

1 sounds like “won” (the past tense of “win”)
2 sounds like “to” and “too”
4 sounds like “for” and “fore”
6 sounds like “sics” (as in “he sics his dog on you”)
8 sounds like “ate”

Do you speak a non-English language? In *your* language, which digits sound like words? Please tell me!

Here are other associations from our culture....

0

If somebody calls you a “zero,” that person thinks you’re worthless, a **loser**. Trump thinks most Democrats are “losers,” so Democrats should retaliate by proudly wearing badges that say “0.”

When a rocket is going to blast off, people say:

5, 4, 3, 2, 1, blast off!

So 0 is the **blast-off** number!

Some people hate negative numbers: they’ll **stop at nothing** to avoid them.

1

If somebody calls you “number 1,” it means you’re the **winner**, the best, the boss. Since “one” is pronounced the same as “won,” you can have fun saying this:

If you’re number one, you won.

But “1” is also the symbol for being **single**, unmarried, unattached, and lonely. A famous song begins by singing:

One is the loneliest number you’ll ever do.

That song, titled “One,” was written by Harry Nilsson in 1968 and sung by Three Dog Night in 1969, which you can hear here:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=d5ab8BOu4LE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d5ab8BOu4LE)

Try this experiment.

Pick any positive integer.

Do this procedure: **if that integer is even, divide it by 2; but if that integer is odd instead, triple it then add 1.** That procedure gets you a new integer.

Using that new integer, do that procedure again, to get an even newer integer. Keep doing that procedure repeatedly, to keep getting newer & newer integers.

No matter what positive integer you start with, it seems you’ll eventually get 1. Mathematicians have tested that for many positive integers but haven’t figured out how to prove it for *all* integers: the search for a proof is still unsolved.

Here are examples of that procedure:

If you start with 1, you get 1.

If you start with 2, which is even, you divide the 2 by 2, so you get 1.

If you start with 3, which is odd, the procedure gets you 10 (the 3 tripled + 1), which gets you 5 (because you divide by 2), which gets you 16, which gets you 8 then 4 then 2 then 1.

If you start with 4, which is even, you get 2 then 1.

If you start with 5, you get 16 then 8 then 4 then 2 then 1.

If you start with 6, you get 3 then 10 then 5 then 16, 8, 4, 2, 1.

If you start with 7, you get 22 then 11 then 34 then 17 then 52 then 26 then 13 then 40 then 20 then 10 then 5 then 16, 8, 4, 2, 1.

If you start with 8, you get 4, 2, 1.

If you start with 9, you get 28 then 14 then 7, which you saw leads to 1.

If you start with 10, you get 5, which you saw leads to 1.

If you start with 11, you get 34 then 17 then 52 then 26 then 13 then 40 then 20 then 10 then 5 then 16, 8, 4, 2, 1.

If you start with 12, you get 37 then 112 then 56 then 28 then 14 then 7, which you saw leads to 1.

If you start with 13, you get 40 then 20 then 10, which you saw leads to 1.

If you start with 14, you get 7, which you saw leads to 1.

If you start with 15, you get 46 then 23 then 70 then 35 then 106 then 53 then 160 then 80 then 40 then 20 then 10, which you saw leads to 1.

That unsolved problem (“Do all positive integers lead to 1?”) is called the **$3x+1$ problem** (because odd numbers are tripled then you must add 1). It’s also called the **Collatz conjecture**, because it was first mentioned by Lothar Collatz in 1937.

Computers have shown that every positive integer less than 5×2^{60} leads to 1, but what about integers that are even bigger? Unknown!

Some numbers are really horrible. For example, if you start with 27, you need 111 steps to finally get to 1; and you might feel discouraged along the way, since at one point you get up to 9232 before coming back down toward 1.

2

If somebody is called the “number 2,” that person is the main **assistant** to the “number 1.” For example, that person might be the vice-president or secretary or administrative assistant or “COO” (Chief Operating Officer).

But a group of 2 is considered **heartwarming & productive**. People say “It takes 2 to tango.” It takes 2 people (a male + a female) to create a child. A famous song joyfully recommends “tea for 2” so “we can raise a family.” So 2 is better than 1.

2 is **part of you**, since your body has 2 eyes, 2 ears, 2 arms, 2 legs, 2 nostrils, and 2 lungs. If you’re female, you get a bonus: 2 breasts. People say “There are 2 sides to every question.” By holding up a mirror, you can make anything become 2.

Computer circuits use the **binary number system** (based on the number 2) instead of the decimal system (based on the number 10) because most things in life have just 2 states: for example, an electric circuit is either on or off; magnetic poles are either north or south; a card is either whole or has a hole punched through it. If you give a computer a math problem written in the decimal system, the computer translates it into the binary system, does the computation in binary, then converts the answer back to the decimal system so you can understand it.

2 **tablespoons** make an ounce. 2 **cups** make a pint. 2 **pints** make a quart.

2 U.S. **Presidents** were named “Adams,” 2 were named “Harrison,” 2 were named “Johnson,” 2 were named “Roosevelt,” and 2 were named “Bush.” Some people think Trump is 2 much to handle.

2 is **pronounced** the same as “to” and “too” but stupidly spelled “two.” A text saying “I like U2” is praising either you or an Irish rock band.

3

3 is the number of the Christian **Trinity**: Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. There are also 3 **feet** in a yard, 3 **teaspoons** in a tablespoon, and 3 **colors** on a traffic light (green, yellow, and red). Shamrocks, poison ivy, and many other plants have 3 **leaves**.

If somebody asks you whether a certain statement is true, there are 3 **possible answers**: “true,” “false,” or “indeterminate” (which means “not enough information to decide yet”).

In many cultures, even numbers (such as 2) are female, but odd numbers (such as 3) are **male**. That’s because 2 represents a woman + her child, or her 2 breasts, or the other symmetries in her body, whereas a man’s body is similar but adds a prick.

Michelin makes tires but also judges which restaurants to travel to. Michelin awards the best restaurants 3 **stars**: ★★. So in the Michelin guide, a 3-star restaurant means “the best” (because it’s better than 2-star or 1-star or unmentionable). Chefs are proud to be called “3-star.”

There are 3 guys in the standard **joke** (such as “3 guys walk into a bar. The first guy said... The second guy said... But the third said...”). Example of a standard joke:

Bill Clinton, while President, was flying on an airplane with his wife Hillary and daughter Chelsea. Bill said, “If I throw a hundred-dollar bill out the window, I could make somebody happy.” Hillary said, “If I throw 100 one-dollar bills out the window, I could make 100 people happy.” Chelsea said, “If I throw you both out the window, I could make a million people happy.”

Many jokes have 3 examples, such as:

The 3 biggest lies are “Black is beautiful,” “The check is in the mail,” and “Don’t worry, baby, I won’t cum in your mouth.”

A variant of that joke is:

The 3 biggest lies are “Black is beautiful,” “The check is in the mail,” and “I’m from the government, and I’m here to help you.”

Joyce Kilmer wrote a **poem** whose main verses are:

I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree.

John Atherton wrote a parody, whose main verses are:

I think that I shall never c
A # lovelier than 3.
Atoms are split by men like me,
But only God is 1 in 3.

Warren Buffett said:

There are 3 kinds of people: those who can count, and those who can’t.

Similarly, many T-shirts say:

5 out of 4 people struggle with math.

Here’s a similar thought (from the Shoe comic on 11/12/2020):

“Describe yourself in 3 words.”
“Lazy.”

4

Since **Independence Day** (when the Declaration of Independence from England was signed) is July “the 4th,” Americans consider 4 to be patriotic, revolutionary, fiery, and full of firecrackers. The **Irish** consider 4 to be lucky, because finding a 4-leaf clover is a rare joy.

But the **Chinese** consider 4 to be *unlucky*, because in Chinese it’s pronounced “Sì,” which sounds similar to “Sǐ,” which is the Chinese word for **death**. So the Chinese try to avoid house numbers & phone numbers containing the number 4. In many Chinese apartment buildings & hotels, the floor above 3 is called “3A” or “5” instead of 4.

Japanese is similar: in Chinese-influenced Japanese (called Sino-Japanese), 4 and death are both pronounced “shi,” so 4 is unlucky, so some buildings don’t have a 4th floor: the floor above 3 is “3A” or “5.”

Fear of 4 is called “**tetraphobia**.”

A deck of cards has 4 **suits** (hearts, diamonds, clubs, spades).

4 cups make a quart, and 4 quarts make a gallon, so those **measurements** are both 4tunate. Life would be even more 4tunate & simpler if we banned the word “pint,” which gets in the way.

A human has 5 fingers on each hand, but the typical **cartoon character** (such as Mickey Mouse) has just 4 **fingers** on each hand (a thumb plus 3 more) and those fingers are all wide. That’s because 5 thin fingers take too long to draw and, Walt Disney said, look too much like a bunch of bananas. In the Simpsons, every character has 4 fingers per hand except God, who appears rarely and is powerful enough to have 5.

In 1941, President Franklin Roosevelt said everybody in the world should get 4 **freedoms**:

freedom of speech
freedom of worship
freedom from want
freedom from fear

He said the U.S. should protect those freedoms and oppose tyrants who squelch them. Norman Rockwell made 4 paintings to illustrate those 4 freedoms.

Maps The number 4 has tortured mathematicians because of the **4-color problem**, which is this problem in topology (similar to geometry):

Can every map be colored using just 4 colors?

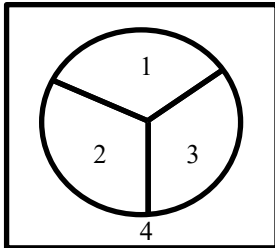
Here are the rules:

If 2 countries rub against each other (share a border), you must give them different colors. But if 2 countries are far away from each other (separated by another country or a body of water), you're allow to give those 2 countries the same color.

Each country is assumed to be a single blob. No country is 2 separated blobs.

If 2 countries touch each other at just one point (or several points), it's okay to give them the same color, unless they rub against each other (by sharing a border that's a straight or squiggly line).

This map requires 4 colors, because each of its 4 countries rubs against the other 3:



Does any map require 5 colors? In 1852, Francis Guthrie noticed that 4 colors seemed to always be enough, but he couldn't prove it. In 1890, Percy Heawood proved that no map required *more* than 5 colors, but did any map require 5? In 1976, mathematicians at the University of Illinois finally proved no map requires more than 4 colors; 4 colors are always enough, so the 4-color problem became the **4-color theorem**.

How many letters? 4 is the only number that's **as big as its spelling**: 4 is spelled "four," which has 4 letters. By contrast, "five" doesn't have 5 letters; "six" doesn't have 6 letters. Just "four" is so nice.

Here's a more detailed analysis....

In English, "four" is the only number that has correct length: it contains 4 letters.

4 ("four") contains 4 letters, so its length is 4. That's correct!

All integers bigger than 4 contain insufficient letters:

5 ("five") has length 4, which is less than 5, so insufficient.
 6 ("six") has length 3, which is less than 6, so insufficient.
 7 ("seven") has length 5, which is less than 7, so insufficient.
 8 ("eight") has length 5, which is less than 8, so insufficient.
 etc.

All numbers less than 4 contain excessive letters:

3 ("three") has length 5, which is more than 3, so excessive.
 2 ("two") has length 3, which is more than 2, so excessive.
 1 ("one") has length 3, which is more than 1, so excessive.
 0 ("zero") has length 4, which is more than 0, so excessive.
 -1 ("minus one" or "negative one") has length more than -1, so excessive.
 ½ ("one half" or "point five") has length more than ½, so excessive.
 .9 ("point nine") has length more than .9, so excessive.

All rational numbers lead to 4:

5 has length 4.
 6 has length 3, which has length 5, which has length 4.
 7 has length 5, which has length 4.
 8 has length 5, which has length 4.
 9 has length 4.
 10 has length 3, which has length 5, which has length 4.
 11 has length 6, which has length 3, which has length 5, which has length 4.
 12 has length 6, which has length 3, which has length 5, which has length 4.
 13 has length 8, which has length 5, which has length 4.
 3 has length 5, which has length 4.
 2 has length 3, which has length 5, which has length 4.
 1 has length 3, which has length 5, which has length 4.
 0 has length 4.

Four fours In the 1890's, math nerds began having fun trying to solve this puzzle: compute each digit by combining four fours. So in the list below, make each equation become true by filling in the blanks, using just the symbols for addition (+), subtraction (-), multiplication (× or * or •), division (÷ or /), and parentheses.

0 = 4 4 4 4
 1 = 4 4 4 4
 2 = 4 4 4 4
 3 = 4 4 4 4
 4 = 4 4 4 4
 5 = 4 4 4 4
 6 = 4 4 4 4
 7 = 4 4 4 4
 8 = 4 4 4 4
 9 = 4 4 4 4

Here's a solution (using scientific order of operations):

0 = 4 - 4 + 4 - 4
 1 = 4 / 4 + 4 - 4
 2 = 4 / 4 + 4 / 4
 3 = (4 + 4 + 4) / 4
 4 = 4 + 4 * (4 - 4)
 5 = (4 * 4 + 4) / 4
 6 = 4 + (4 + 4) / 4
 7 = 4 + 4 - (4 / 4)
 8 = 4 + 4 + 4 - 4
 9 = 4 + 4 + 4 / 4

To continue much beyond 9, you must permit factorials:

"4 factorial" is written "4!" and means "1 times 2 times 3 times 4," which is 24

You must also permit either square roots ($\sqrt{4} = 2$) or shifted numbers (.44 and .4). Then you get:

10 = 4 + 4 + 4 - $\sqrt{4}$ = (44-4)/4
 11 = 4!/√4 - 4/4 = 4/.4 + 4/4
 12 = 4*(4 - 4/4)
 13 = 4!/√4 + 4/4 = 4! - 44/4
 14 = 4 + 4 + 4 + $\sqrt{4}$ = 4(4-.4) - .4
 15 = 4*4 - 4/4
 16 = 4 + 4 + 4 + 4
 17 = 4*4 + 4/4
 18 = 4*4 + 4 - $\sqrt{4}$ = 44*.4 + .4
 19 = 4! - 4 - 4/4
 20 = 4*(4+4/4)
 21 = 4! - 4 + 4/4
 22 = 4*4 + 4!/4
 23 = 4! + 4/4 - $\sqrt{4}$ = (4!*4 - 4)/4
 24 = 4*4 + 4 + 4
 25 = 4! - 4/4 + $\sqrt{4}$ = (4!*4 + 4)/4
 26 = 4! + $\sqrt{4}$ + 4 - 4 = 4/.4 + 4*4
 27 = 4! + 4 - 4/4
 28 = 4! + 4 + 4 - 4
 29 = 4! + 4 + 4/4
 30 = 4! + 4 + 4 - $\sqrt{4}$ = (4+4+4)/.4
 31 = 4! + (4+4)/4
 32 = 4*4 + 4*4

To continue past 32, the square root symbol isn't good enough to bail you out, so you must permit .4 or something wacky, such as "4!!" (which is called "4 double factorial" and means "multiply just the even numbers up to 4," so it's "2 times 4," which is 8).

Paul Dirac won a Nobel Prize for physics in 1933, but he liked math puzzles too. In the 1930's, he invented a devilish way to construct *every* integer by using four fours! He cheated: he used logarithms. Here's his method....

To write n by using four fours, put n square-root signs in front of 4, then write "log_{(√4)/4} log₄" before all that.

For example, to write 7 by using four fours, put 7 square-root signs in front of 4, so you get $\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{4}}}}}}}$, then write "log_{(√4)/4} log₄" before that, so you get:

$$7 = \log_{(\sqrt{4})/4} \log_4 \sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{4}}}}}}}$$

That's because:

$$\begin{aligned} & \log_{(\sqrt[4]{4})/4} \log_4 \sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{4}}}}} \\ = & \log_{2/4} \log_4 \sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{4}}}}} && (\text{since } \sqrt{4} = 2) \\ = & \log_{1/2} \log_4 \sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{\sqrt{4}}}}} && (\text{since } 2/4 = 1/2) \\ = & \log_{1/2} \log_4 ((((((4^{1/2})^{1/2})^{1/2})^{1/2})^{1/2})^{1/2})^{1/2}) && (\text{since } \sqrt{a} = a^{1/2}) \\ = & \log_{1/2} \log_4 4^{(1/2)(1/2)(1/2)(1/2)(1/2)(1/2)(1/2)} && (\text{since } (a^b)^c = a^{bc}) \\ = & \log_{1/2} \log_4 4^{(1/2)^7} && (\text{since } a^{aa\cdots a} = a^a) \\ = & \log_{1/2} (1/2)^7 && (\text{since } \log_a a^b = b) \\ = & 7 && (\text{since } \log_a a^b = b) \end{aligned}$$

But writing numbers *without* using logarithms is still a challenge. The first difficult number is 99. Another is 113. To win, you must cheat.

5

A business that's perfect, top-notch, is called "5-star." The symbol "★★★★★" is the top rating on many Websites, such as Yelp, Trip Advisor, and Google. Many businesses (such as Home Depot) let customers rate individual products, with the top rating being "★★★★★."

In business, "5" is a popular digit to put at the end of a **price**. For example, instead of charging \$4, a business will charge \$3.95.

5 is the number for drinking **tequila**, since the biggest holiday celebrated by Mexican bars in the United States is "Cinco de Mayo," which means "5th of May," which is the date "5/5".

The **alphabet** has 5 vowels: a, e, i, o, and u.

To **divide** by 5, use this trick: divide by 10 (by moving the decimal point to the left), then double the result. For example, to divide 93 by 5, move the decimal point to the left (to get 9.3), then double it, to get the final answer, 18.6.

5 is the first number the **French** pronounce like an English word. In French:

5 is written "cinq,"	pronounced like the English word "sank."
6 is written "six,"	pronounced like the English word "cease."
7 is written "sept,"	pronounced like the English word "set."
8 is written "huit,"	pronounced like the English word "wheat."
1000 is written "mille,"	pronounced like the English word "meal."

6

6 is the **sexiest** number.

The Latin word for 6 is "sex." (By contrast, the Latin word for "sex" is "sexus," which sounds like a demand for group sex.)

Likewise, the Icelandic word for 6 is "sex". (By contrast, the Icelandic word for "sex" is "kynlíf," which sounds like sex kin lif "a man's penis.")

Likewise, the Swedish word for 6 is "sex." The Swedish word for "sex" is also "sex," because Swedes like "sex" a lot.

The German word for 6 is "sechs," which Germans pronounce similar to the English "sex." (But the Germans have "sechs" just while they're sleeping & coughing: the German "s" is pronounced like the English "z," and the "ch" is pronounced like a cough.) The German word for "sex" is "Sex," which the Germans always capitalize, because they like it a lot and capitalize all nouns.

The French word for 6 is "six," same as the English word. (But the French pronounce it the same as the English word "cease," which you should do if having sex with the wrong person, a common French activity.) The French word for "sex" is "sexe," because the French like to be sexy.

Portuguese (spoken in Portugal & Brazil) say the days of the week in modified Latin. Since Friday is the 6th day of the week, it's the 6th opportunity for a country fair, so Friday is called "sexta-feira." That's too long to fit on a calendar, so for Friday the calendars write just "sex," tempting people to have sex every Friday.

Mathematicians call a number "**perfect**" if the sum of its factors equals the number itself. For example, the factors of 28 (the numbers that go into 28) are 1, 2, 4, 7, and 14; if you add them up, 1+2+4+7+14, you get 28, so 28 is called "perfect."

The first "perfect" number is 6 (since 6=1+2+3). The next perfect number is 28 (since 28=1+2+4+7+14). The next perfect number is 496 (since 496=1+2+4+8+16+31+62+124+248). The next is 8128.

As you can see, very few numbers are perfect. Perfect numbers are rare.

Chinese consider 6 to be good because it's pronounced "liù," which sounds similar to "liū," which is the Chinese word for "smooth sailing, nicely slick, calm, peaceful, trouble-free trip."

Though Chinese consider 6 good and mathematicians consider 6 "perfect," religious folks consider 6 "**devilish**," a failed attempt to be perfect, since 6 is 1 less than 7, which religious folks consider perfect.

6 is devilish.

66 is even more devilish.

666 is even more devilish and the symbol for the devil himself. It's mentioned in the final sentence of chapter 13 of the New Testament's Book of Revelations.

In a game of **dice**, each die has 6 numbers. A **Jewish star** has 6 points. If a tough dog owner gets angry at you, he "**sics**" his dog on you.

6 is the only digit that **becomes bigger** if you turn it upside-down: it becomes 9.

6 is the **jolly** number! An old song about a British soldier's pay begins:

I've got sixpence! Jolly, jolly sixpence!
I've got sixpence, to last me all my life!

Then he sings the math: 6=2+2+2:

I've got 2 pence to spend,
And 2 pence to lend,
And 2 pence to take home to my wife. Poor wife!

After more singing about his joy, the song takes a darker turn: he repeats the verse, except "six" becomes "four," and "2 pence to take home" becomes "no pence to take home." Then he repeats the song again, except "six" becomes just "two" (with appropriate math). Then he repeats the song again, except all the numbers become "no pence," because all his money disappeared, so his jolliness becomes cynical, as he sings:

I've got no pence! Jolly, jolly no pence!

How sad!

7

Many people consider 7 to be perfect, since:

There are exactly **7 days** in a week (because God created the world in 7 days, including a day of rest), **7 colors** in the rainbow (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, violet), **7 notes** in the musical scale (A through G), **7 continents** (which from biggest to smallest are Asia, Africa, North America, South America, Antarctica, Europe, and Australia), and **7 seas** (called "oceans," which from biggest to smallest are Pacific, Atlantic, Indian, Southern, and Arctic, which seems to be just 5, except that the Pacific & Atlantic are each divided into North & South, making the total be 7, so sailors can brag they "sailed the 7 seas").

Literature loves to be perfect, so it loves to have 7:

Snow White lived with **7 dwarves**. Sinbad the Sailor took **7 voyages**. Shakespeare said there are **7 ages of man** (infant then schoolboy then lover then soldier then judge then elderly then disappearing). There were **7 brides for 7 brothers**. James Bond called himself **007**.

When playing dice, people yell "**7, come, 11!**" because they win if 7 or 11 comes on the first roll.

7 is **not a multiple or divisor** of any other counting number from 1 to 10, so it's the **most unique** of those counting numbers.

When you ask Americans "What's your **favorite** number?" the answer is more likely to be "7" than any other number. ("3" gets second place, so "37" is also popular.)

In chemistry, a **pH** of 7 is neutral, like water: it's neither acid nor base. So in chemistry, 7 is the safest number.

Seven is the easiest number to make **even**: just erase its "s."

7 and 0 are the only digits that force you to say **two syllables**, to emphasize their bizarre importance.

For more details about why 7 is popular, see Davy Derbyshire's article, published online at The Daily Mail. It's at —

www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2601281/Why-lucky-7-really-magic-number.html

but you can type just:

dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2601281

Also see Emma Taubenfeld's article, published online at Reader's Digest. It's at:

rd.com/article/number-7

8

The Chinese consider 8 to be a lucky number because it's pronounced "bā," which sounds similar to "fā," which is the Chinese word for **wealth**. Even luckier is 88. Even luckier is 888.

Many "Chinese" businesses (in China or elsewhere, owned by ethnic Chinese) include "88" as part of their name (such as a Boston supermarket called "Super 88") or part of their phone number (such as "toll-free 888-"). Sichuan Airlines paid \$280,000 to get a phone number that contained many 8's. For many airplanes flying to & from China, the flight number contains many 8's.

Chinese try to get "8" as part of their house number and lottery number. Chinese try to get "8" as part of their license-plate number and pay thousands of dollars to snag a license plate that contains many 8's. If you see a license plate with many 8's on it, the driver is probably Chinese.

When reserving a table in a fancy restaurant, the Chinese request table 8. At a bride-to-be's engagement party, she expects the group to pitch in to give her a gift of 8,888 yuan.

When the Olympics were held in Beijing, they began on 8/8/08 at 8:00:08:08PM (8 minutes and 8 seconds past 8PM). China, Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore all use the "8:00 time zone" (8 hours later than London).

There are 8 full **planets** in the solar system, since Pluto was downgraded to be called just a "dwarf planet." (The other main dwarf planet is Eris.)

8 **ounces** make a cup. 8 **bits** make a byte.

The Jewish holiday of **Hanukah** lasts 8 nights.

According to the **Beatles**, a week has 8 days, not 7. Their song "8 Days a Week" says their love is bigger than 7:

Ain't got nothing but love, babe, 8 days a week!
8 days a week, I love you!

In normal English, 8 is pronounced like "**ate**," so 8 is the most popular number to stick at the end of a text-message word:

You are gr8, but don't be L8!
That I'd h8, but that's your f8!

That also creates this math horror:

Why does 6 fear 7? It's because 6 heard "7 ate 9!"

But I once met a Texas girl who pronounced 8 as "ott."

9

Optimists say 9 is the age when can begin calling yourself a "**tween**." (Pessimists say you must wait until you're 10.)

Hey, kids! Having trouble memorizing your multiplication tables? To **multiply 9** by any digit (from 1 to 9), use this handy trick:

Put your hands in front of you, palms facing you, so you see all 10 fingers. To multiply by 7 (for example), hold down your 7th finger (so it touches your palm). How many fingers are to the left of it? 6. How many fingers are to the right of it? 3. So the answer is 63.
Yes, 9 multiplied by 7 is 63.

Here's that rule, expressed & defended algebraically:

To multiply 9 by n, hold down your nth finger. How many fingers are to the left of it? N-1. How many fingers are to the right of it? 10-n. So the answer is a 2-digit number, whose first digit is n-1, last digit is 10-n.

Yes, 9 multiplied by n is a 2-digit number whose first digit is n-1 and last digit is 10-n.

That's because $9n = (n-1)*10 + (10-n)$.

Hey, guys! If you ask a German girl for a date, you'll probably hear her say "9." That's because the German word for "no" is "**nein**," which is pronounced the same as the English word "nine."

I met a German girl.
I wished she would be mine.
I offered a good time,
But all she said was "9."

A **cat** has 9 lives. The **Supreme Court** has 9 justices.

In **Chinese**, 9 (pronounced **jiǔ**) means "a long time." To say "forever," say 99 (**jiǔjiǔ**). For example:

I love you 99.

10

Our whole **number system** is based on 10, because we have 10 fingers. We also have 10 toes.

A woman's body has 10 major holes: 2 ears, 2 nostrils, 1 mouth, 2 nipples, 1 urethra, 1 vagina, and 1 asshole.

She can get an extra asshole by marrying one.
If he upsets her, she can shed tears, using 2 extra holes: her tear ducts.

If you're wonderful, you're called a "**perfect 10**." If you're blasting into outer space, the **countdown** can begin at 10.

10 is the only number that becomes a word when spelled **backwards**: 10 becomes "net."

11

To **multiply 11** by a digit, just write the digit twice. For example, 11 times 7 is 77.

To multiply 11 by a two-digit number, write the two digits but put their sum between them. For example, to multiply 11 by 53, write the 5 and the 3 but also write their sum (8) between them, so you get 583. Exception:

If the sum begins with 1, carry the 1. For example, to multiply 11 by 87, write the 8 and the 7 and try to squeeze their sum (15) between them; but since the sum begins with 1, carry the 1, so the answer of "8 15 7" becomes "8+1, then 5, then 7," which is 957. Yes, 11 times 87 is 957.

To **compliment** someone, say:

On a scale of 1 to 10, you're an 11.

World War 1 ended in 1918 on the date of 11/11 at 11 o'clock. That's when hostilities on the Western Front officially ended. That date became **Armistice Day**, whose name the U.S. later changed to **Veterans Day**, a holiday every year on 11/11.

Since "11/11" looks like four singles, China celebrates 11/11 as **Singles Day**, to celebrate singles who were smart enough to not get married yet and can therefore still shop around and buy presents for themselves. That holiday was invented in Nanjing University but popularized by Alibaba's Websites (Tmall & Taobao) as an excuse to sell goods at a discount, earlier than America's Black Friday sale.

12

12 **months** make a year. 12 **inches** make a foot. The typical jury has 12 **jurors**. 12 is how high you can get when you roll a pair of **dice**. 12 **pennies** made a shilling (until the British government changed that "12" to "5," and Australian & New Zealand changed it to "10"). 12 anything make a **dozen**.

You see 12 numbers on a **clock**. Porn movies try to show 12 inches on a **cock**. (But the average guy's erect cock is just 5 inches, according to surveys.)

Jesus had 12 **apostles**, who ate with him at the Last Supper (though Judas turned out to be a jerk, leaving just 11 apostles who were good). At Christmas, you can sing a song about "The 12 **Days of Christmas**."

In **Chinese**, 12 can be pronounced “yāo èr.” When you mumble that, it resembles “yào ài,” which means “want love,” so 12 is the secret Chinese code for “want love.” Many Chinese weddings took place on December 12, 2012, because the Chinese write that date as 2012.12.12, which means “20 times want love, want love, want love!”

Math would be much simpler if we had 12 **fingers**. When I was a high-school kid, I did calculations that indicated **12 is the best number to use as a base for a number system**. 12 is much better than 10! Specifically:

Of all numbers, 12 has the biggest percentage of factors that are less than its square root.

12's square root is about 3.464. 12 has *three* factors that are less than its square root: 1, 2, and 3. *Three* divided by 3.464 is about .866. So 12 is 86.6% good. No other number is better.

By contrast, 10's square root is about 3.16. 10 has just *two* factors that are less than its square root: 1 and 2. *Two* divided by 3.16 is about .63. So 10 is just 63% good.

Notice that in base 12:

1/3 would be written as .4 (because 1/3 is 4 twelfths)

1/4 would be written as .3 (because 1/4 is 3 twelfths)

1/6 would be written as .2 (because 1/6 is 2 twelfths)

1/12 would be written as .1 (because 1/12 is 1 twelfth)

Those answers are much simpler than in our stupid base-10-decimal system!

When I entered Dartmouth College as a freshman, I showed my research to the math department's chairman (John Kemeny). After pausing just a few seconds, he scribbled on the blackboard a formal proof that my conclusion was correct: of all numbers, 12 has the highest factor-to-square-root ratio. I was blown away by his brilliance. Alas, I don't remember what he scribbled.

13

13 is considered an **unlucky** number now because 13 people were sitting at the **Last Supper** (Jesus and the 12 apostles, 1 of whom decided to kill Jesus soon). But actually, 13 was considered an unlucky number before the apostles: in **Norse mythology**, 12 gods sat down to a feast that was interrupted by a gate-crasher and, in the ensuing scuffle, the most beloved god was killed. Historians view Christ's “The Last Supper” as just copying the Norse legend. (Gee, I thought everything in the Bible was real and original. The apostles were plagiarists? How upsetting!)

If you're afraid of the number 13, you have **triskaidekaphobia** (which comes from the Greek words for “three-and-ten fear”). To avoid scaring travelers, many hotels skip the 13th floor: the floor after the 12th is called the 14th or “floor 12½.”

The **United States** began with 13 states. Afterwards, more states joined and got luckier, until Trump made us feel unlucky again.

13 is the first number whose name ends in “teen.” So to be a **“teenager,”** you traditionally must be at least 13. If you're 10, 11, or 12, you're called a “pre-teen” or “tween.” (Exception: some psychologists call a 13-year-old a “tween” instead of a “teenager,” since the typical 13-year-old hasn't reached puberty yet.)

13 is the age when a Jewish boy is considered to be an “adult,” old enough to be responsible for his actions, so he undergoes a ceremony & celebration on his 13th birthday, called **“Bar Mitzvah,”** which is Hebrew and means “Son of the Commandments.”

Since girls mature faster, girls can be “Bat Mitzvah” (daughter of the Commandments) a year earlier, when they're 12; but that doesn't matter much, since the Jewish religion doesn't take women very seriously (hah!), so 13 is still considered generally the magic age to become a Jewish adult. A boy who dates such a girl can be called a “Bat man.”

When playing card games, there are 13 **cards** in each suit: Ace, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, Jack, Queen, King.

In a perfect calendar, each of the 4 seasons would include 13 **weeks**, making a total of 52 weeks in the year.

13 is called a **baker's dozen**. Why? Theories are at:

TodayIFoundOut.com/index.php/2010/09/why-a-bakers-dozen-is-13-instead-of-12

14

The French consider 14 to be patriotic & revolutionary, because **Bastille Day** (when the French stormed the Bastille) is July “the 14th”.

Chemistry students think 14 is the highest **pH** you can get (though you can get even higher if you try hard).

16

When chatting about weight, 16 **ounces** make a pound; but when chatting about volume, 16 ounces make a pint.

16 is the age when girls are considered to be sweetly sexy and somewhat adult. In many states, 16 is the age when a girl is allowed to get **married**. U.S. federal law says 16 is the age when a girl is mature enough to say “yes” to sex without having the male get jailed for “statutory rape” (having sex with a minor), so 16 is called the “age of consent.”

When a U.S. girl turns 16, people often throw a **“sweet-16 party.”** “16 Candles” is a 1958 song about that birthday party, which you can hear here:

YouTube.com/watch?v=gmOU_9gTvyI

In Hispanic countries, girls mature faster (hah!), so they throw a “sweet-15 party” instead (called “quinceañera” in Spanish, “festa de debutantes” in Brazilian Portuguese).

“16 tons” is the name of a song (written by Merle Travis, sung by Tennessee Ernie Ford & Johnny Cash) about a coal miner who's overworked & underpaid. The chorus is:

You load 16 tons. What do you get?
Another day older and deeper in debt.
Saint Peter, don't you call me, 'cause I can't go:
I owe my soul to the company store.

17

At age 17, a girl can blossom further. In 1962, the **Beatles** wrote a song about that, called “I Saw Her Standing There,” whose main thoughts are:

She was just 17.
You know what I mean.
The way she looked was just beyond compare.
So how could I dance with another,
When I saw her standing there?

My heart went “Boom”
When I crossed that room.

Aside from that song, 17 is a relatively **boring** number, so 17 is the number most commonly used in this joke:

Mathematicians can prove all numbers are interesting. Here's how. Suppose some number is *not* interesting. Then what's the *lowest* uninteresting number? For example, suppose that number is 17. Hey, that's interesting! So 17 is an interesting number!

That contradiction (the lowest uninteresting number is interesting) proves all numbers are interesting. So mathematicians have proved that *all* numbers are interesting, and math will always be interesting, and mathematicians will never go out of business.

18

The constitution's 26th Amendment says you can **vote** in federal & state elections if you're at least 18 years old. (Some states & towns are kinder: they let kids vote even if they're just 17 or 16.)

Federal law says you must be at least 18 years old to buy **cigarettes** (but younger kids can smoke cigarettes if they receive them as a gift).

Many states make the buying age even higher: 21. Alaska has a compromise: 19.

Some states also ban kids under 18 from smoking in public.

21

21 is how old you must be to buy **alcohol**. So if you want to kill yourself legally, by getting drunk, you must be 21.

22

“**Catch-22**” is Joseph Heller’s novel about the craziness of World War 2. The title refers to military rule 22, which seems simple but has a catch.

The rule says you can bomb just if you’re sane. But here’s the catch: to want to bomb, you must be a bit crazy. If you’re not feeling mentally well today and therefore reasonably ask to avoid bombing today, that request proves you’re reasonable, so you’re not insane, so you must bomb.

The term “catch-22” is now used to describe any contradictory rule. For example, Mary Murphy said:

To get work as an actor, you need an agent. But to get an agent, you must have worked.

When writing the novel, Heller wanted to call the rule “catch 18,” because 18 is the Jewish code number for “alive.” But his publisher rejected 18, because a novel by Leon Uris already had “18” in its title. 11 and 17 were rejected because movies already had those numbers in their titles (“Ocean’s 11” and “Stalag 17”). 14 was rejected because it wasn’t funny enough. So Heller eventually settled on 22.

Details about “Catch-22” are at:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catch-22>

23

23 is famous for being the number in the **birthday surprise** (which is also nicknamed the “birthday paradox”).

If you have at least 23 people in a room, probably at least 2 people in the room will have the same birthday as each other.

In that sentence:

“same birthday” means “same month and same day of the month,” though not necessarily born in the same year

“probably” means “the probability is greater than half”

the sentence means *some* people in the room probably have the same birthday *as each other* but not necessarily the same birthday *as you*

That statement is true for the number 23 but not for the number 22. You need at least 23 people to make the probability be more than half.

If you have a *lot* more than 23 people in the room, the probability of matching birthdays is a *lot* more than half. For example, if you have 367 people in the room, the probability of matching birthdays is 100%, since there are just 366 possible days in the year (including February 29), so 367 people would have a duplicate somewhere.

So next time you’re in a room holding at least 23 people, try this experiment: have each person shout a birthday. The probability is greater than half that somewhere in the room, 2 people’s birthdays will match each other. If the room holds a lot more people, the probability of success goes way up. If the people are all single, maybe they’ll get excited, and the matching people will marry.

24

24 **hours** make a day.

24 is number of the **confusing President**.

The first American President was George Washington.

The second was John Adams.

The 22nd was Grover Cleveland.

The 23rd was Benjamin Harrison.

Who was the 24th?

The President after Benjamin Harrison was Grover Cleveland again (who got reelected), so by that logic the 24th President was Grover Cleveland. Most historians agree that Grover Cleveland should be called “President #22 and President #24.”

But Grover Cleveland was just the 22nd *person* to become President. The 24th *person* to become President was William McKinley, who came after Grover Cleveland’s second term.

Confusing, eh?

24 is an important number to *me* because May 24th is **my birthday**. When is yours?

25

December 25 is **Christmas**. Priests say yay for Jesus, and kids say yay for presents, so 25 is a yay day.

According to Men’s Health magazine, the typical **woman wants** to be 25 years old. More precisely:

Women under 25 (such as kids) want to be older, closer to 25 (so they can brag they’re more mature and get more privileges & pay).

Women over 25 (such as the elderly) want to be younger, closer to 25 (so they can brag they’re healthier, more athletic, and look traditionally beautiful).

Yeah, that’s sexist. So is America!

26

The **alphabet** has 26 letters, so 26 is the most literate number — if you speak modern English.

Some languages use *fewer* letters:

Greek and Korean alphabets have just 24 letters.

So did older English, which lacked J (used I instead) and U (used V instead). Classical Latin used just 23 letters (no J, U, and W).

Some languages use *more* letters:

Modern Spanish uses 27 letters (the English 26 plus Ñ), according to new Spanish dictionary rules adopted in 2010.

Modern Swedish & Finnish use 29 letters (the English 26 plus Å, Ä, and Ö). Modern Danish & Norwegian use 29 letters (the English 26 plus Æ, Ø, and Å). Modern Vietnamese uses 29 letters (the English 26, minus F, J, W, and Z, plus Á, Ê, Ô, O’, U’, Á, and Ð).

Modern Russian uses 33 letters.

I often feel overloaded. A day doesn’t contain enough hours to accomplish everything I’m supposed to. Sadly, I tell myself:

There are only 26 hours in a day.

Most people say “There are only 24 hours in a day,” but 26 sounds better and uses the fact that I’d get up 2 hours later each day if there were no clock to yell at me.

28

On a **lunar calendar**, each month has exactly 4 weeks, so 28 days. There are also 28 days in a normal **menstrual cycle**.

On a normal calendar (solar), **February** normally has 28 days. 29 days make a leap month. 30 make a banker’s month (since bankers usually say “you have 30 days to pay”). 31 make the longest month.

Like 6, 28 is **perfect**. So God made women be perfect!

29

February usually has 28 days but during **leap years** has 29, so 29 feels like a bonus, a leap up!

30

30 is the smallest number that's the product of **3 primes**: it's "2 times 3 times 5."

31

October 31 is **Halloween**. Scary!

32

32 is the **icy** number, because 32 degrees Fahrenheit is when water freezes.

In the 1950's, a team of famous comedians (Carl Reiner, Mel Brooks, Neil Simon, and others) wrote skits for the TV show "Your Show of Shows." They tried to decide which number is the **funniest**. They decided the funniest number to say is "32," so they had a performer (Imogene Coca) often say "thiiiiirrrry-twooo." The studio audience laughed every time.

36

A **yard** is 36 inches. A full-size classical **piano** has 36 black keys.

Since 6 is the first perfect number, and 36 is 6 squared, 36 is the first **squared perfection**.

During the 1950's, the ideal shape for a woman's body — the shape considered the sexiest — consisted of a big chest (& breasts), slim waist, and wide hips (& ass). That's called the **hourglass** figure. The extreme example was Marilyn Monroe, who at the height of her fame measured 36-22-36. Other examples are Katy Perry (36-25-36) and Hedy Lamarr (36-25-36). So 36 means "delightfully big boobs & buns."

37

37 degrees Celsius is considered to be the "normal" **temperature** of a human. But that's just an approximation. 36 degrees Celsius is a bit cold, 38 degrees is a fever, but anything more than 36 and less than 38 is okay.

If you convert "37 degrees Celsius" to Fahrenheit, you get exactly "98.6 degrees Fahrenheit," so Americans are taught to strive for 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit, but 98.6 degrees Fahrenheit is no better than 98.5 or 98.7.

38

In the United States, a **roulette** wheel (used in gambling) has 38 pockets (where the ball could land). They're numbered 1 through 36, plus 0, plus 00. So if you gamble on a number, your chance of winning is just 1 out of 38.

In Europe, a roulette wheel lacks 00, so your chance of winning is slightly better: 1 out of 37. Moral: if you want to gamble, go to Europe.

Chinese In Chinese slang, calling a person (male or female) "38" means "acting like an **obnoxious woman**."

That's partly because the Chinese are cynical about International Women's Day, which is March 8, which is 3/8. It's also because "three eight" is pronounced "sān bā," which sounds similar to the Chinese word for "stupid" in some dialects.

The Chinese say "38" to refer to all kinds of obnoxious women: "gossipy" or "bitchy" or "a mean mama" or "too concerned about fashion" or "dumb like an American blonde" or "a man who acts too feminine."

39

Traditionally, when you turn 40, you're called "middle aged," so 39 is the last year you can claim you're "young."

Jack Benny was an elderly comedian who, whenever people asked how old he was, would jokingly answer "39." So 39 is the **Jack Benny age**.

For actresses, 39 is typically the last **fuckable year** (the last year you can be in a movie that shows you fucking), unless you're lucky enough to look young when you're even older, according to this cynical video, called "Last Fuckable Day":

[YouTube.com/watch?v=XPpsl8mWKmg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XPpsl8mWKmg)

40

40 is the beginning of being "**middle-aged**." Is being middle-aged good or bad?

An old expression is "**life begins at 40**." That thought began in the 1800's, was expressed more clearly in 1917, became a book title in 1932, and became a song in 1937. The basic idea is that, especially for women, the drudgery of raising kids can end when a woman turns 40; then she can relax! Details about that history are at:

www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/life-begins-at-forty.html

40 is the smallest **vaguely big** number: the Bible and other ancient books often say "40" when they really mean just "many." For example, the Bible says Noah experienced rain for "40 days and 40 nights," but it means just "many days and many nights," not exactly 40. More examples of "40" meaning just "many" are at:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/40_\(number\)#In_religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/40_(number)#In_religion)

A standard **workweek** has 40 hours. That's considered "full time." If you work more than 40 hours, your boss must pay you overtime.

The path around a **Monopoly board** has 40 spots to land on. (The most famous is Boardwalk; the most infamous is "Go To Jail.")

40 is the most **misspelled** number. The correct modern spelling is "forty," not "fourty" (which was an older spelling that started getting phased out about 200 years ago, in 1821). Dictionaries still have "four," "fourteen," and "four hundred" but not "fourty."

A child says "40" when seeing "**T T T T**." A proper British lady says "40" when you've invited to her house "**for tea**."

The Wall Street Journal wrote an article saying that when the typical "expert" warns us a calamity might happen, he says there's a "**40% chance**" it will happen. That way, if the calamity does happen, the expert brags he warned us; and if the calamity does *not* happen, the expert brags he said the chance was just 40%, which is less than half. So either way, the expert can brag, even if the expert is really an idiot.

41

Health departments require restaurant refrigerators to cool below 41 degrees Fahrenheit.

Why 41 instead of 40 or 42? Because "5 degrees Celsius" is a reasonably scientific rule (more reasonable than 0 degrees or 10 degrees), and "5 degrees Celsius" happens to be exactly 41 degrees Fahrenheit. So the "41 rule" is rough science that pretends to be precise.

42

The **Japanese** consider 42 unlucky, because in Japanese "four two" is pronounced "shi ni," which sounds like the Japanese word for death.

New York City's main numbered street is 42nd Street. It's considered the center of New York's excitement. It runs through Times Square (along with Broadway and 7th Avenue). "42nd Street" is the name of an exciting song, a dance number, a musical, and a movie; in them, the main line is:

Come and meet those dancing feet
On the avenue I'm taking you to: 42nd Street!
Where the underworld can meet the elite:
42nd Street!

In "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" (a novel by Douglas Adams), a supercomputer called **Deep Thought** spends 7.5 million years computing the "answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything." Its final answer is:

42

Truth imitates art! Mathematicians actually tried to make computers solve a difficult math problem about 42, and computers spent many days working on it. Here's the problem:

Many integers can be written as the sum of 3 cubes. Here are simple examples:

- $0 = 0^3 + 0^3 + 0^3$
- $1 = 1^3 + 0^3 + 0^3$
- $2 = 1^3 + 0^3 + 0^3$
- $3 = 1^3 + 1^3 + 1^3$
- $6 = 2^3 + (-1)^3 + (-1)^3$
- $7 = 2^3 + (-1)^3 + 0^3$
- $8 = 2^3 + 0^3 + 0^3$
- $9 = 2^3 + 1^3 + 0^3$
- $10 = 2^3 + 1^3 + 1^3$
- $11 = 3^3 + (-2)^3 + (-2)^3$
- $12 = 10^3 + 7^3 + (-11)^3$
- $15 = 2^3 + 2^3 + (-1)^3$
- $16 = 2^3 + 2^3 + 0^3$
- $17 = 2^3 + 2^3 + 1^3$
- $18 = 3^3 + (-2)^3 + (-1)^3$
- $19 = 3^3 + (-2)^3 + 0^3$
- $20 = 3^3 + (-2)^3 + 1^3$

Can *every* integer be written as the sum of 3 cubes? No! Mathematicians proved: when dividing an integer by 9 gives a remainder of 4 or 5, that integer *cannot* be written as the sum of 3 cubes. (The proof requires this advanced-math thinking: when doing "arithmetic modulo 9," whose only numbers are 0 through 8, the only cubes are 0, 1, and 8, and no trio of them makes 4 or 5.) But what about all the *other* integers? Nobody knows! The problem is still unsolved!

I showed you examples up to 20. Notice 12 was tricky: to get 12, you had to cube 10, 7, and -11. What about 21 and the other numbers up to 100? 74 and 33 are difficult, but the hardest turned out to be 42. In September 2019, using 1.3 million hours of computation, a collection of computers found the answer:

$$42 = 80,435,758,145,817,515^3 + 12,602,123,297,335,631^3 + (-80,538,738,812,075,974)^3$$

During the beginning of **President Trump's** reelection campaign, he sent emails demanding a \$42 donation from each of his supporters. Is that because he considers himself a supercomputer, the "answer to the ultimate question of life, the universe, and everything"? His competitor, Joe Biden, asked for just \$3. Is that because Democrats are poorer?

45

During the 1950's and 1960's, the most popular kind of **phonograph record** was 45rpm: it did 45 revolutions per minute. Folks would say:

Hey, let's dance! Put on a 45!

Its diameter was 7-inch.

Trump was the 45th president, so people called him "45." Toward the end of his reelection campaign, he requested \$45 from each donor.

48

For many years (starting in 1912), the **United States** included 48 states. But in 1959, Alaska & Hawaii joined us and complicated who we are. We still say that the United States contains 48 "**contiguous states**" (or "conterminous states" or "lower states"), plus those 2 far-off weirdos.

50

Now the **United States** has 50 states. So does my brain: its 50 states vary from wonderful to horrible.

In the **Danish** language, 50 is the first crazy number. Most other numbers are reasonable. Here's how to say numbers in traditional Danish:

1 en	10 ti
2 to	20 = 2 tens = tyve
3 tre	30 = 3 tens = tredive
4 fire	40 = 4 tens = fyrre
5 fem	50 = 2½ twenties = (½ less than 3 rd) of 20 = halv-tred-sinds-tyve
6 seks	60 = 3 twenties = 3 of 20 = tre-sinds-tyve
7 syv	70 = 3½ twenties = (½ less than 4 th) of 20 = halv-fjerd-sinds-tyve
8 otte	80 = 4 twenties = 4 of 20 = fir-sinds-tyve
9 ni	90 = 4½ twenties = (½ less than 5 th) of 20 = halv-fem-sinds-tyve

For 50, 60, 70, 80, and 90, modern Danes are too lazy to write or say the ending ("sinds-tyve") so they have just:

- 50 halvtreds
- 60 tres
- 70 halvfjerds
- 80 firs
- 90 halvfems

Danish kids memorize just those short forms, which are easy; most Danes don't know the long forms they came from. Danes have trouble remembering how to spell "halvtreds," "tres," and "halvfjerds," because in Danish the "d" in "ds" is silent: "ds" is pronounced as just "s". To communicate with other Scandinavians (Norwegians and Swedes), Danish bankers write simpler words on checks, using base-10 instead of base-20:

- 50 = 5 tens = femti
- 60 = 6 tens = seksti
- 70 = 7 tens = syvti
- 80 = 8 tens = otti
- 90 = 9 tens = niti

More details are at:

olestig.dk/dansk/numbers.html

52

A deck contains 52 **cards** (4 suits, each containing 13 cards). A year contains 52 full **weeks** (plus 1 or 2 days, depending on whether it's a leap year). A full-size classical **piano** contains 52 white keys.

57

Heinz makes ketchup, pickles, and more. In 1896, Heinz began bragging that it made 57 varieties of pickles. Actually, it made more than 60 varieties of things, but Henry Heinz thought 57 sounded more upbeat, because 7 was a lucky number.

On a Heinz ketchup bottle, the ketchup will come out fastest if you tap the "57" on the label.

57 doesn't seem to be divisible by anything, since its last digit is 7 (not 0 or 2 or 4 or 5 or 6 or 8). So 57 seems to be prime. But here's a surprise: 57 is *not* prime: it's "3 times 19." Mathematicians jokingly call 57 the **Grothendieck prime**, because the mathematician Alexander Grothendieck is rumored to have mistakenly said 57 is prime, although others claim it was just Herman Weyl who said 57 is prime.

60

“Sixty” is the classic answer to this famous **riddle** —

What five-letter word has six left after you take away two letters?

or this shorter version:

What 5-letter word becomes 6 after you subtract 2 letters?

Another correct answer is “sixth” but not “eight.”

60 **seconds** make a minute.

60 **minutes** make an hour. “60 minutes” is also the name of a CBS TV news show, so 60 minutes means investigation.

When you turn 60, you can brag you’re a **sexagenarian**, so can sound sexy, and keep bragging about that until you turn 70, when you become a shitty septic: a septuagenarian.

65

In American culture, 65 is the age when you’re supposed to **retire**.

When I was a kid taking tests, I needed to get a **score** of at least 65 to pass.

69

69 is the symbol for **oral sex**, since it’s the same shape as 2 people lying side-by-side, licking each other’s naughty parts.

70

70 is like 69 but means a **sexual threesome**, since it’s “69 plus 1 more.”

70 is the first big number the **French language lost**. In school, **the French are taught no word for “70” or “80” or “90”**.

Instead of saying “70,” the French are taught to say “60+10” (“soixante-dix”).

Instead of saying “80,” the French are taught to say “4 times 20” (“quatre vingts”).

Instead of saying “90,” the French are taught to say “4 times 20, plus 10” (“quatre-vingt-dix”). So to say “98” the French are taught to say “4 times 20, plus 10, plus 8” (“quatre-vingt-dix-huit”).

But French speakers got “liberated” in Switzerland & Belgium (and the Belgian Congo and a few villages in France & Canada). They got disgusted by classical French’s “40 times 20, plus 10,” so they invented a new word for 90: “nonante.”

For 70, they often say “septante.” For 80, they sometimes say “huitante” (or, more rarely, “octante”).

To laugh at the ridiculousness of classical French, they sometimes say “40+10” (“quarante-dix”) instead of 50 (“cinquante”), as a joke.

75

In Japan, you’re not called “**elderly**” until you turn 75. If you’re between 65 and 74, you’re called “pre-old.”

76

76 is called the **trombone number**, because of the song “76 Trombones” in the musical movie “The Music Man.”

86

86 means “**out**.” Examples:

When a chef says “86 the dumplings,” it means “we’re out of dumplings”: the dumplings are sold out, so the servers should stop promising them to customers.

When a bar or casino says “you’re 86’ed,” it means you’re being thrown out, onto the street: you’re banned.

A woman can say “I’m going to 86 my husband,” meaning “I’m going to get rid of him.”

On the desk of Gretchen Whitmer (Michigan’s governor), a sign says “86 45.” It means “get rid of the 45th president, Donald Trump.”

Why does 86 mean “out”? Here are many reasons:

A standard grave is 8 feet long, 6 feet under. So “I’m going to 86 you” can mean “I’m going to bury you.” In the same vein, the Mafia would execute a guy by driving him 80 miles away from the city, to a rural spot, then had him dig his own grave there, 6 feet under, where he got executed, so he got 80’ed then 6’ed.

During the Prohibition era, New York City cops raided Chumley’s bar often; but each time, because of bribery, the bar got warned in advance and told the customers to run out the 86 Bedford Street door (by yelling “86”) before the cops came in the Pamela Court door. So “86” can mean “get out.”

The German word for “not” is “nicht,” which in English became “nix,” so chefs would say “nix the dumplings,” meaning “we do *not* have dumplings anymore; cancel the dumplings.” Restaurant staff loved to invent secret slang when chatting with each other, so “nix” became “86,” because it rhymes with “nix.”

Whisky used to come in 2 strengths: 100 proof or 86 proof. If a customer was getting too drunk on 100-proof whisky, the bartender would cut him down to 86-proof whisky. So “86 him” means “cut him down.”

The U.S. Navy’s code for “trash” is “Allowance Type 6,” which is written “AT-6,” which is pronounced like “86.” So “86 it” means “throw it out.”

In the code used by engineers, an “86 device” is a device that purposely locks out another device until an investigator resets it. So “86” means “lockout.”

Details about the history of 86 are at:

MentalFloss.com/article/51880/where-did-term-86-come
snopes.com/fact-check/86

88

A full-size classical **piano** has 88 keys. So to a pianist, 88 means full, complete, wonderful, not crap.

In **Chinese**, 88 is a lucky number, because 8 is a lucky number, as I explained in my discussion of “8”. So in Chinese, a classical piano is a lucky instrument! The Chinese are trying to make Father’s Day be August 8, because August 8 is 8/8, which is pronounced **bābā**, sounding similar to the Chinese word for father (**bàbà**).

89

On June 4, 1989, China experienced the Tiananmen Square massacre, where the Chinese government massacred protesters. Now any mention of that date is **censored on China’s Internet**. “1989” is censored, and so is just “89.” In China, if you search for “89,” your results are censored, especially each year near June 4, to prevent further protests.

90

Where I live (the Northeast United States), a day is considered “**hot**” if its temperature is at least 90 degrees Fahrenheit, and a “**heat wave**” is defined to be 3 consecutive days of at least 90 degrees.

Other parts of the world define a “hot” day differently: “much hotter than what’s normal there.” Details are at:

wikipedia.org/wiki/Heat_wave

99

When schoolkids get stuck on a long bus ride, they like to kill time (and annoy the bus driver) by singing:

99 bottles of beer on the wall, 99 bottles of beer!
Take 1 down, pass it around, 98 bottles of beer on the wall!

98 bottles of beer on the wall, 98 bottles of beer!
Take 1 down, pass it around, 97 bottles of beer on the wall!

The song continues until it reaches:

No more bottles of beer on the wall, no more bottles of beer!
Go to the store and buy some more, 99 bottles of beer on the wall!

Then the song repeats. More details about the song are at:

wikipedia.org/wiki/99_Bottles_of_Beer

100

On most school tests, a score of 100 means you're **perfect**.

101

In college, the **first course** in a topic is numbered 101. For example, the first course in psychology is called "Psychology 101." So 101 is the most elementary course, for beginners, such as freshmen. 101 means "elementary."

101 is called the **dalmatian number**, because of the book & movies "101 Dalmatians."

110

Instead of saying "try really hard" or "**try your best**" or "give it your all," people say "Give it your 110%" or simply "Give it 110."

144

144 is 12 dozen. It's also called a **gross**.

If somebody disgusts you, you can say:

You're 144. You're a gross!

If you're 72 years old, you can say:

I'm 72. I'm half a gross. When I turn 144, I'll be *completely* gross!

196

A number (or word) is a **palindrome** if it's the same forward as backwards. For example, 121 is a palindrome. So is 646.

A number is **palindromable** if, when you add the number to its reverse, you get a palindrome eventually. Examples:

56 is palindromable, because $56 + 65$ is 121, a palindrome.

57 is palindromable, because $57 + 75$ is 132, but $132 + 231$ is 363, a palindrome.

59 is palindromable, because $59 + 95$ is 154, but $154 + 451$ is 605, but $605 + 506$ is 1111, a palindrome.

Is every counting number palindromable? Nobody knows! If you answer that question, you'll become famous! Mathematicians have checked many numbers. All the numbers from 1 to 195 have been proved to be palindromable, but **nobody knows whether 196 is palindromable**.

Some numbers require many steps to get to a palindrome. For example, the number 89 requires 24 steps to get to a palindrome. Mathematicians found huge numbers that require 289 steps to get to a palindrome.

A number that's *not* palindromable is called a **Lychrel number**. The unsolved problem is: do Lychrel numbers exist? Details are at:

wikipedia.org/wiki/Lychrel_number

211

In the United States, dialing 211 gets you free help from **United Way**, the nonprofit that helps people in distress.

212

212 is the **boiling** number, because 212 degrees Fahrenheit is when water boils.

212 is the traditional area code for the main part of **Manhattan**, which is the most important place in the United States, according to Manhattanites.

360

360 seconds make an **hour**. A **circle** has 360 degrees.

365

On the usual calendar (solar), there are 365 days in the **year**, unless it's a leap year, which has 366.

411

In the U.S., 411 is the phone number to call to get **directory assistance**, to speak to a human who'll help you look up a phone number. So 411 means "give me information, please." 411.com and 411.info are Websites to look up phone numbers.

Those services and Websites all charge money for the info.

420

420 is the secret slang number for **marijuana**. That tradition began in 1971, when students at California's San Rafael High School met after school, at 4:20PM, to hunt for a field of marijuana. They didn't find the field, but they had fun and started saying "420" to mean "get together to smoke marijuana." Details are at:

bbc.com/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-27039192
time.com/4739364/420-marijuana-history

In honor of 420, April 20th (4/20) is celebrated every year as **Weed Day**. It's also **Hitler's birthday**.

451

"**Fahrenheit 451**" is a novel about book-burning, because the author (Ray Bradbury) thought 451 degrees Fahrenheit is the temperature at which book paper burns. Actually, book paper burns at a temperature somewhere between 424 & 475, depending on what the paper is made of.

500

How many grams are in a **pound**? The usual answer is: a pound is defined to be 453.59237 grams. That's the official international definition, used in the United States, England, and most other countries, since July 1, 1959. It's called the **avoirdupois pound**.

But many people in Germany define a "pound" (written "Pfund") more simply: exactly **500 grams**. That's called the **metric pound**. It's used in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and even in Denmark. It's slightly heavier than an avoirdupois pound.

That confuses people. I remember a German woman who got on a scale and wondered why the scale reported she gained a lot of weight. The answer: the scale was using avoirdupois pounds, not the metric pounds she grew up with.

The same happens in China: the Chinese use the metric pound (which they called "jīn"), 500 grams. Half a jīn is 250 grams. In Chinese, if you want to call somebody stupid, you call him a "250," which means "half a jīn," which means he acts like he has just half a brain. If you're too lazy to say "250," say just "2" (which is pronounced "èr"). So "èr" means "acts stupid" (or "happily silly" or "trying to act funny but just being silly").

511

In many parts of the United States, dialing 511 gives you info about **traffic** conditions.

520

In **Chinese**, 520 is pronounced "wǔ èr líng." When you mumble that, it resembles the popular phrase "wǒ ài nǐ," which means "I love you," so 520 is the secret Chinese code for "I love you." Every year on 5/20 (which is May 20), the Chinese celebrate an "I love you" day (similar to Valentine's Day). That's when you're encouraged to express your love to the person you secretly or publicly admire: go out with that person, or propose marriage! It's a popular day to give flowers, chocolates, and beyond, while mumbling "wǔ èr líng" or "wǒ ài nǐ."

To be more dramatic, write this longer code: 5201314. It's pronounced "wǔ èr líng yī sān yī sì." When you mumble that, it resembles "wǒ ài nǐ yì shēng yì shì," which means "I love you, one life, one world!" That's a fancy way of saying "I love you forever!"

555

In **Thailand**, 555 is popular, because 5 is pronounced “ha,” so 555 is pronounced “ha-ha-ha.” In a Thai text message, “555” means “ha-ha-ha, funny, laughing out loud.”

800

On the math part of the **Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)**, the highest score you can get is 800, so that’s considered the “perfect” score and means you’re brilliant.

When I was a kid, I got that score myself, and so did all my friends. You get that score even if a few of your answers are wrong, because the 800 means just “you’re at least 3 standard deviations better than the norm.”

811

Before you dig a **hole** in your yard, the U.S. government requires you to phone 811, to make sure you don’t accidentally hit a cable or pipe hidden underground.

Exception: if you’re a dog burying a bone, you don’t have to phone 811.

911

In the U.S., 911 is the phone number to call in case of **emergency** (to get police or the fire department or an ambulance). 9/11 is also the date of the terrorist attack on the U.S. So 911 means danger, a desperate cry for help.

For milder help, dial **211** instead. That works in many parts of the United States and gets you a free phone **counselor** to help with homelessness, recovery, or any other kind of personal crisis. The counselor will refer you to a local organization to help you. So 211 means caring. Details are at www.211.org.

988

Wanna kill yourself? I have good news! In the U.S., starting in July 2022, the phone number for the national **suicide** hotline will be 988. Just dial 988 to avoid suicide. (Before then, you must dial 800-273-TALK.)

996

In China, young people complain about “996”: how they’re expected to work **from 9AM to 9PM, 6 days a week**. They’d rather be free to relax!

1001

1001, like 40, is a **vaguely big** number, especially in Arabic, such as “1001 nights,” which means just “many nights,” not exactly 1001. Modern English books are sometimes titled

“1001 Uses For...,” meaning just “many uses for...”

1089

1089 is the **magic** number, because math magicians use it to create this trick....

Write down any three-digit number “whose first digit differs from the last digit by more than 1.”

For example:

852 is okay, since its first digit (8) differs from the last digit (2) by 6, which is more than 1.

479 is okay, since its first digit (4) differs from the last digit (9) by 5, which is more than 1.

282 is *not* okay, since the difference between 2 and 2 is 0.

Take your three-digit number, and write it backwards. For example, if you picked 852, you have on your paper:

$$\begin{array}{r} 852 \\ 258 \end{array}$$

You have two numbers on your paper. One is smaller than the other. Subtract the small one from the big one:

$$\begin{array}{r} 852 \\ -258 \\ \hline 594 \end{array}$$

Take your answer, and write it backward:

$$\begin{array}{r} 852 \\ -258 \\ 594 \\ \hline 495 \end{array}$$

Add the last two numbers you wrote:

$$\begin{array}{r} 852 \\ -258 \\ 594 \\ +495 \\ \hline 1089 \end{array}$$

Notice the final answer is 1089.

1089 is the final answer, no matter what three-digit number you started with (if the first and last digits differ by more than 1).

Here’s another example:

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{Take a number:} \quad 724 \\ \text{Write it backward \& subtract:} \quad -427 \\ \quad \quad \quad 297 \\ \text{Write it backward \& add:} \quad +792 \\ \quad \quad \quad 1089 \end{array}$$

Here’s another example:

$$\begin{array}{r} \text{Take a number:} \quad 365 \\ \text{Write it backward \& subtract:} \quad 563 \\ \quad \quad \quad -365 \\ \quad \quad \quad 198 \\ \text{Write it backward \& add:} \quad +891 \\ \quad \quad \quad 1089 \end{array}$$

Yes, you always get 1089!

Proof To prove you always get 1089, use algebra: make letters represent the digits, like this....

	Hundreds	Tens	Ones
Take a number:	A	B	C
Write backwards:	C	B	A

To subtract the bottom (C B A) from the top (A B C), the top must be bigger. So in the hundreds column, A must be bigger than C. Since A is bigger than C, you can’t subtract A from C in the ones column, so you must borrow from the B in the tens column, to produce this:

Hundreds	Tens	Ones
A	B-1	C+10
C	B	A

Now you can subtract A from C+10:

Hundreds	Tens	Ones
A	B-1	C+10
C	B	A
C+10-A		

In the tens column, you can’t subtract B from B-1, so you must borrow from the A in the hundreds column, to produce this:

Hundreds	Tens	Ones
A-1	B-1+10	C+10
C	B	A
C+10-A		

Complete the calculation:

	Hundreds	Tens	Ones
Start with this:	A-1	B-1+10	C+10
Subtract this:	C	B	A
Get this result:	A-1-C	9	C+10-A
Backwards:	C+10-A	9	A-1-C
Get this total:	10	8	9

9, plus the 1 that was carried

Don’t burn your arm I call 1089 the “don’t burn your arm” number, because of this trick suggested by Irving Adler in *The Magic House of Numbers*:

Tell a friend to write a 3-digit number whose first & last digits differ by more than 1. Tell him to write the number backwards, subtract, write that backwards, and add. Tell him to burn the paper he did the figuring on. Put your arm in the ashes. When you take your arm out, the number 1089 will be mysteriously written on your arm in black. (The way you get 1089 to appear is to write “1089” on your arm with wet soap before you begin the trick. When you put your arm in the ashes, the answer will stick to the soap.) The trick works — if you don’t burn your arm.

Variants That procedure (reverse then subtract, reverse then add) gives 1089 if you begin with an appropriate 3-digit number. If you begin with a 2-digit number instead, you get 99.

If you begin with a 4-digit number instead, you get 10989 or 10890 or 9999, depending on which of the 4 digits are the biggest. If you begin with a 5-digit number, you get 109989 or 109890 or 99099. Notice that the answers for 4-digit and 5-digit numbers — 10989, 10890, 9999, 109989, 109890, and 99099 — are all formed from 99 and 1089.

1314

In **Chinese**, 1314 (pronounced yī sān yī sì) sounds like yī shēng yí shì, which means “1 life 1 whole life,” which means “my whole life.”

1492

Christopher Columbus discovered “America” in 1492 on October 12, which Americans celebrates as “Columbus Day.”

On that date, Chris landed just on an island in the Bahamas. He thought he’d reached Japan. He didn’t reach American mainland until later trips, when he reached the coasts of Central America & Venezuela. He never got to North America.

He wasn’t the first to visit Americas. 491 years earlier, in the year 1001, Leif Erikson beat him.

But Leif got ignored, because he visited just Canada’s Newfoundland (which is unimportant?) was an ethnic Norse from Iceland (so he wasn’t “European”), and his settlers didn’t hang around long.

He’s called “Erikson” because he was the son of Erik the Red.

He got to Canada just because he was told about it by Bjarni Herjólfsson, a merchant whose ship was blown off-course while traveling from Iceland to Greenland 16 years earlier, back in the year 985, and so accidentally spotted Canada. But since Bjarni had been in a rush to get to Greenland, Bjarni didn’t land in Canada; Leif gets the credit for being the first to set foot. Yes, he gets credit just by putting his foot down!

But the Native Americans before Chris & Leif beat them all.

1760

A **mile** contains 1760 yards.

1776

America’s “Declaration of **Independence**” from “evil England” was signed on July 4, 1776.

1922

1922 is the only number having a **joyous song**. The song’s main line, sung joyously, is:

This is 1922!

The song is about life in 1922 and how wonderfully modern our lives became then, compared to previous years.

The song is in a musical comedy called “Thoroughly Modern Millie,” which takes place in 1922 and became a movie starring Julie Andrews. Here’s a sample verse, where she sings about the joys of living today (in 1922):

Everything today is thoroughly modern. (Bands are getting jazzier!)
Everything today is starting to go. (Cars are getting snazzier!)
Men say it’s criminal what women’ll do;
What they’re forgetting is: this is 1922!

You can hear the song (and see Julie Andrews enjoying 1922’s culture & fashion) at:

DailyMotion.com/video/x2gsih

Another seductive year is 1928, which appeared in a song called “Let’s Misbehave,” written by Cole Porter in 1927. The song includes this thought:

Let’s misbehave!
We’ll be the great
Event of 1928!

2000

In the United States, 2000 pounds is called a “**ton**” (or a “short ton”). In England, a ton is 2240 pounds instead (and called a “long ton”). In most other countries, a “tonne” (also called a “metric ton”) is 1000 kilograms instead, which is about 2205 pounds.

Those are weights. But the word “ton” is also used to describe the **volume** of a ship or freight car — and the **explosive power** of a bomb (such as a “megaton bomb”).

In Chinese restaurants, tons are edible and called “wontons.”

5280

A **mile** contains 5280 feet.

6174

To understand what’s unusual about the number 6174, you must learn how to find a number’s **heart**. Here’s how:

Write the number. For example:
1925
Rearrange the digits, to put them in descending order:
9521
Underneath, write that backwards (so the digits are in ascending order):
1259
Subtract, to find the heart:
descending 9521
ascending - 1259
8262 = the heart

Try this experiment. Write a **4-digit number that’s not a multiple of 1111**. Find your number’s heart. (If the heart seems to be less than 4 digits, make it 4 digits by putting zeros in front.) Then take that heart and find *its* heart. Then find the heart of *that*. Then find the heart of *that*.

For example, starting with 1925, you get:

the heart of 1925 = 9521-1259 = 8262
the heart of 8262 = 8622-2268 = 6354
the heart of 6354 = 6543-3456 = 3087
the heart of 3087 = 8730-0378 = 8352
the heart of 8352 = 8532-2358 = 6174
the heart of 6174 = 7641-1467 = 6174
the heart of 6174 = 7641-1467 = 6174
etc.

No matter what number you start with, you’ll reach 6174 within 7 steps. So 6174 is where all hearts lead! It’s the heartiest 4-digit number!

6174 is called **Kaprekar’s constant**, because it was discovered by D.R. Kaprekar (an Indian mathematician) in 1946.

If you start with a 3-digit number (instead of a 4-digit number), you eventually get to 495 (instead of 6174).

By the way, each heart is a multiple of 9. (That’s because the heart is created by subtracting 2 numbers that have the same digits, so those 2 numbers have the same remainders when divided by 9.)

3,628,800

If you multiply together all the integers from 1 to 10 (1 times 2 times 3 times 4 times 5 times 6 times 7 times 8 times 9 times 10), you get 3,628,800. That’s called **10 factorial**. Mathematicians write it with an exclamation point, like this:

10!

By coincidence, it’s how many seconds are in **6 weeks**.

Billion

What’s a **billion**? In the United States, a billion has always been a thousand millions. It’s 1 followed by 9 zeros. It’s 10⁹. Here’s the chart:

one	1	= 10 ⁰
thousand	1,000	= 10 ³
million	1,000,000	= 1000 × 1000 = 10 ⁶
billion	1,000,000,000	= 1000 × 1000 ² = 10 ⁹
trillion	1,000,000,000,000	= 1000 × 1000 ³ = 10 ¹²
quadrillion	1,000,000,000,000,000	= 1000 × 1000 ⁴ = 10 ¹⁵
quintillion	1,000,000,000,000,000,000	= 1000 × 1000 ⁵ = 10 ¹⁸
sextillion	1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000	= 1000 × 1000 ⁶ = 10 ²¹

So the smallest counting number (positive integer) that includes sex is 1,000,000,000,000,000,000. Guys, beware: if a girl promises to include sex, she might just write that number and tell you to get lost.

In Great Britain, a billion used to be defined differently: a million millions. Here was the British chart:

one	1	= (million) ⁰ = 10 ⁰
million	1,000,000	= (million) ¹ = 10 ⁶
billion	1,000,000,000,000	= (million) ² = 10 ¹²
trillion	1,000,000,000,000,000,000	= (million) ³ = 10 ¹⁸
quadrillion	1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000	= (million) ⁴ = 10 ²⁴
quintillion	1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000	= (million) ⁵ = 10 ³⁰
sextillion	1,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000	= (million) ⁶ = 10 ³⁶

So the British had to wait much longer to get sex! But in 1974 the British government officially decided to switch to the American definitions, to reduce international confusion, so even the British now define a billion to be 10⁹. So do the Irish, Australians, and New Zealanders.

Unfortunately, most European countries (and Russia) still use the old British definitions and define a "billion" to be 10¹².

Canada is a bilingual mess: Canadians who speak English define a billion to be 10⁹ (like the Americans), but Canadians who speak French define a billion to be 10¹² (like the French).

Details are at:

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Billion>
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Names_of_large_numbers

The Chinese use a totally different naming system, based on a name for 10,000 instead of 1,000:

yī	1			
shí	10			
bǎi	100			
qiān	1,000			
wàn	10,000			
	100,000	is called 10	×10,000,	shí wàn
	1,000,000	is called 100	×10,000,	bǎi wàn
	10,000,000	is called 1,000	×10,000,	qiān wàn
yì	100,000,000			
	1,000,000,000	is called 10	×100,000,000,	shí yì
	10,000,000,000	is called 100	×100,000,000,	bǎi yì
	100,000,000,000	is called 1,000	×100,000,000,	qiān yì
zhào	1,000,000,000,000			

Though 100,000,000 is officially called "yì," some folks say "wàn wàn" instead (which means 10,000×10,000), because yì (which means 100,000,000) sounds too much like yī (which means 1).

Famous irrationals

4 irrational numbers have become famous. Here they are.

Square root of 2 (which is about 1.4)

What number, multiplied by itself, is 2? The answer is called the "square root of 2."

The answer is about 1.4, but not exactly (since 1.4 times itself is just 1.96, which is a hair less than 2). The square root of 2 is also about 99/70, but not exactly (since 99/70 times itself is 9801/4900, which is a teeny-weeny hair more than 9800/4900, which is 2).

The simplest way to draw the square root of 2, exactly, is to draw a square whose sides each have length 1. The length of the square's diagonal will be exactly the square root of 2. That

can be proved by the Pythagorean theorem.

But if you try to measure that diagonal, by using a ruler, you'll see that the diagonal's length is not any simple decimal or fraction.

The square root of 2 is not exactly any rational fraction (integer divided by an integer), so the square root of 2 is called **irrational**. Yes, the square root of 2 is irrational, just like the personalities of most mathematicians.

To prove the square root of 2 is irrational, mathematicians show **the opposite leads to a contradiction, an absurdity** (a technique called **reductio ad absurdum**, which means "reduction to the absurd"):

Suppose the square root of 2 were *rational*. Then it would be a fraction, which could be **reduced to lowest terms, which we'll call p/q**.

Then "the square root of 2" = p/q.

Squaring both sides of that equation, we get 2 = (p/q)². Then 2 = p²/q². Then **2q² = p²**.

Then p² is even (since it's 2 times an integer). Then **p is even** (since if p were odd, p² wouldn't be even). Then p is 2 times some integer, which we'll call k. Then p = 2k. Then p² = 4k². Then the equation at the end of the previous paragraph (2q² = p²) can be rewritten as 2q² = 4k². Dividing both sides of that equation by 2, we get q² = 2k². Then q² is even, so **q is even**, so **both p and q are even**, so the fraction p/q was *not* reduced to lowest terms (since the numerator p and the denominator q can both be divided by 2), so we have a contradiction, so the assumption we started from (the square root of 2 being rational) is false, so the square root of 2 is irrational.

The square root of 2 can be computed in many ways. Here are 3 cute methods.

Multiply-forever method The square root of 2 is:

$$\left(1 + \frac{1}{1}\right)\left(1 - \frac{1}{3}\right)\left(1 + \frac{1}{5}\right)\left(1 - \frac{1}{7}\right)\left(1 + \frac{1}{9}\right)\left(1 - \frac{1}{11}\right)\left(1 + \frac{1}{13}\right)\dots$$

That means: multiply (1+1/1) by (1-1/3), then by (1+1/5), then by (1-1/7), etc., forever, or until you get tired. The longer you continue before you get tired, the closer you'll be to the exact square root of 2.

Average-forever method Guess what the square root of 2 is. (Any guess bigger than 0 will work. For example, guess 1.5.)

Call your guess "G." Then get a better guess by averaging G with 2/G, so the better guess is:

$$\frac{G + \frac{2}{G}}{2}, \text{ which simplifies to } \frac{G}{2} + \frac{1}{G}$$

Do that method repeatedly, so you get better & better guesses, closer & closer to the exact square root of 2.

Continued-fraction method Guess what "the square root of 2, minus 1" is; but make your first guess be .5. Call your guess "G." Then get this better guess:

$$\frac{1}{2 + G}$$

Do that method repeatedly, so you get better & better guesses, closer & closer to the exact "square root of 2, minus 1."

Mathematicians write that method as a "continued fraction":

$$\sqrt{2} - 1 = \frac{1}{2 + \frac{1}{2 + \frac{1}{2 + \frac{1}{2 + \frac{1}{2 + \dots}}}}}$$

Bragging Using those 3 methods (and others that are similar), mathematicians have computed the square root of 2 to many decimal places.

Here's how they bragged:

In 1997, a team led by Yasumasa Kanada computed the square root of 2 to over 137 billion decimal places. (Actually, to 137,438,953,444 decimal places.)

The square root of 2 was computed to a trillion decimal places by Shigeru Kondo in 2010, 2 trillion by Alexander Yee in 2012, 10 trillion by Ron Watkins in 2016.

I'm sorry, but my book isn't big enough to show you Ron Watkins' 10 trillion decimal places. But here are **the first 66 digits** of the square root of 2:

1.41421356237309504880168872420969807856967187537694807317667973799

Pi

(which is about 3.14)

In the Greek alphabet, the letter "p" is written as π. Americans lacking Greek typewriters write π as "pi" and pronounce it the same as the apple "pie" you eat, but Greeks pronounce π the same as the letter "p" and the American word "pee." To be correct, American mathematicians ought to pronounce "π" as "pee"; but they're scared of acting pissy and getting pissed on, so they say "pie."

Mathematician define pi, written as π, to be a circle's **circumference** divided by its diameter. (That "Greek p" letter, π, was chosen because a circle's circumference is also called its "periphery," and p stands for "periphery.") Pi is also a **semicircle**'s curved length divided by its radius, so it's also the curved length of a semicircle whose radius is 1. It's also the **area** of a circle whose radius is 1.

Pi is about 3.14, but not exactly. Pi is about 22/7, but not exactly. Like the square root of 2, pi is irrational, so it can't be written exactly as a decimal or fraction.

Here again are the first 3 digits of pi:

3.14

Hold them up to a **mirror** and see what they spell.

Nerds celebrate pi day every year, on March 14 (which is 3/14), by baking pies.

Here are the first 6 digits of pi:

3.14159

Those digits are famous and often used as an approximation. That approximation is not exact, of course, but cynical engineers say it's "close enough for government work."

Nerds like to scream "3.14159," so the football cheer at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.) includes "3.14159," along with calculus & trigonometry:

E to the u, du, dx,
E to the x, dx.
Cosine, secant, tangent, sine,
3.14159.
Integral, radical, mu, dv,
Slip stick, slide rule, M.I.T!

Variants of that football cheer are used at other nerd universities also (RPI, Worcester Polytech, and Rice).

Pizza What's the volume of a pizza whose radius is Z and whose altitude (height, thickness) is A? According to math, the volume of that "almost-flat cylinder" is "pi times the radius squared times the altitude," so the volume is:

PI*Z*Z*A

T-shirt Math nerds like to wear a T-shirt saying —

$$\sqrt{-1} \ 2^3 \ \Sigma \ \pi$$

because it means "i eight sum pi".

Computing pi Trigonometry says π/4 is the arctangent of 1, but calculus says the arctangent of x is

$$\frac{x^1}{1} - \frac{x^3}{3} + \frac{x^5}{5} - \frac{x^7}{7} + \dots$$

so:

$$\frac{\pi}{4} = \arctan 1 = \frac{1}{1} - \frac{1}{3} + \frac{1}{5} - \frac{1}{7} + \dots$$

Here are other popular ways to compute π:

$$\frac{\pi}{4} = 4 \arctan \frac{1}{5} - \arctan \frac{1}{239}$$

$$\frac{\pi}{8} = \frac{1}{1 \cdot 3} + \frac{1}{5 \cdot 7} + \frac{1}{9 \cdot 11} + \frac{1}{13 \cdot 15} + \dots$$

$$\frac{\pi}{2} = \frac{2}{1} \cdot \frac{2}{3} \cdot \frac{4}{3} \cdot \frac{4}{5} \cdot \frac{6}{5} \cdot \frac{6}{7} \cdot \frac{8}{7} \cdot \dots$$

$$\frac{\pi^2}{6} = \frac{1}{1^2} + \frac{1}{2^2} + \frac{1}{3^2} + \frac{1}{4^2} + \dots$$

$$\frac{\pi^2}{8} = \frac{1}{1^2} + \frac{1}{3^2} + \frac{1}{5^2} + \frac{1}{7^2} + \dots$$

$$\frac{\pi - 3}{4} = \frac{1}{2 \cdot 3 \cdot 4} - \frac{1}{4 \cdot 5 \cdot 6} + \frac{1}{6 \cdot 7 \cdot 8} - \frac{1}{8 \cdot 9 \cdot 10} + \dots$$

Using those formulas (plus better formulas that converge faster), mathematicians computed many digits of pi.

Year	How many digits of pi were computed correctly
150 A.D.	5 digits, by Greeks & Romans
480 A.D.	8 digits, by Zhu Chongzhi in China
1400	11 digits, by Madhava in India
1424	17 digits, by Jamshid al-Kashi in Iran
1596	20 digits, by Ludolph van Ceulen in Holland
1615	33 digits, by Ludolph van Ceulen in Holland
1621	36 digits, by Willebrord Snellius in Holland
1630	39 digits, by Christoph Grienberger in Austria
1699	72 digits, by Abraham Sharp in England
1706	101 digits, by John Machin in England
1719	113 digits, by Thomas Fantet in France
1789	127 digits, by Jurij Vega in Slovenia
1794	137 digits, by Jurij Vega in Slovenia
1844	201 digits, by Dase & Strassnitzky
1847	249 digits, by Thomas Clausen in Denmark
1853	441 digits, by Rutherford
1873	528 digits, by William Shanks in England
1946	621 digits, by D.F. Ferguson
1947	809 digits, by D.F. Ferguson, still no computer!
1949	2,038 digits, finally using a computer!
1954	3,094 digits
1957	7,481 digits
1958	10,022 digits
1959	16,168 digits
1961	100,266 digits
1966	250,000 digits
1967	500,000 digits
1973	1,000,000 digits, that's a million digits!
1981	2,000,000 digits, that's 2 million digits!
1982	8,000,000 digits, that's 8 million digits!
1983	16,000,000 digits, that's 16 million digits!
1985	17,000,000 digits, that's 17 million digits!
1986	67,000,000 digits, that's 67 million digits!
1987	134,000,000 digits, that's 134 million digits!
1988	201,000,000 digits, that's 201 million digits!
1989	1,000,000,000 digits, that's a billion digits!
1991	2,000,000,000 digits, that's 2 billion digits!
1994	4,000,000,000 digits, that's 4 billion digits!
1994	51,000,000,000 digits, that's 51 billion digits!
1999	206,000,000,000 digits, that's 206 billion digits!
2002	1,000,000,000,000 digits, that's a trillion digits!
2009	2,000,000,000,000 digits, that's 2 trillion digits!
2010	5,000,000,000,000 digits, that's 5 trillion digits!
2011	10,000,000,000,000 digits, that's 10 trillion digits!
2013	12,000,000,000,000 digits, that's 12 trillion digits!
2014	13,000,000,000,000 digits, that's 13 trillion digits!
2016	22,000,000,000,000 digits, that's 22 trillion digits!
2019	31,415,926,535,897 digits, that's pi times 10 trillion digits, by Emma Haruka Iwao at Google
2020	50,000,000,000,000 digits, that's 50 trillion digits, by Timothy Mullican in Alabama
2021	62,800,000,000,000 digits, that's 62.8 trillion digits, by Thomas Keller in Switzerland

Memorizing pi

Here are the first 32 digits of pi:

3.1415926535897932384626433832795

To memorize the first 7 of them, just memorize this sentence (by C. Heckman), and count how many letters are in each word:

How I wish I could calculate pi.

To memorize the first 8 digits, memorize this sentence instead (reported by Martin Gardner):

May I have a large container of coffee?

To memorize the first 9 digits, memorize this sentence instead (reported by Presh Talwalkar) —

How I wish I could calculate pi easily today.

or this (by M. Amling):

May I have a white telephone, or pastel color?

To memorize the first 31 digits, memorize this poem instead (by Michael Shapiro):

Now I will a rhyme construct,
By chosen words the young instruct.
Cunningly devised endeavour,
Con it and remember ever.
Widths in circle here you see,
Sketched out in strange obscurity.

In that poem, "endeavour" must be spelled with the British ending ("vour"), not the American ending ("vor").

To memorize the first 32 digits, memorize this instead (by James Jeans & S. Bottomley):

How I want a drink, alcoholic of course, after the heavy lectures involving quantum mechanics; and if the lectures were boring or tiring, then any odd thinking was on quartic equations again.

That's as far as math guys can memorize without cheating, since the 33rd digit of pi is zero.

A group called "ASAP Science" wrote this song about the first 100 digits:

YouTube.com/watch?v=3HRkKznJoZA

A group called "College Humor" created this longer video, where the singers gradually go insane and die:

YouTube.com/watch?v=Skf8NTEnrO4

A contest is held often, to see who can memorize and recite correctly the most digits of pi (after the decimal point). Here are the winners:

Year&month	How many digits	Person	Country
1973 January	956	Parsonnet, Brian	USA
1973 October	1111	Graham, Fred	Canada
1973 December	1210	Pearson, Timothy	England
1974 June	1505	Berberich, Edward C.	USA
1975 December	4096	Plouffe, Simon	Canada
1977 March	5050	Poultney, Michael John	England
1978 May	6190	Archibald, Jamie	Canada
1978 June	9744	Eberstark, Hans	Austria
1978 October	10000	Sanker, David	USA
1979 April	10625	Fiore, David	USA
1980 June	20013	Carvello, Creithon	England
1981 July	31811	Mahadevan, Rajan	India
1987 March	40000	Tomoyori, Hideaki	Japan
1995 February	42195	Goto, Hiroyuki	Japan
2005 November	67890	Lu, Chao	China
2015 March	70000	Meena, Rajveer	India
2015 October	70030	Sharma, Suresh Kumar	India

Here are details about the 3 recent winners:

In 2005, Mr. Lu Chou of China memorized and recited the first 67,890 decimal digits of pi. He recited them on camera, taking 24 hours plus 4 seconds. To win that contest, he wasn't allowed to pause more than 15 seconds, so he couldn't eat or go to the bathroom. He spent a year preparing for that. He actually memorized 100,000 digits and was planning to recite 91,300 of them; but on digit 67,891 he accidentally said 5 instead of 0, so he got credit for just 67,890 digits.

10 years later, in 2015, he was beaten by Mr. Rajveer Mina, a 21-year-old student in India. Rajveer recited 70,000 decimal digits of pi and talked faster: he recited them in just 9 hours plus 27 minutes, while blindfolded.

But Rajveer's world champion title lasted just 7 months, because in October Mr. Suresh Kumar Sharma recited those same 70,000 digits plus 30 more.

Bible The Bible says pi is 3. Specifically, the Old Testament (first book of Kings, chapter 7, verse 23) says King Solomon made a circular metal object that had a diameter of 10 cubits and a circumference of 30.

But maybe the writer meant "30" was just an approximation? 31 would have been more accurate.

Indiana In 1897, Indiana's House of Representatives passed a bill declaring that pi is exactly 3.2, not less, so textbooks must say pi is exactly 3.2, and schoolkids must learn that pi is exactly 3.2. The bill passed unanimously: all 67 congressmen voted yes.

Fortunately, Indiana's senate rejected that bill, so the bill never became a law.

Here's how that bill came about:

Edward J. Goodwin was an Indiana doctor. He was also an amateur mathematician who thought he proved pi is exactly 3.2, even though mathematicians before him proved it was not.

In 1894, he got his result published in *The American Mathematical Monthly*, which is a respected journal and now the most widely read math journal in the whole world. (Back then the journal was more permissive, so it published his research without checking whether it was correct.)

Then he tried to copyright his result and force everybody in the whole world to pay him a royalty for using pi as 3.2. But he had sympathy for schoolkids in Indiana and not make them pay, so he told Indiana's lawmakers that he'd let schoolkids in Indiana (but not elsewhere) use his results free if the lawmakers passed a law saying he was great and his result was correct.

In 1897, The House representatives passed the law unanimously because they figured it was safe: it just said schoolkids wouldn't have to pay if the House acknowledged Goodwin was great. The actual bill didn't specifically mention "pi" and "3.2" but said the equivalent: it said the circumference divided by the diameter is the same as 4 divided by 5/4.

That proposed law got laughed at by newspapers, and a math professor from Purdue University convinced the senate to kill it.

More details about the whole affair are at: MentalFloss.com/article/30214/new-math-time-indiana-tried-change-pi-32

Powers Is this number an integer:

$$\pi(\pi(\pi^\pi))$$

Probably not. But nobody knows for sure, because the number is too big for today's computers to compute accurately enough.

Tau Some mathematicians think tau is more useful than pi. Tau is the symbol τ , which is the Greek letter for t.

Some mathematicians define tau to be the circle's circumference divided by its *radius* (instead of diameter), so tau would be twice as big as pi. Other mathematicians think tau should be the length of a 45-degree arc of a circle whose radius is 1, so tau would be a quarter of pi.

Such definitions of tau would make some math formulas shorter but make other math formulas longer.

Golden ratio (which is about 1.6)

Here's a puzzle for you:

I'm thinking of a number. If I square it (multiply it by itself), I get 1 more than the number I started with. What's my number?

To solve that puzzle, the typical student might begin by guessing simple numbers, such as 0, 1, 2, 3, -1, -2, or -3. Each of guesses fails. Then the student might try fractions (such as 1/2) or mixed numbers (such as 1 1/2). They fail also. No matter what normal number the student tries, the student will fail.

If you're a teacher, you can give that puzzle to your students, then ignore them for the rest of the hour, while you pick your nose. I call that the "pick your nose" puzzle.

Eventually, the students will realize that if the puzzle has a solution, it must be wacky.

If the students studied algebra enough, they'll eventually realize the problem can be rewritten this way:

$$\text{Solve } x^2 = x + 1$$

If their algebra class included the "quadratic formula," they'll realize the problem can be solved by rewriting that equation as —

$$x^2 - x - 1 = 0$$

then applying the quadratic formula, which gives this final result:

$$x = \frac{1 + \sqrt{5}}{2} \text{ or } x = \frac{1 - \sqrt{5}}{2}$$

Since I feel negatively about negative numbers, I'll ignore the negative choice, so my answer is:

$$x = \frac{1 + \sqrt{5}}{2}$$

Since that answer include a square root, it has the same annoying property as the square root of 2 and the square root of 5: **the answer is irrational** (can't be written as a simple decimal or fraction).

The answer is about 1.6, but not exactly. (If you square 1.6, you *almost* get 2.6, but not exactly: you get a hair less, 2.56.) A closer approximation to the answer is 1.618 (whose square is just a teensy-weensy hair less than 2.618). An even closer approximation is 1.6180339887.

The answer is called **phi** (which resembles pi and is a Greek letter whose symbol is ϕ). It's also called the **golden ratio**. Religious folks call it the **divine proportion**. I'll explain why shortly.

Here's another puzzle:

I'm thinking of a number. It's 1 more than its reciprocal. What number am I thinking of?

Written in algebra, that becomes:

$$x = 1 + \frac{1}{x}$$

To solve that equation, multiply both sides by x , so you get " $x^2 = x + 1$." But that's the same equation as the previous puzzle, so it has the same answer: phi.

Here's the puzzle that forced mathematicians to get interested in phi:

If you draw a picture on a sheet of paper, what size should the paper be? For example, should it be square?

One group of ancient artists felt it should *not* be square: one side should be longer than the other. But how much longer? Should it be twice as long? 1 1/2 times as long?

Those artists felt the long side (called the *length*) should be related to the short side (called the *width*) by this formula:

$$\frac{\text{length}}{\text{width}} = \frac{\text{length} + \text{width}}{\text{length}}$$

That formula can be rewritten as:

$$\frac{\text{length}}{\text{width}} = 1 + \frac{\text{width}}{\text{length}}$$

So "length/width" should satisfy this equation:

$$x = 1 + \frac{1}{x}$$

So "length/width" should be phi!

Yes, those artists insisted that the length should be phi times as long as the width. So the length should be about 1.6 times as long as the width. Those artists felt that ratio, "about 1.6 times as long as the width," was **golden, divine**, and created paintings, sculptures, buildings, and books using that ratio. It's called "phi" to honor Phidias, the ancient Greek sculptor who made Parthenon statues using phi, long ago (before 430 B.C.).

Though phi was mentioned by Euclid and other ancient Greeks, there's a lot of controversy about which artists in which centuries (ancient & modern) really used it. Details about phi and its artistic controversies are at:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golden_ratio

Does today's technology use phi a lot? No. Phi is about 1.618, but people use these ratios instead:

Object	Ratio
American letter-size sheet of paper, 8 1/2" x 11"	about 1.294
American legal-size sheet of paper, 8 1/2" x 14"	about 1.607 (close to 1.618)
American mass-market paperback book, 4 1/4" x 7"	about 1.607 (close to 1.618)
American trade-paperback book, 6" x 9"	1.5
international-size sheet of paper (A4)	√2 (which is about 1.414)
traditional computer monitor's screen	4:3 (which is about 1.333)
widescreen computer monitor's screen	16:9 (which is about 1.778)

So according to that chart, the most artistically pleasant people are lawyers and crap-readers!

Like the square root of 2, phi can be written as a continued fraction; and phi's is even prettier:

$$\phi = 1 + \frac{1}{1 + \frac{1}{1 + \frac{1}{1 + \frac{1}{\ddots}}}}$$

Here's the proof:

Let x be that continued fraction. Since $x = 1 + 1/x$, and x is positive, x must be ϕ .

So you can compute phi by using this method:

Make a reasonable guess (such as 1 or 2 or 1.5 or 1.6). Call it G . Then get a better guess by using this formula: better guess = $1 + 1/G$.

Phi arises in trigonometry.

It's twice the cosine of 36°. It's half the secant of 72°. If you draw a 5-pointed star and then draw lines connecting each of its 5 points to each of the other 4 points, the ratios of many of the lengths are phi.

Phi arises in exponent equations.

Phi satisfies the equation $x^n + x^{n+1} = x^{n+2}$, for all n . Proof: start with phi's equation ($1 + x = x^2$) and multiply both sides of that equation by x^n .

Phi arises in the Fibonacci series.

To create the Fibonacci series, write 0, then 1, then repeatedly do this: write the sum of the two most recent numbers. You get this series: 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34, 55, 89, etc., where each number is created by summing the pair of numbers immediately before it. (For example, 8 is created by summing 3+5.) The numbers keep getting bigger. How much bigger? Twice as big? What's the ratio? The further you write, the closer the ratio between adjacent numbers gets to phi.

One mathematician believed that in a perfectly proportioned woman, her total height divided by the height of her navel would be phi. (In other words, her total height would be about 1.6 times the height of her navel.) Ladies, go measure yourselves....

Euler's number, e (which is about 2.7)

In Switzerland long ago, in the year 1690, Jacob Bernoulli tried to solve a puzzle about a bank giving compound interest. His puzzle has tortured math students ever since, since his answer is discussed in most courses about calculus and most college courses about statistics (which are sadistic). His answer is called "e," which should stand for "eek!" but actually stands for "Euler" (a Swiss mathematician who analyzed Bernoulli's answer a lot).

Here's the puzzle.

Suppose you deposit money in a ridiculously generous bank that gives you an interest rate of 100% per year! To keep things simple (and because you don't trust the bank), suppose you deposit just \$1. How much money will you have after 1 year?

The answer is you'll have the \$1 you deposited, plus \$1 (which is 100%) in interest, so you'll have a total of \$2.

Suppose the bank is even more generous: it compounds your interest *quarterly*, so you get a quarter of 100% (which is 25%), 4 times per year, immediately redeposited. How much money will you have at the end of the year? Here's the solution:

At the end of the first quarter, you'll have the dollar you put in, plus 25 cents interest (which is 1/4 of a dollar), so you'll have \$1.25.

At the end of the second quarter, you'll still have that \$1.25, plus 25% of that in interest (which is ".25 times \$1.25," which is 31.25 cents), so you'll have \$1.5625.

At the end of the third quarter, you'll have that \$1.5625, plus 25% of that in interest (which is ".25 times \$1.5625," which is 39.0625 cents), so you'll have \$1.953125.

At the end of the fourth quarter (which is the end of the year), you'll have that \$1.953125, plus 25% of that in interest (which is ".25 times \$1.923125," which is 48.828125 cents), so you'll have \$2.44140625.

Hey, that's better than just \$2!

Suppose the bank is even more generous: it compounds your interest *monthly*, so you get a twelfth of 100%, 12 times per year. At the end of the year, you'll have slightly more than \$2.61, which is even better!

Suppose the bank is even more generous: it compounds your interest *daily*, so you get a 365th of 100%, 365 times per year (if it's not a leap year). At the end of the year, you'll have slightly more than \$2.71, which is even better, but just slightly, just 10 cents more.

Here's the final puzzle: suppose the bank is super-duper generous: it compounds your interest continuously (every tiny fraction of every second of every minute of every hour of every day). At the end of the year, how much will you have? The answer is just *very* slightly more than \$2.71. In fact, it will be this many dollars:

2.71828182845904523536028747135266249775724709369995...

That number is called **e**. If the bank is mean, it will round that down to the nearest penny and give you just \$2.71, the same as if it compounded interest just daily instead of continuously.

That number, e, which is about 2.718, shows up in many branches of math. From that banking example, you can see that e is what you get when you compute —

$$\left(1 + \frac{1}{n}\right)^n$$

and n gets very big. Mathematicians say it's "the limit of that expression, when n approaches infinity." They write:

$$e = \lim_{n \rightarrow \infty} \left(1 + \frac{1}{n}\right)^n$$

Mathematicians who are nervous about infinity write the equation this way instead (using "x" to stand for "1/n") —

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow 0} (1 + x)^{\frac{1}{x}}$$

or this way, which looks cooler:

$$e = \lim_{x \rightarrow 0} \sqrt[x]{x + 1}$$

A faster way to compute e is to use this trick:

$$e = \frac{1}{1} + \frac{1}{1 \cdot 2} + \frac{1}{1 \cdot 2 \cdot 3} + \frac{1}{1 \cdot 2 \cdot 3 \cdot 4} + \frac{1}{1 \cdot 2 \cdot 3 \cdot 4 \cdot 5} + \dots$$

Unfortunately, e is irrational: its digits never end and never completely repeat. But e's first 16 digits are easy to memorize, if you view them in pairs:

2.7 18 28 18 28 45 90 45

The 5 digits after that are 23536, which I memorize by saying to myself, "2 *plus* 3 is 5, but *times* 3 is 6." That gives 21 digits. I was the only kid in my high school who was weird enough to memorize e. I was e-specially eerie.

The e has this weird property: if you grab a piece of graph paper and graph the function "y = e^x," you get a curve whose "slope up" at every point is the same as y. For example, at the curve's point where y reaches 5, the curve's "slope up" (rise divided by run) is also 5. That's why e is fundamental to calculus, which is the study of slopes (which calculus calls "derivatives").

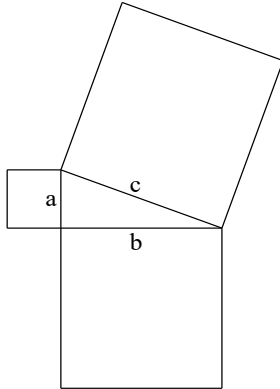
Statisticians like to draw a "bell curve" showing most people & situations are middle-of-the-road. That bell curve is just a heavily modified version of "y=e^x," to make the curve symmetric.

Look closely

Let's look closely at math's wackiness.

Pythagorean theorem

The most amazing math discovery made by Greeks is the **Pythagorean theorem**. It says that in a **right triangle** (a triangle including a 90° angle), $a^2 + b^2 = c^2$, where c is the length of the **hypotenuse** (the longest side) and a & b are the lengths of the legs (the other two sides). It says that in this diagram —



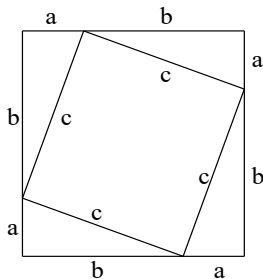
c 's square is exactly as big (has the same area) as a 's square and b 's square combined.

The Chinese discovered the same truth, perhaps earlier.

Why is the Pythagorean theorem true? How do you prove it?

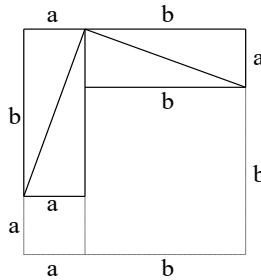
You can prove it in *many* ways. The 2nd edition of a book called *The Pythagorean Proposition* contains *many* proofs (256 of them!), collected in 1940 by Elisha Scott Loomis when he was 87 years old. Here are the 5 most amazing proofs...

3-gap proof Draw a square, where each side has length $a+b$. In each corner of that square, put a copy of the triangle you want to analyze, like this:



Now the square contains those 4 copied triangles, plus 1 huge gap in the middle. That gap is a square where each side has length c , so its area is c^2 .

Now move the bottom 2 triangles up, so you get this:



The whole picture is still “a square where each side has length $a+b$,” and you still have 4 triangles in it; but instead of a big gap whose area is c^2 , you have two small gaps, of sizes a^2 and b^2 . So c^2 is the same size as $a^2 + b^2$.

1-gap proof Draw the same picture that the 3-gap proof began with. You see the whole picture's area is $(a+b)^2$. You can also see that the picture is cut into 4 triangles (each having an area of $ab/2$) plus the gap in the middle (whose area is c^2). Since the whole picture's area must equal the sum of its parts, you get:

$$(a+b)^2 = ab/2 + ab/2 + ab/2 + ab/2 + c^2$$

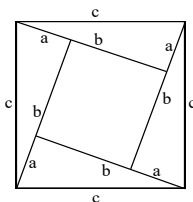
In this proof, instead of “moving the bottom 2 triangles,” we use algebra. According to algebra's rules, that equation's left side becomes $a^2 + 2ab + b^2$, and the right side becomes $2ab + c^2$, so the equation becomes:

$$a^2 + 2ab + b^2 = 2ab + c^2$$

Subtracting $2ab$ from both sides of that equation, you're left with:

$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$

1-little-gap proof Draw a square, where each side has length c . In each corner of that square, put a copy of the triangle you want to analyze, like this:



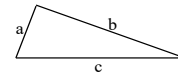
The whole picture's area is c^2 . The picture is cut into 4 triangles (each having an area of $ab/2$) plus the little gap in the middle, whose area is $(b-a)^2$. Since the whole picture's area must equal the sum of its parts, you get:

$$c^2 = ab/2 + ab/2 + ab/2 + ab/2 + (b-a)^2$$

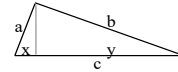
According to algebra's rules, that equation's right side becomes $2ab + (b^2 - 2ba + a^2)$. Then the $2ab$ and the $-2ba$ cancel each other, leaving you with $a^2 + b^2$, so the equation becomes:

$$c^2 = a^2 + b^2$$

1-segment proof Draw the triangle you're interested in, like this:



Unlike the earlier proofs, which make you draw many extra segments (short lines), this proof makes you draw just *one* extra segment! Make it perpendicular to the hypotenuse and go to the right angle:



The original big triangle (whose sides have lengths a , b , and c) has the same-size angles as the tiny triangle (whose sides have lengths x and a), so it's “similar to” the tiny triangle, and so the big triangle's ratio of “shortest side to hypotenuse” (a/c) is the same as the tiny triangle's ratio of “shortest side to hypotenuse” (x/a). Write that equation:

$$a/c = x/a$$

Multiplying both sides of that equation by ac , you discover what a^2 is:

$$a^2 = xc$$

Using similar reasoning, you discover what b^2 is:

$$b^2 = yc$$

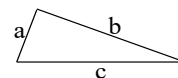
Adding those two equations together, you get:

$$a^2 + b^2 = (x+y)c$$

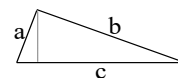
Since $x+y$ is c , that equation becomes:

$$a^2 + b^2 = c^2$$

1-segment general proof Draw the triangle you're interested in, like this:



As in the previous proof, draw one extra segment, perpendicular to the hypotenuse and going to the right angle:



Now you have 3 triangles: the left one, the rightmost one, and the big one.

Since the left triangle's area plus the rightmost triangle's area equals the big triangle's area, and since the 3 triangles are similar to each other (“stretched” versions of each other, as you can prove by looking at their angles), any area constructed from “parts of the left triangle” plus the area constructed from “corresponding parts of the rightmost triangle” equals the area constructed from “corresponding parts of the big triangle.” For example, the area constructed by drawing a square on the left triangle's hypotenuse (a^2) plus the area constructed by drawing a square on the rightmost triangle's hypotenuse (b^2) equals the area

constructed by drawing a square on the big triangle's hypotenuse (c^2).

Which proof is the best? The **3-gap proof** is the most visually appealing, but it bothers mathematicians who are too lazy to draw (construct) so many segments. (It also requires you to prove the gap is indeed a square, whose angles are right angles, but that's easy.)

The **1-gap proof** uses fewer lines by relying on algebra instead. It's fine if you like algebra, awkward if you don't. The **1-little-gap proof** uses algebra slightly differently.

The **1-segment proof** appeals to mathematicians because it requires constructing just 1 segment, but you can't understand it until you've learned the laws of similar triangles. This proof was invented by Davis Legendre in 1858.

The **1-segment general proof** is the most powerful because its thinking generalizes to *any* area created from the 3 triangles, not just *square* areas. In any right triangle:

The area of a square drawn on the hypotenuse (c^2) is the sum of the areas of squares drawn on the legs ($a^2 + b^2$).

The area of a circle drawn on the hypotenuse (using the hypotenuse as the diameter) is the sum of the areas of circles drawn on the legs.

The area of *any* blob (such as a square or circle or clown's head) drawn on the hypotenuse is the sum of the areas of similarly-shaped blobs drawn on the legs.

That proof was invented by a 19-year-old kid (Stanley Jashemski in Youngstown, Ohio) in 1934.

Ugliness

To understand the concept of math ugliness, remember these math definitions:

The numbers 0, 1, 2, 3, etc., are called **whole numbers**.

Those numbers and their negatives (-1, -2, -3, etc.) are all called **integers**.

The integers and fractions made from them ($1/4$, $2/3$, $-7/5$, etc.) are all called **rational numbers** (because they're all simple fractions, simple ratios).

All numbers on the number line are called **real numbers**: they include all the rational numbers but also include irrational numbers (such as "pi" and "the square root of 2"), which can't be expressed accurately as fractions made of integers.

Now you can tackle the **3 rules of ugliness**:

1. Most things are ugly.
2. Most things *you'll* see are nice.
3. Every ugly thing is almost nice.

More precisely:

Suppose you have a big set of numbers (such as the set of all real numbers), and you consider a certain subset of those numbers to be "nice" (such as the set of all rational numbers). The 3 rules of ugliness say:

1. Most members of the big set aren't in the nice subset. (For example, most real numbers aren't rational.)
2. When you operate on most members of the nice subset, you stay in the nice subset. (For example, if you add, subtract, multiply, or divide rational numbers, you get another rational number, if you don't divide by 0.)
3. Every member of the big set can be approximated by members of the nice subset. (For example, every irrational number can be approximated by rational numbers.)

In different branches of math, those same 3 rules keep cropping up, using different definitions of what's "ugly" and "nice."

The rules apply to people, too:

1. Most people aren't like you. You'll tend to think their behaviors are ugly.
2. Most people *you'll* meet will appeal to you, because you'll tend to move to a neighborhood or career composed of people like you.
3. The "ugly" people are actually *almost* like you: once you make an attempt to understand them, you'll discover they really aren't as different from you as you thought!

How math should be taught

I have complaints about how math is taught. Here's a list of my main complaints. If you're a mathematician, math teacher, or top math student, read the list and phone me at 603-666-6644 if you want to chat about details or hear about my other complaints, most of which result from research I did in the 1960's and 1970's. (On the other hand, if you don't know about math and don't care, skip these comments.)

Percentages Middle-school students should learn how to compute percentages (such as "What is 40% of 200?"); but advanced percentage questions (such as "80 is 40% of what?" and "80 is what percent of 200?") should be delayed until after algebra, because the easiest way to solve an advanced percentage question is to turn the question into an algebraic equation by using these tricks:

change "what" to "x"
change "is" to "="
change "percent" to "/100"
change "of" to "·"

Graphing a line To graph a line (such as " $y = 5 + 2x$ "), students should be told to use this formula:

the graph of the equation $y = h + sx$ is a line whose height (above the origin) is h and whose slope is s

So to graph $y = 5 + 2x$, put a dot that's

a distance of 5 above the origin; then draw a line that goes through that dot and has a slope of 2.

The formula " $y = h + sx$ " is called the "hot sex" formula (since it includes $h + sx$). It's easier to remember than the traditional formula, which has the wrong letters and wrong order and looks like this:

the graph of the equation $y = mx + b$ is a line whose height (above the origin) is b and whose slope is m

Imaginary numbers Imaginary numbers (such as "i") should be explained *before* the quadratic formula, so the quadratic formula can be stated simply (without having to say "if the determinant is non-negative").

Factoring Students should be told that every quadratic expression (such as $x^2 + 6x + 8$) can be factored by this formula:

the factorization of $x^2 + 2ax + c$ is $(x+a+d)(x+a-d)$, where $d = \sqrt{a^2 - c}$

For example:

to factor $x^2 + 6x + 8$, realize that $a=3$ and $c=8$, so $d=1$ and the factorization is $(x+3+1)(x+3-1)$, which is $(x+4)(x+2)$

As you can see from that example, the **a** (which in the example is 3) is the **average** of the two final numbers (4 and 2). That's why it's called **a**.

The **d** (which is 1) is how much each final number **differs** from **a** (4 and 2 each differ from 3 by 1). That's why it's called **d**. You can call **d** the **difference** or **divergence** or **displacement**.

Here's another reason why it's called **d**: it's the **determinant**, since it determines what kind of final answer you'll get (rational, irrational, imaginary, or single-root). You can also call **d** the **discriminant**, since it lets you discriminate among different kinds of answers.

Quadratic equations To solve any quadratic equation (such as " $x^2 + 6x + 8 = 0$ "), you can use that short factoring formula. For example:

to solve " $x^2 + 6x + 8 = 0$," factor it to get " $(x+4)(x+2) = 0$," whose solutions are -4 and -2

Another way to solve a quadratic equation is to use "Russ's quadratic formula," which is:

the solution of " $x^2 = 2bx + c$ " is $b \pm \sqrt{b^2 + c}$

That's much shorter and easier to remember than the traditional quadratic formula, though forcing an equation into the form " $x^2 = 2bx + c$ " can sometimes be challenging. Here's an application:

to solve $x^2 = 6x + 16$, realize that $b=3$ and $c=16$, so the solution is $3 \pm \sqrt{25}$, which is 3 ± 5 , which is 8 or -2

Prismoid formula Students should be told that the volume of any reasonable solid (such as a prism, cylinder, pyramid, cone, or sphere) can be computed from this **prismoid formula**:

volume =
height • (area of the typical cross-section
where “area of the typical cross-section” means
(top + bottom + 4 • middle)/6, where
“top” means “area of top cross-section”
“bottom” means “area of bottom cross-section”
“middle” means “area of halfway-up cross-section”

That formula can be written more briefly, like this:

$V = H(T + B + 4M)/6$,
where V means volume,
H means height,
T means top cross-section’s area
B means bottom cross-section’s area
M means middle cross-section’s area

For example, the volume of a pyramid (whose height is H and whose base area is L times W) is:

$H(0 + LW + 4(L/2)(W/2))/6$, which is
 $H(LW + 4LW/4)/6$, which is
 $H(LW + LW)/6$, which is
 $H(2LW)/6$, which is
 $HLW/3$

The volume of a cone (whose height is H and whose base area is πr^2) is:

$H(0 + \pi r^2 + 4\pi(r/2)^2)/6$, which is
 $H(\pi r^2 + 4\pi r^2/4)/6$, which is
 $H(\pi r^2 + \pi r^2)/6$, which is
 $H(2\pi r^2)/6$, which is
 $H\pi r^2/3$

The volume of a sphere (whose radius is r) is:

$(2r)(0 + 0 + 4\pi r^2)/6$, which is
 $2r(4\pi r^2)/6$, which is
 $4\pi r^3/3$

In the prismoid formula, $V = H(T + B + 4M)/6$, the “4” is the same “4” that appears in Simpson’s rule (which is used in calculus to find the area under a curve). The formula gives exactly the right answer for any 3-D shape whose sides are “smooth” (so you can express the cross-sectional areas as a quadratic or cubic function of the distance above the base). To prove the prismoid formula works for all such shapes, you must study calculus.

Balanced curriculum Math consists of many topics. Schools should reevaluate which topics are most important.

All students, before graduating from high school, should taste what statistics and calculus are about, since they’re used in many fields. For example, economists often talk about “marginal profit,” which is a concept from calculus. Students should also be exposed to other branches of math, such as matrices, logic, topology, and infinite numbers.

The explanation of Euclidean geometry should be abridged, to make room for other topics that are more important, such as coordinate geometry, which leads to calculus.

Like Shakespeare, Euclid’s work is a classic that should be shown to students so they can savor it and enjoy geometric examples of what “proofs” are; but after half a year of that, let high-school students move on to other topics that are more modern and more useful, to see examples of how proofs are used in *other* branches of math.

Too much time is spent analyzing triangles.

For example, consider the experience of John Kemeny, who headed Dartmouth College’s math department (and also invented the Basic programming language and later became Dartmouth College’s president). When he was a high-school student, his teacher told him to master “trigonometry, the study of analyzing triangles”; but for the next 20 years, he never had to analyze another triangle, even though he was a mathematician. That trigonometry course was totally useless!

Finally, one day, he bought a plot of land that was advertised as being “an acre, more or less.” He wanted to discover whether it was more or less, so he had survey it and analyze triangles. (The plot turned out to be *more* than an acre.)

When he told that tale to me and my classmates at Dartmouth, he then went on to make his point: mathematicians don’t have much use for analyzing triangles, though they *do* have use for how trigonometric functions (such as sine and cosine) help analyze circles (and circular motion and periodic motion). So let’s spend less time on triangles and more time on other topics!

No bell prize

I’ve invented several new ideas. I figure I should get a Nobel prize for them, except the ideas are half-baked: they need further research to make them fleshed out, complete, and fully useful. So I beg you: improve on these ideas, so *you* can get a Nobel prize. If you mention me in a footnote, I’d appreciate that. We can split the Nobel prize: you get the Bell prize, and I get No prize.

There’s just one little hitch in our plan to split a Nobel prize:

The Nobel prize was invented by Alfred Nobel, who decided to award prizes just to achievements that are “practical.”

He thought math wasn’t practical, so there’s no “Nobel prize” in math. To get a Nobel prize, your achievement must fit into one of these 6 Nobel-prize categories: physics, chemistry, medicine, economics, peace, or literature.

Although my ideas are mathy, we must pretend they aren’t. We must pretend my first idea, “derived happiness,” is about economics, not math or psychology. We must pretend my other ideas, about infinity & infinitesimals, are about physics (infinite blasts & strange objects in space), not math.

... or else we must create our own “No” and “Bell” prizes for ourselves!

Derived happiness

What makes people happy? Several centuries ago, the “meaning of happiness” was considered a philosophical problem. Nowadays, it’s considered a psychiatric problem: happiness is whatever makes your happiness hormones increase. In the future, it will become a math problem; here’s why...

To begin our fancy-schmancy math analysis, let’s do the same thing physicists do when analyzing motion: oversimplify! Later, we’ll discuss all the complications of the “real world,” such as friction.

Physicists begin by assuming objects move in a vacuum, then later add the effects of friction. We’ll begin by assuming happiness consists of having lots of money, then later add the effects of interpersonal friction (good & bad relationships with other people) and God friction (good & bad relationships with the desire to have a meaningful life). I’ll start with money, rather than frictions, because money is easier to measure.

Zereth-derivative happiness

Let’s start with the simplest situation:

Joe has \$200.
Tim has \$100.

That’s all we know about Joe & Tim so far. They’re both American males, so we don’t know any cultural differences between Joe & Tim yet. On the basis of what we know so far, Joe is probably happier than Tim, since Joe is wealthier.

This explanation is going to get mathy, and I’m even going to say jargon from calculus! But to avoid scaring the anti-math part of your brain, I promise to explain all math jargon simply.

Using math jargon, we say that Joe is higher up on the “wealth function” than Tim. That stupidly simple explanation is called the **zereth-derivative function**.

First-derivative happiness Now let's complicate the situation slightly, by peeking at the past:

Joe had \$400 yesterday — but now has \$200.
Tim had \$50 yesterday — but now has \$100.

Now the happiness seems different. Tim is happy because his money doubled. Joe is unhappy because Joe's money halved. Even though Joe still has more money than Tim, Joe feels unhappy because Joe's "life is going downhill," so his future looks grim, whereas Tim is thrilled because Tim's "life is going uphill" so his future looks bright.

Compared to yesterday, Tim gained \$50, whereas Joe lost \$200. In calculus jargon, we say:

Tim's **slope** (gain divided by time) is **\$50 per day**.
Joe's **slope** (gain divided by time) is **minus \$200 per day**.

So Tim's slope is better than Joe's slope. **Slope** is also called the **derivative**. More precisely, it's called the **first derivative**. So to figure out a person's happiness, you should look at the person's slope (first derivative).

Second-derivative happiness Now let's complicate the situation further, by peeking further into the past:

Ann had \$200 then \$300 but now has \$305.
Sue had \$100 then \$60 but now has \$55.

Who's happier: Ann or Sue?

Ann has more money than Sue (since Ann has \$305 while Sue has just \$55). Ann's recent slope is also better than Sue's recent slope (since Ann's recent slope was \$5 per day, while Sue's recent slope was minus \$5 per day).

But in spite of all that good news for Ann, she probably feels depressed, because her recent raise (the **\$5 raise** from \$300 to \$305) is worse than her previous raise (the **\$100 raise** from \$200 to \$300). Her raise **decreased** by \$95 (since the \$100 raise dropped to \$5). She feels her life isn't improving as much as it used to. She fears her life will, in the future, improve less and less and finally go downhill. She's depressed that she has less pride now (going from \$300 to \$305) than she had before (going from \$200 to \$300). She feels she's no longer a star on the rise. She's a has-been with probably a depressing future. She wants to commit suicide, because the great part of her life is over.

Sue, by contrast, is feeling relieved. Although her money dropped recently (a **\$5 drop**, since \$60 became \$55), the drop wasn't as dramatically bad as the period before (a **\$40 drop**, from \$100 to \$60). She's happy she didn't drop \$40 again. She's happy her drop this time was just slight, almost insignificant, so her losses are "stemming" (becoming less significant). She feels her life is "turning the corner" and might soon rise. Her slope improved: it was minus \$40 per day previously but became minus \$5 per day for the recent day.

Comparing old slopes against new slopes is called **computing the second derivative**. Since Ann's slope got worse (decreased), her second derivative is negative, and Ann feels depressed; since Sue's slope got better (not as bad as before), her second derivative is positive, and Sue feels relieved.

So according to that theory, **happiness is the second derivative** of the wealth function.

If you graph the history of Ann's money and Sue's money, you see that Ann's graph looks like the left half of a **cap** (which has no visor); Sue's graph looks like the left half of a **cup** (which has no handle). A **cap** graph means the second derivative is negative; a **cup** graph means the second derivative is positive. So according to that happiness theory, **happiness is a cup**.

To improve that theory further, we should make modifications....

Logarithms The first improvement is to use logarithms. Here are the details.

Compare these two people:

Bud had \$100 yesterday — but now has \$115.
Sam had \$10 yesterday — but now has \$20.

We don't know enough of the past to compute a second derivative. According to the previous theory, Bud should be happier than Sam, since Bud has more money (\$115) and a bigger slope (\$15 per day). But in reality, Sam is more thrilled than Bud, since Sam's money **doubled** (from \$10 to \$20), whereas Bud's money went up by just a **small percentage** of what Bud had before (15%). Sam can brag to himself & friends that his money doubled, whereas Bud hasn't much to brag about. Bud is happy (since Bud's money went up, not down), but Sam is thrilled.

So to measure happiness, we should measure the **percentage** by which money increased. To do that, we can choose two methods, each giving the same result:

Percentage method Instead of computing the simple slope (the money increase per day), compute the "slope as a percentage (or fraction) of the money": take the slope and divide it by the amount of money. In calculus, the wealth function is written as $f(t)$, its slope is written as $f'(t)$, and this method is written as " $f'(t)$ divided by $f(t)$."

Logarithm method Instead of using the simple wealth, use the wealth's logarithm (base 2 or e or 10 or whatever you please), by using a calculator or by graphing the wealth on log-graph paper. When you do that, you see the distance up from \$10 to \$20 is the same as the distance up from \$20 to \$40, which is the same as the distance up from \$40 to \$80, which is the same as the distance up from \$80 to \$160. That's because going from \$10 to \$20 feels as good as going from \$20 to \$40, since each means your wealth has doubled. Then find the slope of that vertical distance. In calculus, that can be written as "the derivative of $\log f(t)$."

The two methods give the same result because, according to calculus, "the derivative of $\log f(t)$ " equals " $f'(t)$ divided by $f(t)$."

Use the percentage method (or the equivalent logarithm method) to compute first-derivative happiness and second-derivative happiness.

Blended derivatives If your second derivative and first derivative are both negative, you might feel depressed. But if you start whining about them, your friends might remind you that you shouldn't feel so bad, because you still have enough money to live on. For example, if you had 4 billion dollars but then had just 3 billion and then just 1 billion, your second and first derivatives are both negative; but your friends might remind you that you still have a billion dollars left and you're still better off than most other people, so cheer up!

How important to your happiness are the first and second derivatives in relation to the amount of money you actually have? Your happiness is actually a blend of all that data. Your happiness might even be affected by the **third derivative** (which measures how much your second derivative is better than it was before). Maybe the happiness of people (and other animals) having impaired memory isn't influenced much by derivatives, second derivatives, and third derivatives. Experiments should be done to determine how much the various derivatives contribute to the happiness of various kinds of people.

Beyond money Besides money in your pocket, these other things can give you happiness: investments, things you own, food, shelter, health (and being pain-free), beauty, intelligence, good relationships (with people, pets, and the environment), love, sex, feeling useful (in your career or by volunteering or by helping friends & family), feeling powerful, feeling moral, and — alas! — taking mood-enhancing drugs (alcohol, nicotine, marijuana, heroin, and beyond). Your happiness is affected by how much you have of all those things, how much more you have than your **neighbors**, and how much **fame** you have for what you do. Your happiness is a blend of all those factors. Experiments should be done to determine how important those factors are in the blend.

Focus Maybe most factors in your life are okay, but one factor is **bugging** you at the moment. Maybe it's a **test** you must take tomorrow (and you haven't studied for yet), or a **friend** who's dying, or a **lover** you're in the middle of breaking up with, or you're **being arrested** and transported in a paddy wagon to the police station, or you're **having a medical emergency** and need help fast.

Or maybe one factor is **thrilling** you at the moment. For example, maybe you've just won an award, or won a lottery, or had an orgasm.

During those especially bad or good moments, your attention focuses on one thing and nearly ignores everything else; but those other things still have some effect on your happiness then, though maybe just slightly. To compute your overall happiness in that situation, we must invent a formula that's a weighted average of your feelings about everything: that formula must **emphasize** (give more weight to) the **extreme feelings** (feelings that are extremely positive or extremely negative) and de-emphasize the feelings that are closer to neutral (and therefore nearly ignored).

Please finish this explanation and get a Nobel prize.

Simplest infinitesimals

In elementary school, you learned how to count: 1, 2, 3, etc. Later, you learned about other kinds of numbers: zero, negative numbers, and fractions. If you took 2 years of high-school algebra, you also learned about "imaginary" numbers, such as "i", which is the square root of minus one.

During the last 3,000 years, whenever new kinds of numbers were invented, critics laughed at the inventors:

When zero was invented, the critics laughed and said "How can you have zero? If you have zero, you don't have anything at all, so you don't have zero."

When negative numbers were invented, the critics laughed and said, "How can you have less than nothing?"

When "imaginary" numbers were invented, critics laughed and said, "How can minus one have a square root, really?"

The critics got silenced when inventors drew pictures:

Zero is the height of an Egyptian pyramid before you start putting the bricks on it. Zero is also how much money you have before you start getting some.

Negative numbers are what you see on a thermometer when the temperature is colder than zero degrees. When you draw a vertical number line that shows how far up something went, negative numbers represent going down instead of up. When you draw a horizontal number line that shows how far something went toward the right, negative numbers represent traveling to the left instead.

Imaginary numbers became believable when Caspar Wessel and Jean-Robert Argand drew pictures including them. Those pictures, called **Argand diagrams**, are drawn on graph paper, with the "real" numbers on the horizontal x axis and "i" on the vertical y axis, so the "i" sits above 0.

When Germany's Gottfried Leibniz and England's Isaac Newton invented calculus in the 1600's, they thought about an "infinitesimal number," which is a number so tiny that it's less than every fraction of integers (less than $\frac{1}{2}$, less than $\frac{1}{10}$, less than $\frac{1}{100}$, less than a millionth, less than a trillionth, etc.) but is still more than zero. But since an "infinitesimal number" was hard to picture, it was hard to discuss confidently, so mathematicians later did calculus a different way, involving "limits" and awkward phrases such as "for every epsilon there exists a delta such that..." Those long-winded phrases make students want to cry, or give up and just sleep through the calculus lectures, or snore.

Mathematicians wish there were an easy, confident, pictorial, accurate way to mention infinitesimals, but that goal has eluded them. In 1966 at Yale University, Professor Abraham Robinson became famous for inventing what he called **non-standard analysis**, which is his own way to do calculus by using infinitesimals, but it's hard to understand. In the year 2000 at the University of Wisconsin, Professor H. Jerome Keisler

invented a simpler way to explain Robinson's work, but mathematicians complain that Keisler's explanation seems sloppy.

Here are my own 2 ways to explain infinitesimals: the **zillions method** and the **minimal method**. Each has its own advantages and disadvantages. Neither is completely satisfactory. I hope someday you or your friends can improve on what I've done and get a Nobel prize.

Zillions method This way to start doing calculus is understandable even to kids in elementary school. Just use the word "**zillion**." As most elementary kids already know, "a zillion" means "a lot of," "ridiculously many," as in "I have a zillion chores to do."

The word "zillion" has been popular for many years. According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (at merriam-webster.com/dictionary/zillion), the word "zillion" has been used for many decades, even back in 1934, and some folks have been saying "jillion" instead, beginning in 1942.

To do calculus, consider a **zillion** to be more than a million, more than a billion, more than a trillion, more than every other "illion" you ever heard of. Make the symbol for a zillion be ∞ . You can call that number "infinity" if you like, but people get scared about the word "infinity," whereas kids use the word "zillion" all the time.

Like a trillion, a zillion is a number that obeys all the normal rules of arithmetic and algebra. It pleases mathematicians because, like normal numbers, it all obeys the commutative and associative laws and all the other laws of an "ordered field." It just happens to be even bigger than a trillion.

The only "law" a zillion doesn't obey is the "Archimedes principle," since you can't reach a zillion by counting 1, 2, 3, etc. in a finite amount of time, though you can reach it in a zillion amount of time. In other words, a zillion can't be generated by starting at 0 and then adding 1 repeatedly in a finite amount of time; it can't be generated by multiplying two finite numbers together. But that disappointment about zillion doesn't affect any computations used in high-school algebra or calculus, so don't worry about it.

A zillion is not the biggest number, since "a zillion plus one" is even bigger (and written " $\infty+1$ "), and "two zillion" is bigger yet (and written " 2∞ "), and "a zillion times a zillion" is bigger than those (and written " $\infty\infty$ " or " ∞^2 "), and "a zillion to the zillionth power" is bigger than all those (and written " ∞^{∞} ").

An example of an infinite number that's slightly smaller than a zillion is "a zillion minus one" (written " $\infty-1$ "). An even smaller infinite number is "the square root of a zillion."

Just like a "million" has a reciprocal called "a millionth," a zillion has a reciprocal called a **zillionth**, which is the fraction $\frac{1}{\infty}$. That fraction is an example of an **infinitesimal**, since it's tinier than any normal fraction but still bigger than 0. Mathematicians like to call that fraction "**epsilon**" (which is the Greek letter for "e" and written " ϵ "), but that Greek jargon confuses young kids and makes them complain "It's Greek to me!" so obey the warning of AIDS advisors: don't do Greek.

A zillionth isn't the only infinitesimal number. A slightly bigger infinitesimal number is "two zillionths" (which is twice as big as a zillionth and written " $\frac{2}{\infty}$ ").

In elementary school, kids learn how to round numbers. Examples:

7.1 rounded to the nearest integer is 7.

7.9 rounded to the nearest integer is 8.

7.19 rounded to the nearest tenth is 7.2.

In calculus, mathematicians round using a method I call **calculus round (cRound)**.

If a number is positive and infinite, its cRound is a zillion. Examples:
 The cRound of “a zillion plus one” is a zillion, so $\text{cRound}(\infty+1) = \infty$.
 The cRound of “a zillion minus one” is a zillion, so $\text{cRound}(\infty-1) = \infty$.
 The cRound or “two zillion” is a zillion, so $\text{cRound}(2\infty) = \infty$.

If a number is negative infinite, its cRound is “minus a zillion.” Example:
 $\text{cRound}(-\infty+1) = -\infty$.

If a number is finite, its cRound is the closest number that’s normal (doesn’t involve infinitesimals). Examples (using ϵ to mean $1/\infty$, assuming kids are old enough to do Greek):
 $\text{cRound}(7+\epsilon) = 7$
 $\text{cRound}(7-\epsilon) = 7$
 $\text{cRound}(7+2\epsilon) = 7$
 $\text{cRound}(\epsilon) = 0$
 $\text{cRound}(2\epsilon) = 0$
 $\text{cRound}(\epsilon^2) = 0$

In old-fashioned calculus, the word “**limit**” is defined in a long-winded way, starting with “for every epsilon there exists a delta such that.” But in my zillion calculus, we can define “limit” to mean just cRound. More precisely, define “the limit, as x approaches p , of $f(x)$ ” to mean the result of this 3-step procedure:

Step 1: write $f(x)$.
 Step 2: switch the x to $p+\epsilon$, so you have $f(p+\epsilon)$.
 Step 3: cRound the result of step 2, so you have $\text{cRound}(f(p+\epsilon))$.

So here’s the definition:

$$\lim_{x \rightarrow p} f(x) = \text{cRound}(f(p+\epsilon))$$

That definition requires no “delta”! That definition works if p is ∞ or $-\infty$ or a normal number (such as 7).

In my zillion calculus, we can define “the **derivative** of $f(x)$ ” to mean just the cRound of “ $f(x+\epsilon)-f(x)$, all that divided by ϵ ,” like this:

$$f'(x) = \text{cRound}((f(x+\epsilon)-f(x))/\epsilon)$$

That definition involves no “delta,” no “limit,” and no “ p ,” so it lets you compute the derivative much faster than old-fashioned methods.

Minimal method Gee, infinity can be scary: so many kinds of infinite numbers! To do elementary calculus simply, fuck infinity: let’s have no infinite numbers at all! Let’s have just the minimal necessary to do elementary calculus: a special number, called **epsilon** (written “ ϵ ”).

Epsilon is tiny. It’s tinier than any fraction you encountered in elementary school: it’s tinier than $1/10$, tinier than $1/100$, tinier than $1/1000$, etc. It’s so tiny that when you multiply it by itself, it disappears, poof! Here’s the equation: $\epsilon^2=0$. Physicists brag about “black holes,” where things *seem* to disappear, but we mathematicians have epsilon, whose square really *does* disappear!

So how do you make a number system that includes epsilon and lets you do calculus, all in a reasonable way? It’s easy! It’s even easier than the crap they teach in high school’s algebra 2 class about “imaginary numbers.” In algebra 2, they teach you to draw a horizontal ruler (an x axis) labeled 0, 1, 2, etc., and draw a vertical ruler (a y axis) labeled 0, 1i, 2i, 3i, etc. Do the same thing for my minimal method, but write “ ϵ ” instead of “ i ”, so the vertical ruler is labeled 0, 1ϵ , 2ϵ , 3ϵ , etc. In algebra 2, they teach you to invent numbers of the form $x+yi$, such as $3+7i$; in my minimal method, invent numbers of the form $x+y\epsilon$, such as $3+7\epsilon$. In algebra 2, they teach you to add, subtract, and multiply numbers in the obvious way, but remembering that $i^2=-1$; in my minimal method, you can add, subtract, and multiply numbers in the obvious way, but remember that $\epsilon^2=0$.

Inventing “ i ” simplified algebra, by making the quadratic formula more understandable. Inventing ϵ simplifies calculus, by making derivatives more understandable.

For you math nerds, here’s a formal explanation...

To use ϵ , construct the **extended real numbers**, which consist of numbers of the form $a + b\epsilon$ (where “ a ” and “ b ” are ordinary “real” numbers). Add and multiply extended real numbers as you’d expect (bearing in mind that ϵ^2 is 0), like this:

$$(a + b\epsilon) + (c + d\epsilon) = (a+c) + (b+d)\epsilon$$

$$(a + b\epsilon) \cdot (c + d\epsilon) = ac + (ad+bc)\epsilon$$

For example:

$$(9+12\epsilon) + (2+4\epsilon) = 11+16\epsilon$$

$$(9+12\epsilon) \cdot (2+4\epsilon) = 18 + (36+24)\epsilon, \text{ which is } 18+60\epsilon$$

You can define order:

“ $a+b\epsilon < c+d\epsilon$ ” means “ $a < c$ or ($a=c$ and $b < d$)”

Those definitions of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and order obey the traditional “rules of algebra” except for one rule: in traditional algebra, every non-zero number has a reciprocal (a number you can multiply it by to get 1), but unfortunately ϵ has no reciprocal.

If x is an extended real number, it has the form $a + b\epsilon$, where a and b are each real. The a is called the **real part of x** . For example, the real part of $3 + 7\epsilon$ is 3.

A number is called **infinitesimal** if its real part is 0. For example, ϵ and 2ϵ are infinitesimal; so is 0.

Infinitesimals are useful because they let you define the “derivative” of $f(x)$ easily, by computing $f(x+\epsilon)$:

Define the **differential of $f(x)$** , which is written **$d f(x)$** , to mean **$f(x+\epsilon) - f(x)$** . For example, dx^2 is $(x+\epsilon)^2-x^2$, which is $(x^2+2x\epsilon+\epsilon^2)-x^2$, which is $2x\epsilon$ (since $\epsilon^2=0$), which is $2x dx$ (since dx turns out to be ϵ).

Define the **derivative of $f(x)$** to mean **$(d f(x))$ divided by ϵ** . For example, the derivative of x^2 is $(2x\epsilon)/\epsilon$, which is $2x$. The definition of the derivative of $f(x)$ can also be written as $(d f(x))/dx$, since dx is ϵ .

Define the **limit, as x approaches p , of $f(x)$** to mean **the real part of $f(p+\epsilon)$** . For example, the limit, as x approaches 0, of x/x is the real part of $(0+\epsilon)/(0+\epsilon)$, which is the real part of ϵ/ϵ , which is the real part of 1, which is 1.

Define **$f(x)$ is continuous at p** to mean:
for all b , $f(p+b\epsilon) - f(p)$ is infinitesimal.
 For example, the function “2 if $x \leq 9$, 3 if $x > 9$ ” isn’t continuous at 9, since $f(9+1\epsilon)-f(9)$ is $3-2$, which is 1, which isn’t infinitesimal.

Define **$f(x)$ is differentiable at p** to mean:
for all b , $f(p+b\epsilon) = f(p) + b$ (the derivative of $f(x)$ at p).

Then calculations & proofs about derivatives and limits become easy, especially when you define $\sin \epsilon$ to be ϵ and define $\cos \epsilon$ to be 1.

I was proud I invented that minimal method. But recently, I discovered the same method was invented in 1873 by William Clifford and named the **dual-number system**. Damn!

Measure theory

People think math is impersonal, but it can get *very* personal. A math theorem changed my whole life and personality, in ways I didn’t expect. Here’s my story....

When I was in elementary school, junior high, and high school, I was good at math, won many awards, got a perfect score on the math SAT, and so got admitted to an Ivy League college (Dartmouth), graduate school (Harvard), and intensely personal further graduate school (Wesleyan University in Connecticut). I invented new ways to do many branches of math and got praised for my discoveries. I thought I was hot stuff. I thought I’d become a top mathematician.

Most of my discoveries got kinda ignored, but finally, in 1973, I made a discovery I figured would make me world-famous: I discovered a way to reduce all of geometry to just 5 axioms, instead of all those stupid axioms Euclid’s gang invented. I figured: hooray, now I’ll definitely be famous! Wow! This is it!

My 5 axioms let you compute the length, area, and volume of anything, even if the thing is an object that’s bent or weird or split into many parts.

Moreover, I proved my 5 axioms achieved math's holy grail, they were perfect, satisfying the 3 goals of math axiomatics: I proved my 5 axioms were consistent (they didn't create any contradictions), complete (no extra axioms would ever be necessary), and independent (all 5 axioms were necessary, none were redundant).

Since I was still just a graduate student, I showed my research to my advisor. My research belonged to a math specialty called "measure theory," but my advisor was not an expert in that specialty, so he told me to mail my results to the expert in that field. I mailed. And waited.

Finally, I got a reply from that expert, who was a professor at Brown University. His letter went something like this:

Yes, your results are very interesting. They were discovered by Kolmogorov in 1917, but don't be discouraged: not everybody can be as great as *the great Kolmogorov!*

I was crushed. I went to the library and looked up what Kolmogorov did. He didn't actually say there were 5 axioms, but his thinking was very similar to mine; he just expressed his result differently. So he deserves at least 80% of the credit, and I deserve at most 20%.

What bugged the hell out of me was: here was a great result, which should have affected the teaching of geometry in a big way, but nobody knew and nobody cared. I noticed I could write the most profound things about math, and nobody cared, not even the math professors; but I could write the stupidest things about computers (such as where to find the power button), and everybody wanted a copy of *them*.

That experience convinced me that math was a dead-end occupation, so I switched my allegiance from math to computers and became famous for writing about computers, not math.

That was in the 1970's, when math professors were losing their jobs (because people cared less about math and more about feminism, the environment, and antiwar protests), and so math professors had to learn about computers instead (which were just starting to become popular and personal).

But ever since, I've missed my old love: math! And now the tide has turned: everybody already knows about computers, but not enough people know enough about math, so I wish I could become a math guy again.

I'll try.

Thanks for listening. Here are the 5 axioms.

But wait! The axioms are a bit hard for normal humans to understand, so (assuming you're normal and not a mashed-up mathematician) I'll start with a simplified version of the axioms first, then give you the whole gory story.

To simplify, I'll start by talking about just area. (Later I'll show how rewriting the axioms, just slightly, lets them also cover length & volume.) So to start, here are the 5 axioms about area.

But wait! I must confess: the axioms assume you own a sheet of graph paper, and you know how to plot points on it if I tell you the coordinates.

So here are the 5 axioms, as they apply to area:

Unit axiom: the area of the unit square, whose corners are at the points (0,0), (0,1), (1, 1), and (1,0), is 1. Here's how that axiom is written in math notation: area of $[0,1][0,1] = 1$.

Sum axiom: if S and T are two objects (sets), and they're separated from each other (so the distance from S to T is more than 0), then the sum of their areas equals the total area of their combo (their union). Here's that axiom in math notation: if $d(S,T) > 0$ then the area of S + the area of T = the area of SUT.

Extended sum axiom: if you have a bunch of objects (which might overlap and might be infinitely many), the sum of their areas is at least as much as the area of their combo (their union). Let's call those objects S_1, S_2, S_3 , etc. Here's that axiom in math notation: the area of S_1 + the area of S_2 + the area of S_3 + ... \geq the area of $S_1 \cup S_2 \cup S_3 \cup \dots$. Here's that axiom in

fancier math notation, where the symbol " Σ " means "sum":

$$\sum_{i=1}^{\infty} \text{the area of } S_i \geq \text{the area of } \bigcup_{i=1}^{\infty} S_i$$

Moving axiom: if S can fit in T (by moving and maybe stretching S, so all of S's points become part of T, but the distance between S's points doesn't decrease), the area of S is no more than the area of T. Here's that axiom in math notation: if S can fit in T, the area of S \leq the area of T. Here's that axiom in fancier math notation: if there exists a function f that maps S into T and such that "for all p and q in S, $d(p,q) \leq d(f(p),f(q))$," then the area of S \leq the area of T.

Borel axiom: this axiom is relatively unimportant, and you can ignore it, since it won't help you compute the area of any popular shape; but I had to include it to handle wacko shapes and make the list of axioms complete. It says that if the area of S is less than r, then S fits in some "Borel subset T of the plane R^2 " whose area is also less than r. What's a "Borel subset"? That's a long story! The axiom's main effect is: if you're debating whether S's area is big or small, and the other axioms don't answer that question (because S is weird), S's area is big.

Those axioms get you the area of *any* shape, even if the shape doesn't fit on graph paper (because the shape is infinitely big or is a 3-dimensional curve or a cube or even a science-fiction type that involves *more* than 3 dimensions), and even if the shape is just a bunch of scattered dots (such as all points whose coordinates are integers, or all points whose coordinates are rational numbers, or all points whose coordinates are irrational numbers).

In those 5 axioms, if you change the word "area" to "volume," you get the 5 axioms about volume. If you change the word "area" to "length," you get the 5 axioms about length.

Instead of saying "length," mathematicians often say "the 1-dimensional measure" or " m_1 ". Instead of saying, "area," mathematicians often say "the 2-dimensional measure" or " m_2 ". Instead of saying "volume," mathematicians often say "the 3-dimensional measure" or " m_3 ".

Those 5 axioms can be applied to k-dimensional measure, m_k , no matter whether k is 1, 2, 3, or even (in science fiction) bigger than k. So here are those 5 axioms, written in the most general form:

Unit axiom: $m_k [0,1]^k = 1$

Sum axiom: if $d(S,T) > 0$ then $m_k S + m_k T = m_k SUT$

Extended sum axiom:

$$\sum_{i=1}^{\infty} m_k S_i \geq m_k \bigcup_{i=1}^{\infty} S_i$$

Moving axiom: Suppose S can fit in T. In other words, suppose there exists a function f that maps S into T and such that for all p and q in S, $d(p,q) \leq d(f(p),f(q))$. Then $m_k S \leq m_k T$

Borel axiom: if $m_k S < r$, then S fits in some Borel subset T of R^k such that $m_k T < r$

When written that way, those 5 axioms are brief but powerful.

Are they powerful enough to really replace all of Euclid's axioms? No, because they have 3 kinds of limitations:

They assume you already know a lot: they assume you know how to add numbers, decide which numbers are bigger than others, make unions, plot coordinates, compute distances, and decide which subsets are Borel.

The axioms compute the length, width, and height of an object just if you know what the object's coordinates are.

The axioms don't compute the sizes of angles.

Chat

If you want to chat about any of that stuff, call my cell phone (603-666-6644) anytime (24 hours). I'll be glad to give more details, explain more clearly, or listen to your objections.

Formal algebra

Here are the best definitions, axioms, and theorems for formalizing the elementary part of high-school algebra. It assumes you know the meaning of these logic words:

"and", "or", "it is false that", "if", "then", "assuming" (which means "if"), "iff" (pronounced "if and only if" or "is equivalent to"), "you can switch it to", "it means"

To save you time reading this yucky stuff, I won't bother writing "proofs" and "examples" here, but phone me at 603-666-6644 anytime you want free help!

Equality

In "a=b", the "=" is pronounced "is" or "equals" or "is equal to". It's primitive (which means it's undefined).

It leads to these **definitions**:

"a = b = c" means "a=b and b=c"

"≠" is pronounced "isn't" or "is not" or "unequals" or "differs from" or "is unequal to" or "isn't equal to" or "doesn't equal" or "is not equal to" or "does not equal" or "is different from". "a≠b" means "it is false that a=b".

Here are the **axioms (fundamental properties)**:

Reflexive: a = a

Substitution: if a=b, you can switch "a" to "b"

Those definitions and axioms lead to these **theorems (consequences that can be proved)**:

a=b iff b=a
if a=b=c then a=c
a=b or a≠b

New:

Older books have two more axioms ("a=b iff b=a" and "if a=b=c then a=c"), but I prove those statements and make them theorems.

One

"1" is pronounced "one". It's primitive.

Addition

In "a+b", the "+" is pronounced "plus" or "added to" or "more than" or "increased by". It's primitive.

Definitions:

"2" is pronounced "two" and means "1+1".
"3" is pronounced "three" and means "2+1".
"4" is pronounced "four" and means "3+1".
"5" is pronounced "five" and means "4+1".
"6" is pronounced "six" and means "5+1".
"7" is pronounced "seven" and means "6+1".
"8" is pronounced "eight" and means "7+1".
"9" is pronounced "nine" and means "8+1".
"a+b+c" means "(a+b)+c"

Axiom:

Backwards: a+b+c = c+b+a

Negative

In "-a", the "-" is pronounced "minus" or "negative". It's primitive.

Definitions:

"a - b" is pronounced "a minus b" or "a subtract b" or "a take away b" or "a decreased by b". It means "a + -b".

"0" is pronounced "zero" and means "1 - 1"

"-a + b" means "(-a) + b"

New:

Old-fashioned books leave 0 undefined, but I define 0 to be 1-1.

Axiom:

Disappearing: a+(b-b) = a

Simple theorems:

a+0 = a	a - a = 0
a+b = b+a	a + -a = 0
0+a = a	-0 = 0
0 - a = -a	a - 0 = a

Theorems involving the associative law:

a+(b+c) = a+b+c	
2+2 = 4	3+3 = 6
3+2 = 5	4+3 = 7
4+2 = 6	5+3 = 8
5+2 = 7	6+3 = 9
6+2 = 8	4+4 = 8
7+2 = 9	5+4 = 9

New:

Old-fashioned books give 4 axioms about addition: a+b=b+a, a+(b+c)=(a+b)+c, a+0=a, and a+-a=0. But I prove all 4 of those statements from the **backwards and disappearing axioms** (which I invented), so my 2 axioms replace the traditional 4.

Theorems about solving equations:

a=b iff a+c = b+c	a-b=x iff x+b=a
a=b iff a-c = b-c	a+x=0 iff x=-a
x+a=b iff x=b-a	a+x=0 iff -a=x

Theorems about double negatives:

--a = a
a - -b = a + b

Theorems involving three negatives:

-(a+b) = -a + -b
-(a-b) = b-a

Theorems about negating both sides:

a=b iff -a=-b
-x=a iff x=-a

Theorems about solving simultaneous equations:

(a=b and c=d) iff (a=b and a+c=b+d)
(a=b and c=d) iff (a=b and a-c=b-d)

Positivity

In the phrase "a is positive", the "is positive" is primitive.

Definitions:

">" is pronounced "exceeds" or "is more than" or "is larger than" or "is bigger than" or "is greater than". "a > b" means "a-b is positive".

"a > b > c" means "a>b and b>c"

"<" is pronounced "undercuts" or "is less than" or "is smaller than". "a < b" means "b > a".

"a < b < c" means "a<b and b<c"

"≥" is pronounced "grequals" or "is at least" or "is more than or equals" or "is more than or equal to" or "is greater than or equals" or "is greater than or equal to". "a ≥ b" means "a>b or a=b".

"≤" is pronounced "lequals" or "is at most" or "is less than or equals" or "is less than or equal to" or "is smaller than or equals" or "is smaller than or equal to". "a ≤ b" means "a<b or a=b".

"a is negative" means "-a is positive"
"a is real" means "a is positive or negative or 0"
"a is full" means "a≥1 or a≤-1 or a=0"

New:

Old-fashioned books make "a<b" undefined and write axioms about "a<b"; but I define "a<b" to mean "b>a", which I define to mean "b-a is positive," so I write axioms about "is positive" instead. My approach leads to fewer axioms.

Axioms:

One positive: 1 is positive
Sum positive: if a and b are positive, so is a+b
Zero not positive: 0 is not positive
Sum real: if a and b are real, so is a+b

Theorems about "positive":

2 is positive	6 is positive
3 is positive	7 is positive
4 is positive	8 is positive
5 is positive	9 is positive

Theorems about "not":

if a is positive then a≠0
1 ≠ 0
1 ≠ 2
if a is positive, -a is not positive

Theorems about ">":

a>0 iff a is positive
a>b iff a+c>b+c
a>b iff a-c>b-c
if a>b>c then a>c
if a>b and c>d then a+c>b+d
if a>b and c is positive then a+c>b
"a>a" is false
if a>b then "b>a" is false

Theorems about "<":

0<a iff a is positive
a<b iff a+c<b+c
a<b iff a-c<b-c
if a<b<c then a<c
if a<b and c<d then a+c<b+d
if a<b and c is positive then a+c<b+c
"a<a" is false
if a<b then "b<a" is false
a<b iff -a>-b

Government

Our country is run by **lawyers**, who write & analyze laws requested by **politicians**, who start **wars**. Let's peek at those lawyers, their politicians, and their wars.

Political philosophies

Why do they call it "politics"? Because discussing it gets Aunt Polly ticked.

Conservative's lament

Conservatives say:

If you're young and not a liberal, you haven't got a heart.
But if you're old and not conservative, you haven't got a brain!

That quote was attributed to Winston Churchill (Britain's prime minister during World War 2), but according to his fans, there's no record he ever said it. That thought was expressed by many people, including a French historian in the 1800's. I call it the **Conservative's lament**.

The lament is correct. Young people, forever optimistic, believe that the world will be a beautiful place if you treat everybody kindly and liberally. Old people, who've been mugged and cheated by many "nice-looking" people, become cynical.

Examples:

When President Jimmy Carter and I were young, we both believed the Soviets would treat the rest of the world kindly if the rest of the world would treat them kindly. But then the Soviets, without provocation, invaded Afghanistan. I was disillusioned, and Jimmy Carter was voted out of office.

When I was young, I believed that all people who claimed to be poor should be given generous welfare benefits. But after I chatted with many welfare recipients who used their money to eat in fancy restaurants, buy drugs, and visit prostitutes, I grew more cynical about the needs of the "needy." Sure, there are members of society who are truly desperate and do need welfare money; and sure, the rich have a moral obligation to give large sums of money to the truly needy poor. But when I see the large percentage of welfare recipients who abuse and even laugh at the system, I want to cry.

When the governor of Alabama, George Wallace, was young, he ran for office on a platform of being nice to blacks. He even kissed black babies. He lost the race. Then he changed his tune, became a cynical anti-black segregationist, ran for office again, and — because he was a cynical segregationist — won! Although I don't recommend imitating him (since segregation is immoral), his life proves one point: cynicism pays.

Why Democrats make me smile

Democrats tend to be liberal, and Republicans tend to be conservative. But what is "liberal," and what is "conservative"? What's the difference?

The answer used to be simple:

Republicans were rich.
Democrats were poor.

Republicans were conservative, to preserve their wealth and status.
Democrats were wild, because they wanted to *change* their status.

In 1974, Representative Craig Hosmer (Republican from California) published a funny list of those differences in the Congressional Record. He got it from a source that wished to remain anonymous. Several people tried updating (or censoring) that list (especially Rowland Nethaway, senior editor of the Waco Texas *Tribune-Herald*, in 1998). Here's my own attempt to update that list further:

Republicans raise dahlias, Dalmatians, and eyebrows.
Democrats raise hell, kids, and taxes.

Republicans employ exterminators.
Democrats step on the bugs.

Republicans go fishing on their boats.
Democrats stay fishing at the docks.

Democrats eat the fish they catch.
Republicans hang them on the wall.

Republicans grab financial pages and love them.
Democrats grab financial pages and shove them — into bird cages.

Republicans consume ¾ of all rutabaga produced in this country.
Democrats throw out the rest.

Republicans follow the plans their grandfathers made.
Democrats make up their own plans — but ignore them.

Democrats take individual delight in reading banned books.
Republicans form censorship committees to read those books as groups.

Democrats give their worn-out clothes to the less fortunate.
So do Republicans, who are smarter and take the tax deduction.

The junk along the road was thrown from car windows by Democrats,
but can't be seen by Republicans from the back of their limos.

Democrats name their kids after athletes, entertainers, and politicians.
Republicans name their kids after the richest ancestors.

Republicans close their curtains at night — but needn't bother.
Democrats leave their curtains open — to amuse Republicans.

Republican boys date Democrat girls.
They plan to marry Republican girls but feel entitled to a little fun first.

Republicans sleep in twin beds, often in separate rooms.
That's why there are more Democrats.

But recently, it's become less true that most Republicans are rich and most Democrats are poor. To predict how a person will vote, don't ask about the person's income; instead, ask about church attendance: Protestant "churchgoers" (who attend church at least once a week) tend to vote Republican.

Researchers recently discovered an even more accurate way to determine who'll vote Republican: ask what kind of God the voter believes in. If the voter believes God is vengeful (punishes sinners and other "bad people"), the voter will probably vote Republican; if the voter believes God is forgiving (like Jesus) or laissez-faire (he created the world but then left it alone), the voter will probably vote Democrat.

According to Democrat analysts, Republicans believe government should be like a stern father (tough police enforcement) while Democrats believe government should be like a loving mother (kind to the helpless). Why can't we have both?

It's exciting to be extreme. The ultimate Republican male would say to his daughter:

What? You're pregnant! No, you're *not* going to have an abortion! I forbid it. You're going to keep that baby for the rest of your life and suffer for it. Your life will be tough, miserable. That'll teach you not to be the irresponsible woman you are!

The ultimate Democrat female would say to a jailbird:

What? You're a mass murderer and killed 200 people? I feel sorry for you. You must have had bad parents, a bad upbringing, bad friends. You got cheated out of learning how to have a good life. The rest of your life will be full of pain. I feel sad for you. Let me pat you on the back. Let me hug you. Here, have a cookie.

Left-right issues

American voters have been arguing about the following issues recently.

Income inequality Should the rich pay higher taxes? Leftists say yes, are called **progressive taxers**, and say:

The rich should be nicer to the poor. The rich should offer to *donate* to the poor, but some rich folks are stingy and should be *required* to donate; the simplest way is to charge them higher taxes. Karl Marx said the perfect society would act as a friendly team: each person would contribute as much as able and receive as much as needed, so wealth should be distributed more equally.

Though some people got rich by working hard, others got rich just by luck: gambling, the stock market, having rich parents, or having parents that provided a good education, or being in the right place at the right time with the right idea about how to make money. Other folks had worse luck (maybe from medical bills) and should get help from the government, paid for by contributions from the lucky.

Rightists say no, are called **flat taxers**, and say:

If you tax the rich heavily, people won't try to get rich, so people won't try to work hard, so they'll become lazy bums looking for government handouts.

A simple, flat tax, where everybody pays the same percentage of income, is a great idea and fair. The Bible says each person should be taxed at a flat 10%, or maybe even 24%, not more. Charity beyond that should be voluntary. High praise for giving to charity will encourage the rich to give more, so they become truly moral people.

Minimum wage Should the minimum wage be increased a lot? Leftists say yes:

A person who works a full 40 hours per week should be paid a "living wage": enough to pay the living costs for a family of 4 (that person plus 2 kids plus a spouse to manage the kids & household).

The current federal minimum wage (which in 2021 is still just \$7.25 per hour) is too low to handle that. In expensive cities such as New York City, you need at least \$15 per hour to support a family of 4, unless you work a lot more than 40 hours per week, but that's inhuman! God said everybody deserves at least 1 day of the week for rest.

Raising the minimum wage will help the economy, because a higher minimum wage will give workers more money to spend (so sales will increase) and reduce the need for welfare money & food stamps. It's better to let workers earn a living wage than charge taxpayers to give workers welfare handouts.

Rightists say no:

If you raise the minimum wage, companies can't afford to pay that wage so will hire fewer workers and try to rely on machines instead. The workers you're trying to help will wind up unemployed instead.

Not all companies are rich enough to pay everybody high. Many companies are small, run by entrepreneurs who'll go bankrupt if their costs skyrocket. Raising the minimum wage will put many companies out of business.

If your company raises the bottom employees to \$15 per hour, all other employees will want raises also, since they're better than the bottom, so payroll costs will rise through the roof, and the company must raise prices to compensate, thereby causing inflation, so money that retirees saved will be worth less.

It's best to let companies be flexible about how much to pay. If you're a kid who never had a job before, a company might be willing to give you your first job at a low starting pay but with a promise to pay you higher when you get good, as the company trains you how to improve. If the company is forced instead to pay you a high minimum wage, the company will decide you're not worth that much yet, so the computer won't hire you at all and won't train you. A company should have the right to pay trainees less than regular workers, since trainees get free training from the company.

Some leftists are willing to "compromise" by saying trainees can get paid less than minimum wage if the trainees are called "interns," but then you create a bureaucratic nightmare by creating complicated hoops the company must go through to prove somebody's an "intern." Just get off our backs and let us companies pay people what they deserve. If a worker does well, we'll pay the worker more, partly to show appreciation and partly to prevent the worker from jumping to another company that pays more.

If the worker needs more cash, the worker can hold 2 or 3 part-time jobs simultaneously until the worker gets skilled enough to earn higher pay. Holding several jobs simultaneously gives the worker a chance to try several careers to see which career is the best match.

The federal government can't create a high minimum wage that's fair in all regions. The cost of living in New York City is quite different than living in a rural area, where a "living wage" is much less. Let each city create its own minimum wage, rather than have the federal government treat the whole country as a single blob. Better yet, don't have any minimum wage at all!

Unions Should union membership be encouraged? Leftists say yes, are called **pro-union**, and say:

Workers should have the right to band together to form unions. The Constitution guarantees the right to free assembly & free speech. Unions can confront stingy bosses to demand higher pay & better working conditions & benefits.

In many companies, if workers don't unionize to complain, the management continues to do evil. A solo worker who complains about working conditions might get fired for being a nuisance, but an organized union complaining about working conditions can force managers to be nice, by threatening a strike that would shut down the company and hurt the managers.

Unions are needed, to balance the power between workers & employers.

Suppose *most* of a company's workers join a union that achieves better benefits for *all* workers. The workers who haven't joined the union should be required to help pay for the union's management: join the union or pay a fee to the union, for services rendered.

Rightists say no, are called **right-to-work supporters** (and **union-busters**), and say:

In many unions, membership dues are too high and go straight to the pockets of the union's managers, who are assholes that love fighting against the company's owners instead of peacefully negotiating a deal that pleases *everybody*.

Forcing all employees to join a union and pay union dues & fees is effectively putting an unwanted tax on all employees. Instead of forming an expensive union to threaten the company's owners, a bunch of employees should first go together, as a group, to the owners to air grievances humbly, before getting into a unionized shouting match.

Employees should have the right to *not* join a union and *not* bribe the union's managers to start fights. That's called "right to work" and freedom!

Immigration Should the government be kinder to immigrants? Leftists say yes:

This country was founded by immigrants. We're all either immigrants or descended from immigrants, unless you're a pure Native American. We should treat immigrants as nicely as we were treated in our own lives. Immigrants who snuck into this country did so because life was unbearable in the countries they came from. If you lived in one of those countries, you'd try to sneak into this country too!

Some immigrants were little kids dragged here by their parents. Those kids grew up here; America is their home. If you throw them out, they'll have an unreasonably tough time adjusting back to the countries they came from.

If a kid was born in the U.S., the kid's legally an American citizen. If the kid's parents snuck to the U.S., it's unreasonable to send the parents back to their old countries and have the kid get put in a foster home here, at government expense. It's more reasonable to let the parents stay here to take care of the kid.

In some families, the grandparents, parents, and kids all have different legal statuses from each other, because of the peculiarities of U.S. immigration laws. It's unreasonable to split up those families.

Our government doesn't have enough time & money to chase the 11 million illegal immigrants onto busses & planes and transport them all back to their original countries. It's cheaper to let the illegal immigrants stay here, make them pay taxes, and make them get drivers licenses if they try to drive.

Some immigrants came here legally but then overstayed their visas because they love this country so much. Must we be so mean to people who love us? Taxing them should be enough.

Rightists say no:

This country was founded on the basis of laws. People who break laws should be arrested. If we don't arrest illegal immigrants now, many more illegal immigrants will come and magnify the problem. Stop this madness now! Some immigrants come here to get free schooling & housing & better jobs, but they hide in the underground economy and don't contribute any taxes to pay for the benefits they receive.

Most of our ancestors came here legally. The new immigrants should do the same. It's unfair that some immigrants snuck in while the better immigrants tried to go through the legal process, had to wait a long time because of paperwork and quotas, then got rejected for reasons that weren't their fault. Maybe increase the quotas a bit for legal immigrants, but don't let in hordes of potential criminals, terrorists, tax cheaters, and welfare burdens. We can't afford it.

If you let in too many immigrants, they'll start by taking low-paying jobs, so fewer jobs will be left for poor Americans, who'll become even poorer.

Trade Should cheap imports from other countries be stopped? Leftists say yes, are called **protectionist**, and say:

Discount retailers, such as Walmart, get too many of their supplies from China, Vietnam, and other countries. Walmart should be more patriotic and buy more American-made goods instead!

American farmers & factory workers want to sell to Walmart but face unfair competition from other countries, where wages are shamefully lower, working conditions are unfair & hellish, and products are made in ways that are unsanitary & bad for the environment. Unfair competition from other countries drives American wages down, causes American factories to move to other countries, and makes American workers unemployed.

Stop buying foreign crap!

Rightists say no, are called **free-traders**, and say:

We should keep buying from other countries.

If we buy less from other countries, those countries will retaliate by creating their own taxes, tariffs, and trade barriers to prevent their citizens from buying from us. Then we'll have a harder time exporting what we make here, so American workers will be worse off.

If American workers want to be paid more than foreign workers, American workers must learn how to produce goods that have higher quality.

We should think internationally: competitive trade makes the whole world a better place. Trading freely with other countries makes those countries like us, so we don't have to spend so much on our military & war. Happy trading makes friends, who become tourists, who pay us money. Win-win.

Military Should the U.S. shrink its military? Leftists say yes, are called **doves** (and **peaceniks**), and say:

Spend less money to create wars. Spend more on education and other human services instead.

When two countries fight each other, we should help the good guys but not get involved heavily. If we try to act as the world's policeman, people worldwide will call us "bullies," hate us even more, and start more wars against what we stand for.

Give peace a chance. Negotiate. Use diplomacy. Try harder to find clever ways to please both sides of conflicts. Lead by example: show the benefits of peace.

We must defend ourselves, but let the U.N. handle international crises. That's what the U.N. is for.

Rightists say no, are called **hawks** (and **war mongers**), and say:

If our military is weak, lots of bad guys will find openings to blast at us. Look at 9/11. If we'd bombed the hell out of the jihadists, they wouldn't have grown into the terrorist nightmare they've become. As long as there are nutcases willing to start wars, it's our responsibility to destroy them before they destroy us.

The U.N. is mostly useless. Whenever a bad guy does something and the U.N. votes on how to react, the U.N. usually votes to do nothing, because either the security council or the general U.N. membership has enough objectors to block any action beyond giving cute speeches or a token slap on the wrist. If we want something definitive accomplished, we must do it ourselves and bypass the U.N.

Guns Should guns be limited to just the police & military? Leftists say yes:

Guns are too dangerous and should be banned. Too many people die from homicides & suicides caused by guns.

Background checks are inadequate to stop bad guys from getting guns, so all guns should be turned in, no guns sold.

Rightists say no:

People should be allowed to keep guns, especially in rural areas, for several reasons: hunt animals for food, kill animals who are dangerous, protect homes against burglars, protect pedestrians against robbers, and protect women against rapists.

Police can't get to danger spots fast enough to stop the bad guys, so we citizens must have the right to protect ourselves. The Constitution's 2nd amendment gives us the right to bear arms.

If gun ownership is made criminal, then just criminals will have guns, and the world will be more dangerous. If good guys can keep guns, criminals will think twice before attacking good guys who might have guns.

People who are mentally ill should get therapy, which is more effective than laws trying to restrict everybody.

Eliminating guns is impossible, since smugglers will just import guns from other places and sell them to bad guys here.

Marijuana Should selling & smoking marijuana be legal? Leftists say yes:

Marijuana is a helpful tool, prescribed by wise doctors to reduce chronic pain. Like alcohol, marijuana should be permitted if used in moderation by adults.

Smoking marijuana is less harmful to your body than smoking tobacco and eating high-fat foods such as bacon. Since adults are allowed to smoke tobacco and eat bacon, adults should be allowed to moderately smoke marijuana, to be consistent. Legalizing marijuana, with moderate controls and tracking of who's selling it, will stop gun-toting criminal pushers who scare law-abiding citizens.

Rightists say no:

Marijuana is a gateway drug to heroin and cocaine. People who get in the habit or smoking marijuana are more likely to "graduate" to heroin and cocaine, to get even higher, then get themselves into legal & medical trouble and a life of gun-toting crime. Stop adults & kids from getting hooked on marijuana, an addiction that leads to dangerous escalation. Government should protect the innocent from getting hooked on bad habits.

Marijuana prevents the brain from thinking clearly. If you use marijuana before driving a car or operating machinery, you increase your chance of causing an accident. If you use marijuana before thinking, you're more likely to say something stupid that can haunt your life forever.

Marijuana can be more deadly than alcohol, because marijuana's effects haven't been studied as thoroughly yet.

Don't risk your life. Don't put our society at risk. Don't use or permit marijuana.

If you need a pain killer, get it from a doctor prescribing a *tiny* dose of a pain pill; don't take marijuana, whose potency can vary dangerously.

If you smoke marijuana, your non-inhaling neighbors will complain: they dislike the smell and should have the right to avoid it. Many places have laws against smoking tobacco in public places; legalizing marijuana will mean creating complicated laws against smoking marijuana in public places. We don't want even more laws, do we?

Abortion Should abortions be allowed? Leftists say yes, are called **pro-choice**, and say:

A woman should be able to choose what happens to her body and what's inside it. The government should keep its hands off a woman's body. Prohibiting abortion discriminates against women.

Though late-term abortions are disgusting & repulsive, sometimes they're needed to save the mother's life & sanity and prevent the birth of a baby who wouldn't be cared for enough. If a woman gets pregnant, abortion should be permitted at least in the first few weeks, when the fetus is just a few cells, has no personality yet, and isn't truly a person. If the woman got pregnant from getting raped or drunk or stupid or an accident, she shouldn't be forced to suffer though many years of a motherhood she wasn't prepared for.

Rightists say no, are called **pro-life**, and say:

Abortion is murder. It's murdering a human. When an egg meets a sperm, it becomes a person. The Bible says don't murder the innocent; it says be kind to the helpless, don't murder them. If abortion is allowed, kids & adults will have sex too freely, knowing they can just kill the baby.

If it's okay to kill an innocent baby, how about a toddler or schoolkid or an adult? Where will the killing stop? End killing immediately, as soon as the egg meets the sperm.

If the woman doesn't want the baby, she can put it up for adoption. She shouldn't just kill it.

Gay marriage Should gay marriage be legal? Leftists say yes:

If two people love each other, they should be able to live together and express their love to each other.

People whose hormones or backgrounds make them gay shouldn't be discriminated against. The Constitution protects freedom of expression.

The most *complete* person would be able to love *everybody*, be bisexual, and choose a favorite to be married to, without government nagging to love differently.

Rightists say no:

The Bible says marriage is between a man and a woman. Marriage should stay that way, as God said.

The Constitution intended just male-female relationships. If we make it too easy to get married, people will marry their friends just to get tax breaks and dishonest medical benefits for "spouses."

Gay sex is disgusting, leads to AIDS. Stop it before good Christians vomit.

Religious symbols Should religious symbols be removed from public property? Leftists say yes:

The United States is supposed to be a melting pot, accepting people from all religions. The Constitution guarantees religious freedom. Muslims, Hindus, atheists, and other non-Christians shouldn't be forced to pay taxes to fund Christian symbols.

Government buildings and government-funded parks should avoid religious displays, which intimidate their visitors to switch religions. They discriminate against people with different religions. Religious discrimination is illegal! Religious symbols should be displayed just on religious properties and at homes of religious people.

Companies should avoid religious symbols unless all prospective employees & customers have the same religion, which is unlikely. Displaying symbols from a variety of religions might be okay in some museums and art collections, but that might intimidate people whose religions aren't included.

Rightists say no:

This country was founded by God-fearing Christians. References to the Christian God appear throughout our Constitution and laws. I swear to tell the truth "so help me God." Christmas is a federal holiday, and no reasonable person wants to change that.

The Constitution guarantees the right to express yourself, and that includes the right to express your religion. Showing a picture of Jesus is less offensive than what some kids wear nowadays. Anti-religious people should get off our backs!

We agree that we should all be moral & ethical. Religious symbols encourage people to be moral & ethical. Gentle religions make the world a better place and should be encouraged.

If you disagree with our particular religious symbol, we hope you're adult enough to realize our intention is sound. We respect your right to feel differently about religious details, but we hope you're adult enough to respect our own right to express the love that Jesus tried to give the world.

Other issues Here are other issues to argue about:

	Left	Right
Should companies who hurt the environment pay bigger fines?	yes	no
Should the government provide & require health insurance?	yes	no
Should we keep the fancy tax system (breaks & penalties)?	yes	no
Should governments make college be free, like high school?	yes	no
Should governments provide free daycare & preschool?	yes	no
Should private schools be ineligible for government funds?	yes	no
Are donkeys nicer than elephants?	yes	no

Hard to tell

It can be hard to tell whether a person's a Republican or a Democrat, even if that person talks a lot about political issues. *Saturday Night Live* illustrated that conundrum, in a fake game show called "Republican or Not":

[YouTube.com/watch?v=8h_N80qKYOM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8h_N80qKYOM)

Lament by Adler & Stevenson

In 1929, Alfred Adler (the Austrian psychotherapist) wrote:

It's always easier to fight for one's principles than to live up to them.

In 1952, that quote was repeated in a speech by Adlai Stevenson (the brilliant egghead Democrat who ran for president against Eisenhower but lost).

Henry Kissinger (who was Secretary of State) went a step further, by saying:

Corrupt politicians make the other 10% look bad.

Patriotism versus nationalism

What's the difference between patriotism and nationalism? Charles de Gaulle, who was President of France, said:

Patriotism is when love of your people comes first.

Nationalism is when hate for people other than your own comes first.

During the Trump era, the United States unfortunately switched from patriotism to nationalism.

Politician versus statesman

What's the difference between a politician and a statesman? Here are famous quotes (as edited by me).

Back in the 1800's, Harvard Professor James Freeman Clarke started this discussion by saying:

A politician thinks of the next election.

A statesman thinks of the next **generation**.

More recently, Political Consultant James Carville said:

A statesman looks to the next generation.

A politician looks to the next **election**.

A political consultant looks to the next **tracking poll**.

Costa Rican President Óscar Arias said:

A politician says what people want to hear.

A statesman says what people **need to know**.

Walter Lippmann said:

A statesman learns more from his opposition than from fervent supporters.

President Harry Truman said:

A politician understands government.

A statesman is a **politician who's been dead 15 years**.

Bob Edwards said:

A statesman is a **dead politician**. We need more statesmen.

Texas Governor John Connally said:

When you're **out of office**, you can be a statesman.

Harry Truman's Secretary of State (Dean Acheson) said:

A statesman's first requirement is that he be **dull**.

Grover Cleveland's Vice President (Adlai Stevenson the First) said:

A politician is a statesman who approaches every question with an **open mouth**.

British Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin said:

A statesman wants courage & vision, but after 6 months he wants mainly patience.

Robert Dallek said:

There's a certain clubbiness to being an **ex-president**.

You're no longer a politician. You're a statesman.

Earl Wilson said:

The fastest way for a politician to become an elder statesman is to **lose an election**.

British Prime Minister David Lloyd George said:

A politician is a person whose politics you disagree with.

If you **agree** with him, he's a statesman.

British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan said:

At home, you must always be a politician.

Abroad, you feel yourself a statesman.

President Theodore Roosevelt said:

If no war, you don't get a great general.

If no **great occasion**, you don't get a great statesman.

If Lincoln had lived in a time of peace, no one would have known his name.

Connecticut Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz said:

A man who's confident, ambitious, and strong is a statesman and a leader.

A **woman** with those qualities is called a not-so-flattering name.

Details are at:

[BrainyQuote.com/topics/statesman-quotes](https://www.brainyquote.com/topics/statesman-quotes)

Be nice

Kati Preston was born in Hungary in 1939. Her mom was Catholic, but her dad was Jewish and sent by Nazis to the Auschwitz concentration camp. A neighbor hid her, to save her from the same fate.

Now she gives speeches to kids about the Holocaust and the dangers we all still face. Here's a summary of what she told Travis Morin (according to *Hippo* magazine's issue of March 4, 2020, page 6):

I became a journalist and then a fashion designer, but now the only thing that makes me truly happy is to try doing some good for the world.

Today's school-age generation is full of exceptional kids. They're going to save the world.

We're leaving them a lousy deal, but they can change it. All they must do is learn not to hate. **If you don't hate each other, the world is limitless and could be wonderful.**

Today's problem: the erosion of caring & civility. There's too much polarization.

I tell kids: **we're not football teams, we're a country.** Don't say you're going to play for just the blue people or the red people. We're *all* people; we're *all* our brother's keeper and all must look out for each other.

10% of people are wonderful, 10% are awful. But the other **80% are sheep who follow.** They don't make up their own minds; they just listen to TV or look online.

People like to follow, because it's easier than to think things out for yourself. People tend to follow the bully more easily, because all they must do is just stand there and do nothing. If you follow the good person, you tend to have to actually say something or do something good, and it's more of an effort. If people aren't educated & informed, it's easier for the bully to sway the 80% in the wrong direction.

Ben Ferencz's dad sat his kids down every night and asked them, **"What have you done for humanity today?"** When I talk like that to kids in my audience, they get it. Each of us can do something, however small, for humanity.

Be nice to the kid nobody wants to talk to. Open the door for a teacher. Pick up a piece of trash.

Everybody can do something good every day. If you just get into that habit, you become a nice society.

3 Keys to success

Lorne Michaels invented the *Saturday Night Live* TV show. He said (on page 111 of the May 2, 2016 issue of *Time* magazine):

In politics, as in show business, you need 3 things to be successful: **talent, discipline, and luck.**

Canada's prime minister, Justin Trudeau, clearly has the first 2. I wish him luck.

That list of 3 requirements is so true! Many politicians and entertainers have exciting raw **talent**, but to be truly successful you must also **discipline** yourself (by **studying hard, practicing, and keeping focused**) and also have good **luck**, unlike Al Gore, who *almost* became President in the year 2000's Presidential election: he got 543,895 more American votes than George W. Bush but lost the election anyway, just because 537 voting cards weren't punched *clearly* in Florida, a swing state critical to Electoral College counting. A similar fate befell Hillary Clinton, who *almost* became President in the year 2020's Presidential election: she got more American votes than Donald Trump but lost the election anyway because of the Electoral College.

Cynical slogans

In the 1800's, famous for corruption, this cynical slogan arose:

Vote early. Vote often.

Modern politicians follow 4 strategies:

Stand up for your principles — and to succeed, change them.

Speak decisively but without deciding anything.

To win the middle, embrace Joe Six-Pack. He has a big middle.

If you vote for what's right, you won't be left in the race.

Modern candidates urge the public:

Don't vote for who's right. Vote for who'll *win!*

Protest with your heart, but vote with your brain.

Folks fought for your freedom, but don't freely use freedom in ways we don't like!

If you don't vote, you can't complain — but if you vote unwisely, we'll complain about *you!*

Being a politician is difficult. Try saying these slogans out loud:

A **mayor** may **err**.

A **governor** may successfully **govern**, or...

A **president** may set a bad **precedent**.

After an election, a candidate will have a good **morning** or a good **mourning**.

Politicians lie

Politicians always lie, either in a big way or by exaggerating a bit or in a smaller way called "being tactful."

What if a politician were attached to a lie detector? Here's what would happen, according to this 1982 sketch, where comedian Johnny Carson portrays a politician giving a press conference while attached to a lie detector beeping at each lie:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=hef7v6fp_DQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hef7v6fp_DQ)

Here's an abridged transcript of the main part:

First of all, I'd like to say I'm delighted to be here. *Beep!*

I don't mind being here. *Beep!*

I was forced to be here.

Your opponent says you've distorted certain facts about your background.

That's not true. I was born Phillip Cabot Swarthmore the third. *Beep!*

Phillip Cabot Swarthmore the second. *Beep!*

My name is Dicky Frostheimer.

The charge has been made that you falsify your educational background.

I graduated from Harvard University. *Beep!*

I went 2 years to Harvard. *Beep!*

1 year at Harvard. *Beep!*

I took a summer session at Harvard. *Beep!*

I was held back in the 8th grade. *Beep!*

Alright, the 4th grade!

It seems you've taken every opportunity to slander your opponent's character.

Nonsense. I feel my opponent's a decent man. *Beep!*

He's an okay man. *Beep!*

He's a man. *Beep!*

He's bisexual.

Isn't it true you won't subsidize heating bills for our senior citizens this winter?

Absolutely not! No one's more concerned about our senior citizens than I. *Beep!*

There may be some small cutbacks. *Beep!*

Some big cutbacks. *Beep!*

They're gonna freeze their asses off.

It's been alleged your major contributors are corporate fat cats.

That's not true. All my contributions come from the small working man. *Beep!*

From the middle class. *Beep!*

It's all from the Mafia.

What's your position on equal rights for women?

I look forward to a day when all Americans are equal, regardless of sex. *Beep!*

I'm looking forward to a day when they're kinda equal. *Beep!*

I'm looking at your boobs.

It's been rumored you've been having marital problems.

Nonsense. I've been happily married for 25 years. *Beep!*

I've never been with another woman. *Beep!*

Once! *Beep!*

Alright, last night I had 6 Chinese girls on a forklift truck. Are you satisfied?

Are you a bribe-taking, gay, Communist, peeping-Tom, wife beater?

No, no, no, no, no. *Beep!*

2 out of 5 ain't bad. *Beep!*

4 out of 5 ain't bad. *Beep!*

In conclusion, if elected I'll be the most honest candidate ever elected. You can trust me! *Beep!*

Republican language

Republicans appeal to voters by changing the jargon. Here's how the typical voter responds, according to Frank Luntz (a Republican pollster and spin doctor) and Eric Effron (managing editor of *The Week*):

The voter doesn't mind an "estate tax" but opposes it when called a "death tax."
The voter is unsure about "tort reform" but favors it when called "ending lawsuit abuse."
The voter is against "global warming" but accepts it when called "climate change."

The voter is against "government eavesdropping" but accepts it when called "electronic intercepts."
The voter is against "torture" but accepts it when called "aggressive interrogation techniques."

The voter is against the U.S. starting an "invasion" but accepts it when called a "liberation."
The voter is against war's "escalation" but accepts it when called "troop surge."
The voter is against war's "civilian casualties" but accepts them when called "collateral damage."
The voter is against the U.S. being an "occupying power" but accepts it when called a "coalition partner."
The voter is against a U.S. "retreat" but accepts it when called a "phased troop redeployment."

The voter is worried about "civil war" but less worried about it when called "sectarian strife."

According to Mark Kleiman (a Democrat who's a public-policy professor at UCLA) and his friends, here's how Republicans redefine political terms:

Political term	Republican definition
laziness	when the poor aren't working
leisure time	when the rich aren't working
growth	justification for tax cuts for the rich
simplify	reduce (especially the taxes of Republican donors)
compassionate conservatism	poignant concern for the very wealthy
bankruptcy	a means of escaping debt, available to corporations but not poor people
ownership society	civilization where just the owners have power
class warfare	any attempt to raise the minimum wage
alternative energy sources	new places to drill for gas and oil
healthy forest	no tree left behind
climate change	progress toward the blessed day when blue states are swallowed by oceans
voter fraud	a significant minority turnout
honesty	lies told in simple declarative sentences, such as "Freedom is on the march."
stuff happens	I don't have to live in Baghdad
stay the course	continue to perform the same actions and expect different results
pro-life	valuing human life up until birth
woman	a person trusted to raise a child but not to decide whether to have one
No Child Left Behind	ensuring that stupid kids learn enough to get jobs in the military
creation science	theory that Bush's resemblance to a chimpanzee is just coincidental
Patriot Act	preemptive strike on American freedoms, to prevent terrorists from destroying them first

2029

Republicans fear that the year 2029 will have these headlines:

Ozone from electric cars kills millions in 7th largest country, Mexifornia, formerly called California. White minorities still try to get English recognized as Mexifornia's 3rd language.
Castro dies at age 112. Cuban cigars can now be imported legally, but President Chelsea Clinton has banned all smoking.
Baby conceived naturally; scientists stumped. Couple petitions court to reinstate heterosexual marriage.
Spotted-owl plague threatens Northwest crops and livestock. France pleads for global help after being taken over by Jamaica. New federal law requires registering all nail clippers, screwdrivers, fly swatters, and rolled-up newspapers. Postal Service raises price of 1st-class stamp to \$17.89 and reduces mail delivery to just Wednesdays. IRS sets lowest tax rate at 75%. 85-year 75-billion-dollar study says diet & exercise are keys to weight loss. Supreme Court decides: punishing criminals violates their civil rights. Massachusetts executes last remaining conservative.

Emblem

The Internet says the government's decided to change the national emblem from an **eagle** to a **condom**, which more accurately reflects the government's political stance:

It permits inflation, halts production, destroys the next generation, protects a bunch of pricks, and gives you a sense of security while you're actually being screwed.

I'm running

I hereby declare I'm running for President. Like all Presidents, I must walk the plank, so here are the planks of my platform:

To simplify name recognition, I'll change my name to Don L. Trump.

To keep money out of politics, I'll *refuse* donations, spend *no* money on my campaign, and pay *no* filing fees to get on state ballots. Politicians should be generous, not self-serving, so I'll *not* vote for myself and *not* tell people to vote for me. As President, I won't be bribed: I'll accept no gifts, no salary: I'll just volunteer and live on social security.

I'll hear all issues from *both* sides: in one ear, out the other.

I'm in favor of animal rights, so no dogs or other pets will be forced to live in the White House.

To welcome *all* Americans, regardless of sexual orientation, I'll make the White House be colored like a rainbow. It's time to have a Black woman as President, so if elected I'll change my gender and race accordingly! Everyone should have *15 minutes of fame*, so if elected President I pledge to step down after 15 minutes! *All* people should be treated equally, so if I become your President I pledge to make *all* Americans be President too!

To improve international relations, I'll reserve a White House room for Putin, plus rooms for all other major leaders. To create all those rooms in the White House, I'll get rid of the kitchen: I'll make sandwiches at my desk and occasionally order takeout.

After my Presidency, I pledge to *not* become a lobbyist, though if I eat too much I might become a rotunda.

Presidents we've had

Have we been had?

Obama's good point

People are amazed that President Obama was our first multiracial president. But I'm more amazed at something else: he's the first president who was a caring, candid intellectual. Some other presidents were caring, some were candid, some were intellectual, but Obama was the first president that has all 3 qualities simultaneously.

I don't agree with all his decisions, but I liked his style of getting there.

Bush the younger

Let's look back at George W. Bush. We journalists were thrilled when he became president, because he gave us somebody to make fun of!

Imitated Carson Here's why America voted for George W. Bush and made him president: he resembled Johnny Carson. Like Carson, Bush smiled and was a semi-intellectual affable joker.

That's what America wanted in a president: a talk-show host who smiled. That's what America got. But after 8 years, America got tired of seeing the same old smiles and changed channels.

But he's ba-a-a-ck... reincarnated in a new body, called "Trump." Still a talk-show host who smiles... but now infused by the devil's scornful yell.

Bush outsourced While Bush was president, this nasty news flash appeared on the Internet:

Congress announced the Presidency will be outsourced to India. The move's being made to save the president's \$400,000 yearly salary. The office of president will be assumed by Mr. Gurvinder Singh of Indus Teleservices, Mumbai, India. He's eligible for the Presidency because he was born in the U.S. while his Indian parents vacationed at Niagara Falls. He'll be paid \$320 a month but no health coverage or other benefits. Because of the time difference between the U.S. and India, he'll work mainly at night, when most U.S. government offices are closed, and can handle the job without support staff. He said, "Working nights will let me keep my day job at the American Express call center."

Singh isn't fully aware of all presidential issues; but that's okay, since Bush wasn't familiar with them either. Singh will rely on a script. Using those canned responses, he can address common concerns without understanding the underlying issues. A spokesman said, "We know those scripts work. President Bush used them successfully for years."

Singh might have difficulty producing a Texas drawl; but Bush recently abandoned that "down home" persona anyway, to appear more intelligent.

Bush was given Manpower's outplacement services, to help him write a résumé and prepare for his next job. Manpower says Bush might have difficulty securing a new position, since his practical work experience is limited, but suggested a greeter position at Walmart because of his extensive hand-shaking experience and fake smile.

Bush the elder

Which President was the *niciest*? Maybe George H.W. Bush.

Reagan picked him to be Vice President. After Reagan, George became the next President but lasted just one term, because in 1992 he was beaten by Democrat Bill Clinton. On Bill's inauguration day (January 20, 1993), George had to step down but handwrote, on White House stationery, a *very* nice letter to Bill. Here it is (edited slightly by me):

Jan. 20, 1993

Dear Bill,

When I walked into this office just now, I felt the same sense of wonder & respect I felt 4 years ago. I know you'll feel that too.

I wish you great happiness here. I never felt the loneliness some Presidents have described.

There will be very tough times, made even more difficult by criticism you may not think fair. I'm not a very good one to give advice, but just don't let the critics discourage you or push you off course.

You'll be *our* President when you read this note. I wish you well. I wish your family well.

Your success now is *our country's* success. I'm rooting hard for you.

Good luck — George

Grading the presidents

Of all the U.S. presidents, who was the best? Who was the worst? Occasionally, surveys were taken of scholars (historians and other analysts), to get their opinions. The scholars were asked to rank all the presidents, from best to worst.

Details of 20 surveys are at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Historical_rankings_of_presidents_of_the_United_States

Here's my summary of the 5 most important surveys. They were done in 2005, 2010, 2017, and 2018. For each survey, I translated the rankings into letter grades: the 3 top presidents got A+, the 3 bottom presidents got F-, the middle-ranked Presidents got C, and the other presidents got grades that are in-between:

President	Party	2005	2010	2018	2018	2021	Av.
		WSJ	USPC	APSA	Siena	CS	
1. George Washington	none	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+
2. John Adams	Fed	B	B	B	B-	B	B
3. Thomas Jefferson	D-R	A	A	A	A	A-	A
4. James Madison	D-R	C+	B-	B+	A-	B-	B
5. James Monroe	D-R	B-	B	B-	A-	B+	B
6. John Quincy Adams	D-R	D+	C	C	B-	B-	C
7. Andrew Jackson	Dem	B+	B+	B	C+	C	B-
8. Martin Van Buren	Dem	D+	D	D+	C-	D-	D+
9. William H. Harrison	Whig		F-	F-	F	F	F
10. John Tyler	Whig	F+	F	F+	F+	F	F+
11. James Polk	Dem	B+	B-	C+	B+	B-	B
12. Zachary Taylor	Whig	F+	F+	D-	D	D-	D-
13. Millard Fillmore	Whig	F	F	F+	F+	F+	F+
14. Franklin Pierce	Dem	F-	F-	F	F	F	F
15. James Buchanan	Dem	F-	F-	F-	F-	F-	F-
16. Abraham Lincoln	Rep	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+
17. Andrew Johnson	Dem	F	F	F	F-	F-	F
18. Ulysses Grant	Rep	D	D	C+	C-	C+	C-
19. Rutherford Hayes	Rep	C-	D-	D+	D	D-	D-
20. James Garfield	Rep			D-	D+	D+	D
21. Chester Arthur	Rep	D+	D-	D	D-	D	D
22&24. Grover Cleveland	Dem	B	C	C-	C	C-	C
23. Benjamin Harrison	Rep	D-	F+	D	D-	D	D-
25. William McKinley	Rep	B-	C+	C+	C+	B-	C+
26. Theodore Roosevelt	Rep	A	A	A	A	A	A
27. William H. Taft	Rep	C	D+	C	C	C	C
28. Woodrow Wilson	Dem	B+	A	B+	B+	B	B+
29. Warren Harding	Rep	F-	F-	F	F	F+	F
30. Calvin Coolidge	Rep	C-	D	D+	D	C-	D+
31. Herbert Hoover	Rep	D-	D+	F+	F+	F+	D-
32. Franklin Roosevelt	Dem	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+	A+
33. Harry Truman	Dem	A-	A-	A	A-	A	A-
34. Dwight Eisenhower	Rep	A-	B+	A-	A	A	A-
35. John Kennedy	Dem	B-	B-	B-	B+	A-	B
36. Lyndon Johnson	Dem	C+	B	B+	B-	B+	B
37. Richard Nixon	Rep	D-	C-	D-	D+	D	D
38. Gerald Ford	Rep	D	C-	C-	D+	D+	D+
39. Jimmy Carter	Dem	F+	C+	C-	C-	C-	C-
40. Ronald Reagan	Rep	A-	B+	A-	B	A-	B+
41. George H.W. Bush	Rep	C	C-	B-	C+	C+	C+
42. Bill Clinton	Dem	C-	C	B	B	C+	C+
43. George W. Bush	Rep	C+?	D-	D	D-	D+	D
44. Barack Obama	Dem		A-?	A-	B-	B+	B+
45. Donald Trump	Rep			F-?	F?	F	F

The rightmost column shows the average of the 5 surveys.

Here's a summary of the rightmost column:

Which presidents got that average

A+	George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, Franklin Roosevelt
A	Thomas Jefferson, Theodore Roosevelt
A-	Harry Truman, Dwight Eisenhower
B+	Woodrow Wilson, Ronald Reagan, Barack Obama
B	John Adams, James Madison, J. Monroe, J. Polk, J. Kennedy, L. Johnson
B-	Andrew Jackson
C+	William McKinley, George H.W. Bush, Bill Clinton
C	John Quincy Adams, Grover Cleveland, William H. Taft
C-	Ulysses Grant, Jimmy Carter
D+	Martin Van Buren, Calvin Coolidge, Gerald Ford
D	Rutherford Hayes, James Garfield, C. Arthur, R. Nixon, George W. Bush
D-	Zachary Taylor, Benjamin Harrison, Herbert Hoover
F+	John Tyler, Millard Fillmore
F	William Harrison, Franklin Pierce, Andrew Johnson, W. Harding, D. Trump
F-	James Buchanan

Here are more details about the surveys:

In 2005, **The Wall Street Journal (WSJ)**, working with James Lindgren of Northwestern U. Law School and the Federalist Society, surveyed 78 scholars (30 historians, 25 political scientists, and 23 law professors) and told them to judge each president on 2 factors: “his presidency’s accomplishments” and the “leadership he provided the nation.” It tried to give equal weight to conservative scholars and liberal scholars. For example, Republican-leaning scholars thought George W. Bush was A-, but Democrat-leaning scholars thought he was F+, so his grade is a compromise: C+.

In 2010, the **United States Presidency Centre (USPC)** at the University of London surveyed 47 British specialists in U.S. history & politics and told them to judge each president on 5 factors: foreign-policy leadership, domestic leadership, moral authority, agenda-setting vision, and historical significance. The results were published in 2011.

In December 2017 and January 2018, the **American Political Science Association (APSA)** surveyed 170 members of its Presidents & Executive Politics section. The results were published in 2018.

In 2018, **Siena College** (a Catholic College in Loudonville NY) surveyed 157 presidential scholars, historians, and political scientists and told them to judge each president on 20 factors: foreign-policy accomplishments, domestic accomplishments, handling the economy, executive appointments, court appointments, relationship with Congress, ability to compromise, willingness to take risks, communication ability, leadership ability, executive ability, overall ability, intelligence, avoiding mistakes, integrity, imagination, party leadership, background, luck, and overall impression.

In 2021, **C-SPAN (CS)** surveyed 142 scholars (historians and other professional presidential analysts) and told them to judge each president on 10 factors: international relations, economic management, crisis leadership, administrative skills, relations with Congress, public persuasion, moral authority, agenda-setting vision, pursued equal justice for all, and performance within context of times.

Here are more comments about the presidents:

Brief presidents William H. Harrison and Garfield were presidents just briefly. (William H. Harrison was president just 31 days until he died of pneumonia. Garfield was president just 200 days because he was shot.) Since there wasn’t much data about them, WSJ and USPC didn’t grade them.

Lincoln era Lincoln gets A+. The 3 presidents before him (Fillmore, Pierce, and Buchanan) get F+ or F or F- because their incompetence led to Civil War — though as Kennedy pointed out, don’t be so quick to criticize Buchanan until you thoroughly understand what dilemmas he faced. The president after Lincoln (Andrew Johnson) gets F because he badly handled the South’s reconstruction from the Civil War.

Mixed bags John Quincy Adams, Van Buren, and Taft accomplished a lot during their lifetimes but not during their presidencies, so their presidential grades are mediocre. Kennedy was a mixed bag: he had nice rhetoric but didn’t accomplish much. Nixon was a mixed bag: he did some things that were wonderful and some things that were terrible.

Recent presidents George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden were presidents just recently, so it’s too early to grade their accomplishments accurately. Some surveys omitted them or gave them question marks.

2016 election

Before analyzing the 2020 election, let’s take a look back at the 2016 election, which, frankly, was more important. That’s when the Democrats nominated Hillary Clinton, and the Republicans nominated Donald Trump.

Most Americans preferred Hillary: she got 2.86 million more votes than Trump. But the Electoral College system of voting gives voter in low-population states (small states & rural states) more influence than voters in high-population states (big states & urban states). Trump’s supporters were in rural states, so Trump won the Electoral College vote and became President.

Trump has told more lies than any other President (many thousands of lies, usually transmitted as tweets or off-the-cuff remarks). He thinks a lot of himself. He has a big ego, which

ballooned, full of hot air. Physicists discovered why Trump became President:

Hot air rises.

How you can become President

It’s easy to run for President. Just meet the minimum requirements, which are:

You’re at least 35 years old.

You were born in the U.S.

(or have some other excuse to call yourself a “natural-born citizen”).

You’ve lived in the U.S. at least 14 years, while a citizen or permanent resident.

You didn’t make Congress call you a jerk

(by getting impeached or breaking an oath to uphold the Constitution).

You weren’t already President for 2 terms (or most of 2 terms), since you’re not allowed to be President thrice.

If you meet those requirements, go ahead: just scribble your name on the ballot when you vote!

Though it’s easy to *run* for President, it’s hard to *win*.

To win, here’s the first step: get your name printed neatly on the ballot that voters see. That’s easy! For example, to get on the Presidential ballot in New Hampshire, just pay \$1000 to New Hampshire’s Secretary of State, to help pay for the printing cost. Then all voters in New Hampshire can see your name! How thrilling! How easy! That’s why about 100 candidates were on the 2016 Presidential primary ballots in New Hampshire. But just one of them ultimately became President: Trump. All the others lost (so the whole contest resembled a reality-TV survivor show); but they’re glad they ran, because running made them famous, so they became top government officials, lobbyists, guest speakers, consultants, and other types of braggarts.

8-year rule

Every 8 years, voters want change: they say “throw the bums out,” so they throw out the party that won the previous election. So for President, we had:

8 years of a Republican (Eisenhower)
then 8 years of Democrats (Kennedy & Johnson)
then 8 years of Republicans (Nixon & Ford)
then a Democrat (Carter)
then Republicans (Reagan & Bush the elder)
then 8 years of a Democrat (Clinton)
then 8 years of a Republican (Bush the younger)
then 8 years of a Democrat (Obama)
then a Republican (Trump)
then a Democrat (Biden)

That’s because Democrats have great forward-looking ideas, but Republicans are great at scaling back the messes Democrats have created. The only exceptions to the “8-year rule” is:

Democrat Carter had a disaster (a war with Iran that led to an oil crisis, recession, and failed mission to rescue hostages), so he lasted just 4 years. The Republicans stole his other 4, so the Republicans got 12 years instead of 8 that time.

Republican Trump was a bit crazy, not a true Republican, so even some Republicans disliked him.

Crazy candidates

Who ran for President in 2016? Lots of crazy megalomaniacs put their names on the ballot. So did comedians, such as the famous **Vermin Love Supreme** (yes, he made that his legal name), who wears an upside-down boot on his head.

Most Americans were totally disgusted by all the candidates who ran. Many Americans preferred this candidate instead: **Know Buddy**. He’d have been a success, because when you ask Americans which candidate should be President, most say

“Know Buddy!” Here are his slogans:

Know Buddy for President! Put Know Buddy in the White House!
Know Buddy is your buddy. Put your Buddy in the White House!
Know Buddy is really right for this election!
Know Buddy can make a difference!
I wait for Know Buddy! I’ll stand behind Know Buddy!
Nobody is equal to Know Buddy!
Once you know Buddy, you’re for Know Buddy!
No candidate is loved more than Know Buddy!
Once you know who’s your Buddy, you’re for Know Buddy!

Lili Timmons wrote this jingle about Know Buddy:

When Know Buddy’s ahead, others take note,
So give Know Buddy your vote!

Composers wrote these hit songs about how Know Buddy sympathizes with the downtrodden and helps them by his love:

Know Buddy knows the trouble I’ve seen!
Know Buddy loves you when you’re down and out!
Know Buddy loves me. Know Buddy cares!
I need some Buddy to love!

His followers created many ads about Know Buddy. Each ad ends by saying:

This ad was approved by Know Buddy.

I invented “Know Buddy” as an artful joke, but reality imitates art: Rich Paul, who lives in Keene, New Hampshire, legally changed his name to “Nobody,” because he thought people would prefer “Nobody” to the other candidates. He ran for mayor and governor, but lost. He got arrested often, such as for selling drugs and running a fake church that stole money.

24 serious candidates

Of all the candidates who tried to win the 2016 Presidential election, just these 24 were taken seriously (6 Democrats + 18 Republicans):

2 Democrat governors		When quit
Lincoln Chafee	Rhode Island	Oct. 23, 2015
Martin O’Malley	Maryland	Feb. 1, 2016
9 Republican governors		
Rick Perry	Texas	Sept. 11, 2015
Scott Walker	Wisconsin	Sept. 21, 2015
Bobby Jindal	Louisiana	Nov. 17, 2015
George Pataki	New York	Dec. 29, 2015
Mike Huckabee	Arkansas	Feb. 1, 2016
Chris Christie	New Jersey	Feb. 10, 2016
Jim Gilmore	Virginia	Feb. 12, 2016
Jeb Bush	Florida	Feb. 20, 2016
John Kasich	Ohio	May 4, 2016
1 Democrat U.S. senator		
Bernie Sanders	Vermont	July 12, 2016
5 Republican U.S. senators		
Lindsey Graham	South Carolina	Dec. 21, 2015
Rand Paul	Kentucky	Feb. 3, 2016
Rick Santorum	Pennsylvania	Feb. 3, 2016
Marco Rubio	Florida	Mar. 15, 2016
Ted Cruz	Texas	May 3, 2016
2 Democrat U.S. secretaries		
Jim Webb	Secretary of the Navy	Oct. 20, 2015
Hillary Clinton	Secretary of State	Nov. 9, 2016
1 Republican U.S. commissioner		
Mark Everson	Commissioner of IRS	Nov. 5, 2015
1 Democrat outsider		
Larry Lessig	Harvard law professor	Nov. 2, 2015
3 Republican outsiders		
Carly Fiorina	Hewlett-Packard CEO	Feb. 10, 2016
Ben Carson	Johns Hopkins surgeon	Mar. 2, 2016
Donald Trump	NY real-estate owner	winner

Refusers

2 **Massholes** (people from Massachusetts) were urged to run but **steadfastly refused**:

Elizabeth Warren (U.S. senator from Massachusetts, Democrat)
Mitt Romney (Massachusetts governor, Republican)

3 administrators seriously considered running but **finally refused**:

John Bolton (Ambassador to U.N., Republican) got ignored, so he gave up early (May 14, 2015). After the election, he became President Donald Trump’s National Security Advisor.

Mike Bloomberg (New York mayor, Independent) was shocked by the 2 extremists (extreme leftist Bernie Sanders and extreme rightist Donald Trump). He said: if the election turned into a choice between those 2 crazies, Sanders-versus-Trump, he’d run as the middle-of-the-road reasonable independent candidate. He said he’d decide by March 2016. But when March came, he realized Bernie Sanders would *not* be the Democrat nominee, so he bowed out (March 7, 2016), to let Hillary Clinton be the middle-of-the-roader.

Joe Biden (Vice President, Democrat) was the U.S. Senator from Delaware, then Vice President under Obama. He wanted to become President, but one of his sons suddenly died. That son had urged him to run, but Joe was too grieved to have enough energy to run. Also, Joe was busy being Vice President, his wife was skeptical of being dragged through another mudslinging election, and he’d suffered earlier through 2 heartbreaking deaths: a car accident killed his first wife & daughter and seriously injured his 2 sons. He finally said no (October 21, 2015). After the election, he felt sorry he didn’t run against Donald Trump, whom he hated.

Early dropouts

Of the 24 serious candidates, these 19 had the good sense to drop out early (by March 16, 2016)....

Democrats:

Larry Lessig (Harvard law professor) wanted campaign-finance reform. He promised that if he got elected and accomplished campaign-finance reform, he’d quit being President and let the Vice President take over.

Jim Webb (Secretary of the Navy) received many awards for heroic fighting in Vietnam. His 3rd wife was a Vietnamese immigrant. Ronald Reagan made him Secretary of the Navy but refused his request for more ships, so he quit then became a U.S. Democrat Senator from Virginia. But when he ran for President, he talked too hawkishly to please Democrats.

Lincoln Chafee (governor of Rhode Island) was a Republican, then an Independent, then a Democrat.

He arose: he was a mayor, then a U.S. Senator, then Rhode Island’s governor. His dad was Rhode Island’s governor also; so were his great-great-grandfather and great-great-uncle.

When he announced he was running for President, he said the U.S. should switch to the metric system. Science teachers applauded, but everybody else thought that was the wrong priority for a President, so they laughed at him. He got further pooh-poohed when he admitted that as U.S. Senator, his first vote was wrong because he didn’t know yet what he was doing.

Martin O’Malley (governor of Maryland) was Baltimore’s mayor before becoming governor. Baltimore is a troubled city, but he claimed he made it slightly better than before and made Maryland generally wonderful.

He was a reasonable compromise between leftist Bernie Sanders and hawkish Hillary Clinton. Since his initials are M.O’M., I told him to distribute a bumper sticker saying “Reasonable M.O’M,” which moms could put on their cars. He thanked me for that suggestion but didn’t use it.

Unlike Bernie Sanders & Hillary Clinton, he was easy to approach, shake hands with, and chat with, since he wasn’t mobbed by thousands of fans. He got ignored. At one Iowa event he advertised, just one voter came to see him.

He proudly listed 15 goals the U.S. should meet. But he didn’t say how to accomplish them, and none of them involved foreign policy, since he didn’t know much about that. Unlike other candidates, he emphasized improving the environment, so young environmentalists loved him.

Age 53, he bragged he was younger than Hillary Clinton & Bernie Sanders and represented a new generation. But his youth was his liability: he wasn’t yet mature enough to give good speeches. He sounded like a robot (or a high-school kid running for student council). His speeches lacked the fire & pointedness needed to enflame a national campaign.

Republicans:

Mark Everson (Commissioner of IRS) got ignored, so he quit early.

Jim Gilmore (governor of Virginia) didn't campaign much, so got ignored.

Lindsay Graham (U.S. senator from South Carolina) was a hawk who got few votes. After Trump became President, he gave anti-Trump speeches.

Rick Santorum (U.S. senator from Pennsylvania) is a nice guy, gentle, but strongly right-wing on religious issues: against abortion & gay marriage.

George Pataki (governor of New York) was gentle but didn't have much to say. Cynics said he stayed in the race awhile just to become famous and get paid more as a consultant.

Scott Walker (governor of Wisconsin) campaigned in New Hampshire by riding his motorcycle everywhere, to look cool. He was proudly tough on unions, so the teachers union hated him.

Mike Huckabee (governor of Arkansas) was evangelical, strongly against abortion & gay marriage. He also was a commentator on Fox TV. After the election, his daughter (Sarah Huckabee Sanders) became President Donald Trump's press secretary.

Rick Perry (governor of Texas) made too many gaffes. His most famous was back in 2012, when he tried to say he wanted to eliminate 3 departments of the U.S. government (Commerce, Education, and Energy) but couldn't remember the 3rd one, so he got laughed at then ignored.

Bobby Jindal (governor of Louisiana) is the son of immigrants from India, but he was born in Louisiana. He was born a Hindu but converted to being Catholic. He was a U.S. Congressman from Louisiana then became Louisiana's governor.

He wanted even the poorest people to pay taxes, so they'd feel involved in the tax process & government. He wanted a 2% tax on the first \$10,000 per person (so \$20,000 per married couple), then a 10% tax on the next tax bracket (\$10,001 to \$90,000 per person), then a 25% tax on the rich (earning over \$90,000 per person).

Carly Fiorina (Hewlett-Packard CEO) was only female Republican candidate. She wanted to cat-fight against Hillary Clinton and threaten Vladimir Putin, whom she met while Hewlett-Packard's CEO. But she'd suffered 2 failures: Hewlett-Packard's board of directors fired her because Hewlett-Packard did poorly during the tech industry's downfall, and she lost when trying to become a California senator. She talked tough, dramatically & clearly, so voters liked her, until voters discovered that what she said was often false. Donald Trump criticized her for having an ugly face.

She was very right-wing. 2½ months after she quit, right-winger Ted Cruz chose her to be his Vice President candidate. She accepted. But 6 days later he quit.

Jeb Bush (governor of Florida) is the younger brother of President George W. Bush (and son of President George H.W. Bush). He's nice & gentle, so even a Democrat like me could like him. When he was a college kid, he traveled to Mexico and married a Mexican woman, so he had sympathy for immigrants and spoke Spanish decently.

He was nicer and smarter than his brother, whom some people disliked, so he avoided mentioning his last name was Bush: his campaign signs said just "Jeb!"

As the fight against other Republican candidates got more heated, he made the mistake of trying to imitate them: he nudged himself into becoming more right-wing. That made him look too shift.

Rand Paul (U.S. senator from Kentucky) is a libertarian, like his dad (Ron Paul, who ran in the previous election). He believes in as little government as possible, so he wants to shut down the Department of Education and many other government activities and get involved in fewer wars & interventions. But he's less extreme than his dad: he admits the U.S. should at least still keep military bases in other countries. He believes in a flat tax: every person & business should pay a 14.5% flat income tax but no other payroll taxes (no taxes for Social Security & Medicare) and no taxes on investments (capital gains, dividends, interest, and inheritance).

Besides being a senator, he was also an eye doctor (ophthalmologist). His supporters thought he was the only candidate who could see straight.

His speeches & writings contained many passages he plagiarized from other sources, though he eventually promised to stop doing so.

Chris Christie (governor of New Jersey) was a typical New Jerseyite: boldly blunt & candid. I'm from New Jersey too, so I liked his style and thought he'd be a great President, even though I'm a Democrat. Hillary Clinton's staff feared him more than any other competitor. But his brain was worse than his style: when he started announcing specific policies, I realized his thinking was senseless.

His image was smashed by a scandal called BridgeGate, where his assistants illegally closed ramps to the George Washington Bridge to punish Fort Lee's mayor for being anti-Christie. Though Christie himself was never implicated, the incident proved he had poor judgment in choosing assistants.

After he quit, he befriended Trump and hoped to become Trump's Vice President, but Trump wisely picked Pence instead. Afterwards, Christie

became disliked in New Jersey and the most hated of all U.S. governors.

Marco Rubio (U.S. senator from Florida) is the son of immigrants from Cuba. He was born in Miami but speaks Spanish fluently, better than any other candidate. A young, handsome, smart lawyer who spoke eloquently & forcefully, women fell in love with him and wanted to vote for him.

Many Republicans thought he was the best candidate, since his views were moderate. But when attacked by Ted Cruz, Marco tried to imitate Ted by moving farther right; and when attacked by Trump for being short, Marco stooped to Trump's level by claiming to have a bigger penis than Trump. Marco's downfall was hastened by candidate Chris Christie, who pointed out that whenever Marco was asked a question, Marco just repeated a memorized canned speech, rather than answering the exact question. The final result: Marco came across as being immature, not ready to be President yet.

Ben Carson (Johns Hopkins surgeon) was the only Black candidate. Of all candidates, he was the most soft-spoken, contradicting the stereotype that Blacks should be noisy. Though he spoke softly, his words were often wise & cynical. He's smart: he was the brain surgeon who ran the team that separated Siamese twins joined at the head (though those twins did *not* live happily ever after).

He was very right-wing. He was very religious and took the Bible literally: he didn't believe in evolution (even though he was a scientist), and a sentence in the Bible made him believe the pyramids were used for storing grain (and made archaeologists think he was nuts).

To help young Blacks, he believed America should give them better education (so they can get better jobs) rather than hand them welfare checks. His anti-welfare attitude makes him popular with right-wingers: he was a White right-winger's ideal of what a Black guy should be.

He didn't know much about foreign affairs. While running for President, he tried hard to try to catch up on foreign affairs, but his staff complained he was a slow learner on that topic.

After the election, he became Trump's Secretary of Housing & Urban Development (HUD).

5 finalists

After those 19 dropped out, 5 **finalists** remained. Here they are, listed from leftist to rightist.

Bernie Sanders

Left-wing Democrat

U.S. senator & congressman from Vermont, socialist, Jewish

Of the 8 finalists, Bernie was the farthest left.

He thought the rich should be nicer to the poor. He hated the rich for being rich. He railed against what he calls the "billionaire class."

Of all the 24 serious candidates, he was the oldest (74!) but in excellent health. Of the 8 finalists, he spoke the most energetically.

He demanded big changes:

He wanted to raise the federal minimum wage (\$7.25) to \$15 fast. Some rich cities had raised their minimum wages to \$15 already, but he demanded the whole country do the same.

He demanded the government give free tuition for all 4 years of public college. He said: the government gave free tuition for public high schools, so why stop at just high school? To get high-paying jobs, kids normally need 4 years of college. He said a good education should be everybody's right, not just a privilege.

Same for health care: he said everyone should get Medicare benefits, even the young, not just senior citizens, since good health should be a right, not just a privilege. Same for family leave: everyone should get free paid vacation time to care for their babies.

How will the government pay for all those benefits? By taxing the rich! He said the rich and stock traders should pay higher taxes, and big banks should be split up to prevent them from abusing wealth by making strange investments.

Forcing the rich to give a lot to the poor is against the capitalist idea of encouraging the lazy to work hard to get rich. Bernie's wasn't a capitalist: he was a socialist, which he said was like being a Communist but without Communist corruption, without forced labor, without censorship. Like many Communists & socialists, he ended each memo and letter by saying "In solidarity" instead of "Respectfully yours."

To soften his stance, he didn't call himself a straight "socialist": he calls himself a "democratic socialist," because he believed in free elections and just wants government to be more generous to the poor. He wanted the U.S. to imitate Scandinavia, especially Denmark, but ignored these Denmark facts:

Denmark acquired its prosperity back when it was capitalist.
Denmark's experiment with being socialist was now being scaled back.
Denmark was now tough on immigrants.

He was popular. When he gave a speech, over 10,000 people often flocked to the auditorium.

I had lots of sympathy for Bernie, because we're alike!

We're in the same generation. We were both born in New York City to a Jewish father who immigrated from Europe to escape Nazis. We both have New York accents; his is stronger, pure Brooklynese! We both care about religion but attend religious services rarely. We both escaped New York, went to prestigious colleges elsewhere, then lived most of our lives in New England: he in Vermont, I in Massachusetts then New Hampshire.

We both look unkempt: a reporter described him as looking like an "unmade bed." We both hate wearing suits but wear them when we're forced to. We tend to wear the same clothes, the kind popular 50 years ago at J.C. Penny's. We eat the same cereal: raisin bran.

In college, we both got involved in the U.S. civil rights struggle. We both traveled south to make a difference, he as a protester, I as a teacher.

Later, I was a teacher & writer; he was a protester & political leader, as mayor of Burlington, Vermont then U.S. Congressman then U.S. Senator. He ran as an independent (since his views were farther left than most Democrats) but then renamed himself a Democrat so he could be the Democrat candidate for President.

We have similar speaking styles: we speak dramatically & candidly, not censoring our mouths when truth must be said.

So did I vote for Bernie? No, because he had 4 flaws.

1. His proposals didn't lead to a balanced budget.

His extra taxes on the rich wouldn't be enough to fund all his benefits to the poor.

2. His campaign was based on hate: hating the rich!

Most Democrats believe a good President should run a campaign based on *love for everybody*, rich & poor. Nudge the rich to give more to the poor, nudge strongly and by taxes, but with a smile. Bernie & I both love Pope Francis, but I wish Bernie would *act* more like that pope, talking *love*!

Not all rich people are evil. Bill Gates is often the richest person in the world, but he's a philanthropist who encourages other philanthropists to give to worthy causes, such as improving world health. Bill Gates is not evil.

Bernie's yelling at the rich "billionaire class" sounds scarily like Hitler's yelling at the "rich Jewish class." I'm not rich, but Bernie's hate speech scares me anyway.

3. He was against free trade.

Bernie wanted to protect U.S. unions from having their factories shut down by competition from Mexico, China, Vietnam, and beyond, so he wanted lots of laws & taxes to prevent trade.

I believe in showing love for the *whole* world. Let people from *all* countries compete in the global marketplace: if U.S. factories are no longer competitive, teach our workers new skills.

If you make Walmart stop buying cheaply from China, many Walmart shoppers won't be able to afford the higher prices Walmart will charge, so many Americans will get fewer goods and be, in effect, poorer. Also, people who work in factories that *export* to China and Mexico will complain they can't sell their goods, because China & Mexico will retaliate against the trade barriers by creating their own.

4. He didn't try to improve himself.

In every speech, he said the same stuff. He was like a broken record, saying the same comments repeatedly. He complained the media didn't give him enough attention, but the media couldn't give much attention to a guy who so boringly repeats himself.

No matter what folks ask him, he just blames the billionaires. If I ask him an innocent question, such as whether he prefers vanilla or chocolate, he'd probably turn it into another excuse to blame billionaires: he'd say they manipulate the cocoa market, so we're morally bound to protest against chocolate and choose vanilla.

I told his staff I'd volunteer to help Bernie improve as a candidate, but his staff gave me the usual answer: the staff couldn't communicate with Bernie, since he was too wrapped up in his fame to have time to chat with underlings.

Bernie Sanders has the initials B.S., which is slang for bullshit. I told his staff to create a bumper sticker saying:

I love B.S.

Bernie Sanders

They rejected my suggestion, of course. But that's the problem with Bernie Sanders: too much of what he says is B.S.

His math was wrong about balancing his budget. His percentage was wrong when he claimed the rich controlled a big percent of the wealth. His claim was wrong that restricting trade would make life better for the average American.

The main people who liked Bernie were young, in their teens & twenties.

They liked his offer of getting free college tuition and other free benefits paid by the rich, because those kids weren't rich yet. They considered him a humorously grumpy grandpa who was a cheerleader for everything they wanted.

Margaret Thatcher said it's easy to vote for a socialist who's spending someone *else's* money. *Saturday Night Live* said kids like Bernie because he's like a kid: full of big plans and no idea how to accomplish them.

Bernie accomplished his goal: he moved the country farther left.

Since he inspired voters and threatened Hillary, he made her change her policies and move farther left. His hatred of foreign trade was copied gently by Hillary, dramatically by Donald Trump.

Bernie was anti-military, reluctant to go to war. He agreed with John Lennon's song: "Give peace a chance." On that issue he was much farther left than Hillary, who was hawkish. But Bernie wasn't totally crazy: he was willing to go to war *sometimes*. In his past role as legislator, Bernie showed he could compromise, to get things done, so a Bernie presidency wouldn't be as extreme as his speeches.

How would Bernie convince the Republican Congress to pass his laws? He said it would be easy: he'd get a million people to protest on Capitol Hill, until Republicans "get the message" that Republican days of "whine and neuroses" are over.

Bernie's left-wing history was scary.

When young, he trekked to South America to join socialist/Communist rebels in their celebrations.

He also wanted our government to confiscate all U.S. TV stations, to prevent them from being biased by billionaire owners. The confiscation would be done without reimbursing TV's stockholders: screw them all! He soft-peddled that position later, thankfully, since a government controlling all TV stations would leave no room for creatively independent TV.

Hillary Clinton

Moderate Democrat

Secretary of State, First Lady, U.S. senator from New York

Hillary acquired lots of smarts:

She was the only finalist who had White House experience. She was the First Lady (President Bill Clinton's wife). When Bill Clinton was governor of Arkansas, she was First Lady there too.

She was the only finalist who had a job in the federal government's executive branch. She was Secretary of State during President Obama's first term. She ran the State Department and met all important world leaders.

She'd been a legislator. She was the U.S. senator from New York.

She knew lots about the judicial system. She'd been a lawyer, with a doctorate from Yale Law School.

She understood women's issues best. She became the only female candidate (after Carly Fiorina quit).

She was the most intellectually gifted politician. She graduated from a top women's school (Wellesley College) with honors in political science. She was the first student to ever give that college's commencement address, which got her a 7-minute standing ovation.

With all those credentials, she was by far the most intellectually experienced candidate!

She was the only finalist who actively supported both parties.

Her parents were Republican and raised her to be the same. In high school, she campaigned to make Republican Barry Goldwater be the next President. In college, she was president of the Wellesley Young Republicans.

She helped Republican John Lindsay become mayor of New York City and Republican Nelson Rockefeller try to be President. They were both nice guys, but she wisely abandoned the Republican party when she was asked to help Richard Nixon become President.

She had just one problem: nobody loved her.

She came across as cold & crafty in public, mean-spirited in private. Secret Service guys tried to hide when she came down the hall, because they couldn't stand dealing with her tirades. When she was supposed to give a speech, she usually came very late, sometimes an hour and a half after the doors opened. Many folks voted for her anyway because they hated other candidates, but nobody really *loved* her.

I have sympathy for her:

As former First Lady and Secretary of State, she was required to keep some of her thoughts private. She wasn't at liberty to let her hair down and tell the public what she really thought of all the evil people in the world.

Maybe a less formal hairstyle would have helped? In a perfect world, hairstyle wouldn't matter, but women are often judged by their appearance rather than their brains.

It was hard for her to chat with folks asking her questions, since Secret Service guys tried to keep her away from folks who might kill her.

A true intellectual, she thought carefully & cautiously about both sides of each issue, so she often took a middle ground, which makes her seem unenthusiastic, too calculating, conniving.

The country was in the mood for wild change. She wasn't wild enough.

She's 5 months younger than I. During the election, we were both 69 years old. I wished I could give her a hug, but she's not the huggable type.

Like most people my age, I voted for her in New Hampshire's Presidential primary, because her policies were the most reasonable. But I did so reluctantly, sadly wishing I were stupid enough to vote for Bernie, who's more exciting. I voted with my head; younger folks voted with their heart instead, for Bernie.

Republicans claimed she was ineligible to become President because she illegally stored classified emails on her personal email system in her home.

But when the emails were put there, they weren't considered classified yet: they were declared classified later, when standards changed as to what's "classified." Using personal email to store sensitive messages was also done by Republicans (General Colin Powell and aides to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice), and kids do that all the time, so trying to incarcerate Hillary for that isn't fair.

John Kasich

Moderate Republican

Ohio governor, U.S. congressman, wants kind compromises

John could be a perfect President, in many ways. He was Republican but moderate enough to appeal to Democrats.

While he was running, polls said he'd win against the Democrat nominee, no matter whether that Democrat was Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders. The polls said the other 2 remaining Republicans (Ted Cruz and Trump) would lose to Democrats. So according to the polls, he was the Republican Party's only hope. He was the only finalist who claimed to be able to reach across the aisle, get Democrats & independents to vote for him, and get Democrats in Congress to work with him to solve the country's problems.

He was the only finalist who spoke gently & warmly. When giving speeches, he let the audience members reply. He loved giving them hugs when they told sob stories about their miserable lives. He was the only finalist easy to chat with.

He was also the only finalist who knew when to shut up. For example, he was against abortion but knew not to argue about that, because the President should tackle other issues that have a bigger chance of success.

He was Ohio's governor but had previously been in the U.S. Congress for 18 years, so he was doubly experienced, both an executive and a legislator, both outside and inside Washington, D.C. He bragged that in both roles he balanced the budget: he was practical, not a scary idealist. He was also an experienced businessman (he'd been a banker and on boards of directors), so he knew practical economics beyond just politics. A good explainer, he wrote 3 books and ran his own show on Fox TV.

Democrats complained he didn't support Planned Parenthood, but there wasn't much else to yell at him about. Of all the candidates, he was the most mellow, the safest.

But few Republicans voted for him, because he was too quiet.

In 2016, Republican voters wanted a President who'd shake things up. Trump & Ted Cruz were more dramatic, more noisy & exciting, and more popular (though also more likely to wreck the country). Smart Republicans in smart parts of this country voted for John, but most Republican voters weren't that gifted.

Trump & Ted Cruz acted immature, sniping at each other in many ways. John was mature. During Republican debates, John was called "the only adult in the room."

Ted Cruz

Right-wing Republican

U.S. senator from Texas, born in Canada, dad born in Cuba

He was consistently right-wing. A true Texan, he even wore cowboy boots.

Of all the candidates, he had the strongest formal training:

He graduated from a Baptist high school as valedictorian. He got a bachelor's degree in public policy from Princeton University, where he won many championships for being the best debater & speaker.

He got his law doctorate from Harvard, where he was a top editor of 3 different law journals and graduated magna cum laude. Law professor Alan Dershowitz called him "off-the-charts brilliant!"

He got involved in the U.S. Supreme Court, as a clerk to Chief Justice William Rehnquist then as a lawyer arguing cases before that court. He often won.

Finally he became U.S. Senator from Texas. Texans who said "Don't mess with Texas!" said "Don't mess with Ted!" because he was an extremely accomplished lawyer and debater.

Like Marco Rubio, Ted is Hispanic: His dad immigrated from Cuba, though his mom was *not* Hispanic: she was born in Delaware, of Irish-Italian descent.

His parents were both mathematicians. While they visited Canada to analyze oil drilling, he was born, so he got dual Canadian-U.S. citizenship. To simplify becoming U.S. President, he gave up his Canadian citizenship in 2014.

Since he wasn't born in the U.S., his competitors claimed he couldn't become U.S. President. But most lawyers felt he *could* become President, and a court ruled in his favor.

Evangelical Christians loved him because his views were far-right:

He believed abortion should be illegal unless birth would kill the mom. He was against gay marriage and gay civil unions.

A true right-winger, he wanted to abolish the IRS, have a flat tax (where everybody would pay the same tax percentage, regardless of whether rich or poor), and make the tax very simple, so the whole 1040 tax form would fit on a postcard. But he didn't reveal his plan's details, because any details would prove his plan impossible.

He believed the federal government should be smaller and impose less tax. To make the government shrink, he wanted to eliminate not just the IRS but also the departments of education, commerce, energy, and housing-and-urban-development.

He opposed raising the minimum wage.

He'd prefer no minimum wage at all. He'd let each business decide for itself what wage to pay to get good workers. He'd let businesses pay workers less, so businesses could hire "unemployables" as interns, for on-the-job training.

Back in 2013, he was the main senator responsible for shutting down the government 2 weeks, to protest Obamacare.

He believed strongly that Americans have the right to carry guns. He opposed increasing background checks on gun buyers.

He wanted to be mean to illegal immigrants but make it easier for skilled immigrants to get visas to come to the U.S. Since he didn't speak Spanish well yet, his ability to chat with immigrants was limited.

A skilled debater, he talked logically but tough. If you want a tough-taking America, Cruz is your guy: he's the cowboy lawyer for you.

Senate Republicans hated Cruz, because he was obnoxious, unwilling to compromise to get things accomplished.

Cruz bragged that he was hated. He said it proved he wasn't part of the Washington establishment, and he'd be the best guy to spearhead the drive to "throw all the bums out" of Washington. That made Washingtonians hate him even more.

Right-wingers loved Cruz for promising to rip up the bloated government and its crony system. Normal people wished he'd shut up.

Since I'm a Democrat, I disagreed with Cruz. If he became the Republican nominee against Hillary Clinton, I planned to put this bumper sticker on my Chevy Cruze car:

Cruze for Hillary!

Donald Trump

Wild Republican (very right-wing but sometimes left-wing)

Rich Manhattan real-estate developer, host of The Apprentice

Though his dad was a beloved landlord in Brooklyn, Donald Trump became famous for being a hated landlord in Manhattan. He also owned casinos in Atlantic City & Las Vegas.

To get started in the landlord biz, he borrowed a million dollars from his dad. Then his dad helped him get loans from banks. He finally claimed to be worth 10 billion dollars, though most analysts figured he was worth just 4 billion.

He married 3 women because they were pretty:

His **first wife, Ivana**, was a fashion model from Czechoslovakia. They had a daughter (Ivanka) and 2 sons (Donald Junior and Eric). Because Ivana's English grammar wasn't good, she called him "The Donald," and so do reporters now.

His **second wife, Marla**, was an actress from the U.S. (Georgia). He started an affair with her while still married to Ivana.

His **third wife, Melania**, was a fashion model from Slovenia. He started an affair with her while still married to Marla.

He got famous by running *The Apprentice*, a TV show where contestants try to manage his hotels but fail, so he can happily tell them "You're fired!"

Of the 5 finalists for President, he was the most disgusting, so people in other countries wondered how the U.S. could elect Mr. Disgusting. But he *liked* to disgust, because his behavior got him attention: he was fascinating to watch. The media couldn't help itself: writing about him sold newspapers.

Here's a list of disgusting thoughts he encouraged (but written in my own words):

He's really, really rich.
He'd like to marry his daughter.
Anyone not perfect should get fired.
Protesters should be punched in the face.
If a man threatens the U.S., kill his family.
No Muslims should ever enter this country.
If a woman isn't beautiful, she should hide.
We should torture any terrorists we capture.
He has a bigger penis than other candidates.
Hillary should be executed by a firing squad.
All newspapers criticizing him are worthless trash.
Any woman who criticizes him must be having her period.
The terrorist group ISIS was founded by Obama & Hillary.
We should punish every woman who's ever had an abortion.

Tell every overweight woman she's "a pig" and "Miss Piggy."
Most Mexican immigrants are rapists, thieves, and drug dealers.
Russia's leader, Vladimir Putin, is wonderful because he's tough.
He hopes real-estate prices crash, because then he can buy cheap.
When Americans get massacred, praise Trump for predicting that.
The ideal President is the person smart enough to not pay any taxes.
It's okay to discriminate against Blacks, because so does everyone else.
Obama's a liar with a fake birth certificate and was really born in Kenya.
We should build a wall on Mexico's border and make Mexico pay for it.
Women who oppose him have faces too ugly to be President or First Lady.
Any soldier who gets captured & tortured by the enemy is stupid, not a hero.
Don't buy Ford cars or Oreo cookies, because they'll all be made in Mexico.

Ted Cruz should be banned from being President because immigration courts will delay that inauguration. It's okay for any famous man to walk up to a woman stranger, reach under her skirt, and stroke her genitals. He pays contractors 30% less than agreed on, because that's the smart way to do business, since contractors can't afford to sue. If your son was a U.S. soldier who got killed in battle, your family sacrificed less for your country than a businessman who creates jobs. He donates money to Republicans & Democrats, even if he disagrees with them, because that's how business leaders stay in business. When Miss Universe contestants are in their dressing rooms, it's okay for him to walk in without knocking and enjoy seeing them nude, because he owns the pageant. The 11 million illegal immigrants should all be snatched immediately from their homes and bused back to the border & beyond, even if they fled here to escape from Central American criminals, even if they're kids in school, even if they or their relatives would become orphans; we should deport them all — and deport Hillary Clinton, too!

Those statements are oversimplifications of Trump's actual sentences, which were more nuanced. Examples:

Oversimplification: He'd like to marry his daughter. **Trump's actual words:** "I said if Ivanka weren't my daughter, perhaps I'd be dating her."
Trump's excuse: He just meant his daughter is pretty. **Trump's weakness:** Provocative photos showed Trump getting too intimately close to Ivanka when she was a teenager.

Oversimplification: Protesters should be punched in the face.
Trump's actual words: As for a certain protester, "here's a guy, throwing punches, nasty as hell, screaming and everything else when we're talking. And he's walking out and we're not allowed, you know — the guards are very gentle with him, and he's walking out, like the big high-fives, smiling, laughing. Like to punch him in the face, I tell ya!" **Trump's excuse:** Trump didn't say the protester *should* be punched; Trump just said he felt a momentary *desire* to punch. **Trump's weakness:** Trump's loose rhetoric made many of his fans punch protesters afterwards, even though punching protesters is illegal assault.

Oversimplification: No Muslims should ever enter this country. **Trump's actual words:** I want a "total and complete shutdown of Muslims entering the United States until our country's representatives can figure out what is going on." **Trump's excuse:** Some Muslims think violent anti-American protests are justified and that the U.S. should obey Muslim law rather than the Constitution. The ban on Muslims entering the country could be temporary, until our government can learn more about which Muslims are dangerous. Exceptions might be made for famous good Muslims, such as Jordan's king and London's new mayor. **Trump's weakness:** It's illegal to discriminate against a religion, since the Constitution guarantees freedom of religion. Many Muslims are peaceful and *not* anti-American. If a peaceful U.S. citizen who's a Muslim visits another country as a tourist and then wants to return to the U.S., it would be crazy for customs officials to prevent him from returning and take away his citizenship and passport. Banning people who say they're Muslim would backfire, because if a customs official asks, "Are you a Muslim?" a good Muslim would say "yes" (and be banned) but a terrorist Muslim would lie by saying "no" (and enter). Banning Muslims would also make our Muslim allies in the Middle East hate us (and refuse to work with us) and accidentally help anti-U.S. propaganda.

Oversimplification: Any woman who criticizes him must be having her period. **Trump's actual words:** About reporter Megyn Kelly attacking me by asking me tough questions on TV, "She gets out and starts asking me all sorts of ridiculous questions. You could see there was blood coming out of her eyes, blood coming out of her wherever." **Trump's excuse:** He claimed he didn't mean she was menstruating, just meant she was very angry, about to burst a blood vessel and have a nosebleed. **Trump's weakness:** Observers don't believe his excuse. They believe that when he said "her wherever" he meant her vagina.

Oversimplification: Most Mexican immigrants are rapists, thieves, and drug dealers. **Trump's actual words:** "When Mexico sends its people, they're not sending the best. They're not sending *you*; they're sending people that have lots of problems, and they're bringing those problems with us. They're bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And *some*, I assume, are good people." **Trump's excuse:** Many illegal drugs are brought to the U.S. by travelers from Mexico & Central America. Some of the immigrants came from Central America to flee drug violence there, and Trump did read an article saying some of the smuggled immigrants were raped by their smugglers. **Trump's weakness:** Many of the immigrants were the *victims* of rape, not the perpetrators, and were *fleeing* from drug gangs, not members of them.

Oversimplification: Any soldier who gets captured & tortured by the enemy is stupid, not a hero. **Trump's actual words:** As for John McCain, "he's not a war hero. He's a war hero because he was captured? I like people who *weren't* captured, okay? I hate to tell you." **Trump's weakness:** When John McCain was captured by North Vietnam, he was horribly tortured and repeatedly beaten and maimed for many years because he refused to be disloyal to the U.S., so he deserves lots of sympathy. As *The Washington Post* put it, "As Trump was preparing to take Manhattan, McCain was trying to relearn how to walk."

He was the only candidate disgusting enough to deserve a song. During his campaign, I wrote this song about him, with one verse for each day of the week:

Moon Day

Donald Trump! Donald Trump!
The candidate who ends on his rump
Then bounces back, eats *you* as a snack.
If *you* object, he calls you a "hack."

Twos Day

Blondie boy! Blondie boy!
He plays with you like you're his new toy.
He slaps your sex, says *you* have bad genes.
If you object, he calls you all "queens."

Wed Day

Drama guy! Drama guy!
Yes, he's the one for whom we all cry.
Some *cry* their *love*, while *some* cry their *shame*,
But all he loves is hearing his name.

Thirst Day

Greatest guy! Greatest guy!
Our Trump's the guy who gets us all high.
Just Trump can make America great:
As great as mace, he grates on your face.

Fried Day

Dis that guy? Dis that guy?
Oh, *he'll* find *you* and hurl you a pie.
A fine meringue, it lands with a bang,
Your face disgraced by Donald Trump's gang.

Sat Day

Donald Trump! Donald Trump!
The candidate whose polls get a bump.
Now you'll become a strumpet-whore, too:
Say "hi" to guys, then blow them and screw.

Some Day

Screw poor whites. Screw the blacks,
Then screw Latinos: call them "wet backs."
Next, screw Chinese and Muslims. Who knew
That *someday* he will even screw *you*?

Trump is Republican but a screwed-up version of Abraham Lincoln, so Trump deserves an updated Abraham Lincoln song. The original version began this way:

Battle Hymn of the Republic

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord.
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored.
He has loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword:
He truth is marching on.

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Here's my updated version, which I wrote shortly after the election:

Battle Him of the Republicans

My guys have seen the gory of the coming of the Trump.
He is trampling out the virtues, put the Democrats in dump.
He has loosed his fitful lightning when he gets into a funk.
His tweets go marching on.

Chorus:

Gory! Gory! How's it to ya?
Gory! Gory! How he'll screw ya!
Gory! Gory! Feeling blue, yah?
His tweets go marching on.

It's tempting to impeach him, but that takes a lot of work.
While he tramples on our values, Trump is really quite a jerk.
If you try to be just truthful, Trump fights back and goes berserk.
His tweets go marching on.
(repeat the chorus)

The USA was great, but now he makes us grate our teeth.
We had tried to reach for heaven, but we fell to "underneath."
We have turned friends into enemies; we feel their anger seethe.
Don't freak. Be sweet. Be strong.
(repeat the chorus)

Trump was like Humpty Dumpty. Here's my poem:

Humpy Trumpy

Humpy Trumpy sat on his wall.
Humpy Trumpy had a great fall.
All of his hoarseness and all of his men
Couldn't put Trumpy together again.

Here's the translation:

"Humpy": Trump humped many women (such as his 3 wives and 2 porn stars) and bragged how women let him do that.

"Sat on his wall": Trump insisted on building a wall to block Mexicans from illegally entering the United States, and he got part of it built.

"Had a great fall": after becoming President, his popularity fell, so voters didn't reelect him.

"His hoarseness": Trump kept saying awful things loudly.

"His men couldn't": Trump's White House staff couldn't make Trump look reasonable, so many of them quit or got fired.

I wrote this on November 12, 2018 (as edited afterwards):

Trump-endectomy

The Trump pets sound for Trump the clown.
He loves renown.

He strokes my calf, my golden calf of love for him
And what he's done to make my life devoid of fun.

We laughed, now frown. We wail & cry.
We're saddest clowns.

I write this on April 18, 2019:

The Grandest Waltz

Now *he* is the man who's more grand than before.
His fans love his hands and their plans for more gore.
The clans he can't stand are ripped far from our shore,
While fans in the stands cheer him on, want him more.

President Trump is the grandest of men:
Tells grandest lies and then tells them again,
Crows like a rooster and pecks at the hens.
Please don't elect Donald Trump once again!

Lincoln said, "A house divided cannot stand." Now Americans say, "A house divided cannot stand Trump.

How does **patriotism** differ from **nationalism**? Charles de Galle (the Frenchman who fought the Nazis and became President of France) said:

Patriotism is when love of your people comes first.

Nationalism is when hate for people other than your own comes first.

Trump calls himself a "nationalist"; we wish he were a patriot instead. William Falk (editor-in-chief of *The Week* magazine) said:

We need more healers and less hate.

Though Trump's usually been right-wing, he was left-wing in 4 ways:

He wanted to permit medical marijuana.

He wanted to discourage trade with other countries.

He wanted the U.S. to show more sympathy for Palestinians (though later, after the election, he pissed off the Palestinians by moving the U.S. embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem).

He wanted the U.S. to do less fighting in the Middle East, though he said he wouldn't mind occasionally dropping a bomb.

He switched parties often:

At first, he was a **Republican**.

In 1999, he switched to the **Independence Party**.

In 1999, he then switched to the **Reform Party**.

In 2001, he switched to the **Democrat Party**.

In 2009, he switched to the **Republican Party**.

In 2011, he became **Independent**.

In 2011, he then returned to the **Republican Party**.

Inexperienced Every President (from George Washington to Barack Obama) had prior experience in government or military, and so did the other 4 finalists, but Trump did not. He became the USA's first inexperienced President.

Anger Many voters liked the 3 extreme noisy finalists (Donald Trump, leftist Bernie Sanders, and rightist Ted Cruz) because those finalists displayed anger at Washington politics. Other finalists (such as Hillary Clinton and John Kasich) had a milder style and were more thoughtful, displayed more nuance, more love for *all* Americans — but were boring, especially compared to the popular Hollywood movies, which glorified explosions, violence, and super-strong comic-book characters, whose villains were fun. In earlier years, Hollywood & politics upheld romance, love, and caring instead of violence, but 2016 Hollywood movies & politicians made America become a **country of callous assholes**.

Daniel Henninger (a right-wing columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*) wrote this correct paragraph (on page A11 of the May 19, 2016 issue):

A typical Trump conversation makes minimal linear sense. But most big superhero movies today make no sense either. They're just a lot of quick spurts, jumbled points of view, and over-the-top caricatures. Like Donald Trump.

Which would you rather watch: slow-moving detailed policy analyses by Hillary and Kasich, or dramatically violent screeching by Trump, Bernie, and Cruz? The latter group is more entertaining and makes you want to cheer them on, half-jokingly, half-seriously, like watching a superhero movie or football game, beer in hand. **Wine-sippers whine, but beer bellies beat 'em.**

Vice Presidents

Trump & Hillary both chose the same kind of person to be the running mate (Vice President): a white, male lawyer (with a J.D. degree) who'd been a governor and in Congress, spoke softly & reasonably, and was in his 50's.

Trump picked **Mike Pence** (Indiana's governor and previously in the U.S. House of Representatives, with a J.D. from Indiana University, age 57).

The next week, Hillary picked **Tim Kaine** (Virginia's U.S. Senator and previously Virginia's governor, with a J.D. from Harvard, age 58). Bonus: he learned to speak Spanish.

In the Vice Presidential debate on October 4, 2016, each accomplished his mission: Tim Kane reminded voters of the awful things Trump said. Mike Pence reminded voters that although Trump often sounded extreme, the Trump-Pence ticket puts at least one adult in the White House: Mike Pence!

Anti-Trump speakers

In June, July, August, and September 2016, many Democrats (and some disgruntled Republicans) held an informal contest to see who could argue best that Trump didn't have enough knowledge, sanity, and empathy to be President.

Here are the top 8 anti-Trump speakers. Here's what they said, as abridged by me and edited for clarity.

Tim Miller (Jeb Bush's communications strategist) said on July 30, 2016:

Trump has no self-control. He has no decency or empathy. He apparently thinks: "If you compliment me, I compliment you. If you criticize me, I mock you."

Sally Bradshaw (who was Jeb Bush's top advisor and worked for the Republican party 30 years) said to CNN on August 2, 2016:

The Republicans nominated a total narcissist misogynist bigot. Trump must not be elected president.

I can't look my kids in the eye and tell them I voted for Donald Trump. I can't tell them to love their neighbor and treat people the way *they* wanted to be treated, then let myself vote for Trump.

Voting *against* Trump is the only choice for reasonable, thoughtful Republicans. Our President must represent what's good about America: a belief in opportunity for *all* (regardless of race, gender, and background) to rise and live the American dream. A President mustn't tear down Hispanics, mock the disabled, and print symbols that offend Jews.

I'm leaving the Republican party and becoming independent. If the party regains its sanity, I'll return.

Louis C.K. (comedian) said in June 2016:

The U.S. government can be dangerous. Hillary has the most experience with it. It's like you're on a plane and want to choose a pilot. One person, **Hillary**, says, "Here's my license. I've flown thousands of flights. I've flown planes in difficult situations. I've had good flights and some bad ones, but I've flown often and know how this plane works."

Bernie says, "Everyone should get rides right to their *houses* with this plane!" "How will you do that?" "I just think we should. To be fair, everyone should get to use the plane equally."

Trump says, "I'm going to fly so well! You're not going to believe how good I'm going to fly this plane! By the way, Hillary never flew a plane in her life." "She did, and we have pictures." "No, she never did."

That summarizes the 3 candidates:

Hillary: experienced

Bernie: unreasonable optimist

Trump: liar

Barack Obama (President) said on August 2, 2016:

Trump's unfit to be President and keeps proving it. His attack on a family whose son died for our country and his lack of basic knowledge about international issues mean he's woefully unprepared.

His statements are repeatedly denounced by leading Republicans, including the Speaker of the House, the Senate Majority Leader, and prominent Republicans like John McCain. They should ask themselves: if you say his words are unacceptable, why do you still endorse him? What does that say about your party? There must be a point where you say, "This is not somebody I can support for President, even if he purports to be a member of my party. Somebody who makes those statements doesn't have the judgement, temperament, and understanding to occupy the world's most powerful position."

I've disagreed with some Republican presidents but didn't doubt they could function as President. I think Mitt Romney & John McCain were wrong on some policy issues, but I never doubted they could do the job. If they'd won, I'd have said to all Americans, "This is our President, and I know he'll abide by norms, rules, and common sense, observe basic decency, and know enough that our government will work." But that's not the situation with Trump. There must come a point where you say, "Enough!"

See Barack's complete unedited 5½-minute speech at:

<http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/president-obama-donald-trump-unfit-serve-president/story?id=41066637>

In an email he sent me & others on September 15, 2016, he said:

Let's compare the 2 candidates, side by side.

While Hillary was fighting segregation in the South, Trump was sued for discriminating against people of color. While Hillary's released every tax return from the past few decades, Trump's provided nearly nothing about his financials. While Hillary was fighting for first responders after the 9/11 tragedy, Trump was bragging his building was now the tallest in lower Manhattan. While Hillary's foundation saved lives around the globe, Trump's "charity" used donations to buy a 6-foot-tall painting of himself.

His daily utterances should disqualify him; but because he says something outrageous or nonsensical every time, he gets a pass. Let's change that.

Michelle Obama She's President Barack Obama's wife. She disliked how Trump claimed America's terrible because of immigrants and must become great again by making him President, since he's a rich businessman who can intimidate his opponents by sending 140-character insults on Twitter.

On July 25, 2016, at the Democrat Convention, Michelle said the following (written mainly by her speechwriter, Sarah Hurwitz):

Barack & I tell our daughters: the hateful language they hear from public figures on TV doesn't represent this country's true spirit. We explain: when a person is cruel or acts like a bully, you don't stoop to that level. No, our motto is: when they go low, we go high. Barack & I take that same approach to our jobs as President & First Lady, because we know our words & actions matter, not just to our girls but kids nationwide who saw us on TV. This election is about who'll **shape our kids** for the next 4 or 8 years. I trust just Hillary.

I want someone who **knows this job**, understands that the issues a President faces are not black & white and can't be boiled down to 140 characters, because when you have the nuclear codes at your fingertips and the military in your command, you can't make snap decisions. You can't have a thin skin or tendency to lash out. You must be steady, measured, well-informed.

I want a President with a **record of public service**, whose life's work shows our children we don't chase fortune for ourselves, we fight to give *everyone* a chance to succeed — and we give back, even when we're struggling ourselves, because we know someone's worse off, and there but for the grace of God go I.

I want a President who'll **teach our kids everyone** in this country matters, a President who believes the vision our Founders put forth: we're all created equal, each a beloved part of America. When crisis hits, we don't turn against each other: no, we *listen* to each other and *lean* on each other, because we're stronger *together*.

Hillary will be that President.

See Michelle's full 14-minute speech and transcripts at:

CNN.com/2016/07/26/politics/transcript-michelle-obama-speech-democratic-national-convention/index.html

Alan Pomerantz (real-estate lawyer) wrote:

Trump claims his business experience will help him "make America great again," despite failures such as Trump University & Trump Steaks. But business isn't politics. I've been a real-estate lawyer for 48 years, handled huge deals. The skills that make a real-estate entrepreneur succeed would produce a bad President, because **real estate differs from the presidency in 6 ways:**

1. Businessmen can walk away from a deal. If a real-estate developer doesn't trust a potential partner, he can find a different interested party. At the White House, no: the President can't just walk away from China if he doesn't like Xi Jinping. Failed talks with Iran, Iraq, Syria, Russia, or North Korea can devastate.

2. Companies can fire at will. Not in politics. Trump would have to work with 535 members of Congress he can't fire; many will want him to fail. He hasn't shown skill handling people who disagree with him, nor any desire to learn how; instead he mocked & belittled anyone who challenged him, by calling them names: "Little Marco," "Lyin' Ted," and "Crooked Hillary." If German Chancellor Angela Merkel sharply disagrees with him, could he restrain himself from attacking personally that American ally?

3. Executives are autocrats. Though real estate is heavily regulated, developers aren't: they can buy whatever they want if they have money. But the President is tightly constrained by laws, rules, and regulations. Trump doesn't understand Presidential limits. His pledge to make Mexico fund a border wall by imposing a tariff on imports from Mexico would need Congressional approval and violate the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). His plan to confiscate remittances to Mexico would require court action and proof of criminality; courts would say no.

4. In business, fact checkers are rare. Sellers can say almost anything they want during a real-estate negotiation; those representations are eventually put into writing, but the buyer must verify. Most contracts say the parties can't rely on anything said beforehand. If a falsehood's found just after the buyer signs the agreement, too bad for the buyer! Trump often lies; but on the world stage, words matter.

5. A common business ploy is to create anxiety. By threatening to not repay loans, Trump made lenders give him a better deal. But what if a world player has a finger on the nuclear button?

6. A business always has bankruptcy as an option. A real-estate developer can threaten to go bankrupt, as Trump did with his casinos. That tactic helped Trump (at the expense of others) but will be destructive if used to not pay government bills. He's already threatened to renegotiate America's debt and print more money to pay it.

People keep doing what made them successful. Trump promises to handle the presidency like a business deal. But profitably buying real estate and licensing his name doesn't indicate he'll lead the free world well.

His full argument's on page A13 of The Wall Street Journal's 6/15/2016 issue.

Mike Bloomberg (billionaire Independent who was New York's mayor) said on July 27, 2016, at the Democrat Convention:

Thanks for letting me deliver an unconventional convention speech. I've been a Democrat, a Republican, and eventually independent because I don't believe either party has a monopoly on good ideas or strong leadership.

Too many Republicans blame immigrants for our problems and block action on climate change & gun violence. Too many Democrats blame the private sector for problems and block action to reform education and reduce the deficit. Sometimes I disagree with Hillary, but we must put those disagreements aside, unite to defeat a dangerous demagogue.

We've heard talk about needing a leader who understands business. I agree, but we need a President who's a *problem-solver* (not a bomb-thrower) and can bring members of Congress *together*, to get big things done. Hillary can.

I was elected mayor 2 months after 9/11, as a Republican. I saw Hillary work with Republicans in Washington to ensure New York got help to recover & rebuild. While she was senator, we didn't always agree, but she always *listened*. That's the approach we need.

I've encouraged businessmen to run for office, because many share my pragmatic approach to building consensus. We don't pretend we're smart enough to make every big decision by ourselves. Most of us know we're just as good as our word. But not Trump. Throughout his career, he's left behind a record of bankruptcies, thousands of lawsuits, angry shareholders & contractors who feel cheated, and customers feeling ripped off. He says he wants to run the nation like he's run his business. God help us.

I'm a New Yorker. We New Yorkers know a con when we see one! Trump says he'll punish manufacturers that move to Mexico or China, but the clothes he sells are made overseas in low-wage factories. He says he wants to put Americans back to work, but he games the U.S. visa system so he can hire foreign temp workers at low wages. He says he wants to deport 11 million undocumented people but seems to have no problem hiring them.

The richest thing about Trump is his hypocrisy. He wants you to believe we can solve our biggest problems by deporting Mexicans and shutting out Muslims. He wants you to believe erecting trade barriers will bring back good jobs. He's wrong. We can solve our biggest problems just if we unite and embrace freedom. We can create good jobs just if we invest smarter in infrastructure and support small businesses. Trump doesn't understand that.

A businessman President sounds appealing, but Trump's business plan's a disaster: it would hurt small businesses, damage our economy, threaten retirement savings, create more debt & unemployment, erode our world influence, and make our communities unsafe. He's risky & reckless.

Hillary isn't flawless; no candidate is. But she's the *right* choice, the *responsible* choice. She understands this isn't reality TV; this is reality. She understands the President's job involves finding *solutions* (not pointing fingers) and offering *hope* (not stoking fear).

America's the greatest country. When people vote with their feet, they come here. Join me in love of country and together elect a *sane, competent* person with *international experience*, a *unifier* mature enough to *reach out* for advice, build *consensus*, and recognize we *all* have something to contribute.

Hillary said on July 28, 2016, at the Democrat Convention:

Trump wants to divide us from the rest of the world and from each other and *fear* each other. Over 80 years ago, President Franklin Roosevelt said the perfect rebuke to Trump: "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself!" We're not afraid. Instead of a wall, we'll build an *economy* where everyone who wants a good job can get one; we'll build a citizenship path for millions of immigrants already contributing to our economy. Instead of banning a religion; we'll work with *all* Americans & allies to fight terrorism.

There's much to do. Many people haven't had a pay raise since the crash. There's too much inequality, too little social mobility, too much paralysis in Washington, too many threats worldwide. But **don't believe anyone who says "I alone can fix it."** Those were Trump's words. True Americans don't say "I alone can fix it." We say, "We'll fix it *together!*" Our Founders wrote a Constitution so no single person has all the power. We must *all* to lend our energy & talents to make our nation better.

Millions of hardworking immigrants contribute to our economy. Kicking them out would be self-defeating and inhumane to kick them out. Grow our economy and keep families together.

At his convention, Trump spoke for 70 minutes but **offered zero solutions.**

I love talking about mine. **In my first 100 days,** we'll work with both parties to invest in new, good-paying jobs in manufacturing, clean energy, technology, small business, and infrastructure.

We'll prepare the young for those jobs. We'll make college tuition-free for the middle class, debt-free for all, and liberate millions of people who already have student debt. It's wrong that Trump can ignore his debts while students can't refinance *theirs*. And a 4-year degree shouldn't be the only path: we'll help more people learn a skill or trade.

We'll give small businesses a boost: make it easier to get credit. Too many dreams die in banks' parking lots. If you can dream it, you should be able to build it.

We'll help you balance family & work. If fighting for affordable child care and paid family leave is playing the woman card, deal me in!

Besides making those investments, **we'll pay for them:** Wall Street, corporations, and the super-rich will start paying their fair share of taxes. We don't resent success; but when more than 90% of the gains have gone to the top 1%, that's where the money is. If companies take tax breaks then ship jobs overseas, we'll make them pay us back; we'll put that money to work where it belongs, creating jobs here at home.

I can do it. **I've worked across the aisle** to pass laws & treaties and launch programs that help millions of people.

Some people think "Trump's a businessman, so he must know about the economy." But look closer. In Atlantic City, contractors & small businesses lost everything because Trump *refused* to pay his bills. He *could* pay but *wouldn't* pay. **He stiffed them.** You know the sales pitch he's making to be President: put your faith in him and you'll win big? That's the same pitch he made to those small businesses, then walked away and left working people holding the bag.

He talks a big game about putting America first; but what part of "America first" leads him to make **Trump's neckties in China**, suits in Mexico, furniture in Turkey, picture frames in India? He says he wants to make America great again; he could start by making *things* in America again.

As for **national security**, I'm proud we stopped Iran's nuclear program without firing a single shot, and we stand by NATO allies against Russia threats. Trump says, "I know more about ISIS than the generals do." No, Donald, you don't.

Does he have the temperament to be commander in chief? He can't even handle the rough & tumble of a presidential campaign. He loses his cool at a reporter's tough question, challenges in a debate, or sees a protester at a rally. Imagine him in the Oval Office facing a *real* crisis. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, President Kennedy worried a war might start not by leaders with self-control but by little men moved by fear & pride.

America's strength doesn't come from lashing out. It relies on smarts, judgment, cool resolve, and precisely applied power.

We can't have a President who's in **the gun lobby's pocket.** I don't want you shot by someone who shouldn't have a gun. We'll work tirelessly with responsible gun owners to keep guns out of the hands of criminals & terrorists. **We must heal our country's divides**, not just on guns but on race, immigration, and more. That starts with *listening* to each other, trying to walk in each other's shoes.

Many people **mistakenly laughed off Trump's comments**, excusing him as an entertainer just putting on a show. They thought he couldn't mean the horrible things he says, like when he calls women "pigs," says an American judge can't be fair because of his Mexican heritage, mocks & mimics a reporter with a disability, and insults war prisoners like John McCain (a hero who deserves our respect).

Here's what Trump doesn't get: America's great because America's *good!* Stop the bigotry & bombast.

Earlier, on June 2, 2016, she gave a more detailed speech, explaining how she'd handle foreign policy better than Trump:

We count on the President to decide questions of war & peace, life & death. Trump can't do the job. His ideas are dangerously incoherent. They're not real ideas, just a series of bizarre rants, personal feuds, and lies. He's *temperamentally unfit* to hold an office that requires *knowledge, stability,* and *immense responsibility.* He should never have the nuclear codes, since he could lead us into a war just because somebody got under his thin skin.

He's said nuclear weapons should be in the hands of more countries, including Saudi Arabia. He threatened to abandon our NATO allies, who work with us to root out terrorists. He believes we can treat the U.S. economy like one of his casinos and default on our debts to the rest of the world; that would cause a catastrophe. He said he'd murder & torture relatives of suspected terrorists; that would be a war crime.

He says he doesn't have to listen to our generals, ambassadors, and other high officials, because he has "a very good brain." He also said, "I know more about ISIS than the generals do." I don't believe him.

He says climate change is a hoax invented by the Chinese. He has the gall to say that prisoners of war like John McCain aren't heroes. He praises dictators like Vladimir Putin. He picks fights with our friends: Britain's prime minister, London's mayor, Germany's chancellor, Mexico's president, and the Pope. He says he has foreign policy experience because he ran the Miss Universe pageant in Russia.

Even if I weren't in this race, I'd do everything I could to make sure he never becomes President, because he'll take our country down a dangerous path.

Unlike him, I've experienced statecraft's tough calls & hard work.

I believe in strong alliances, clarity dealing with rivals, and solid commitment to the values that made America great. We're not a country that cowers behind walls; we lead. If America stops leading, we'll leave a vacuum that causes chaos or makes other countries fill the void, so *they're* the ones making decisions about your lives, jobs, and safety. That won't benefit us.

Our next President must do 6 things to keep America leading & safe and grow our economy:

1. Be strong at home. Invest in our infrastructure, education, and innovation. Reduce income inequality, so citizens won't struggle to provide basics for families. Break down bigotry & discrimination.

Trump's economic plans would add over 30 trillion dollars to our national debt over the next 20 years. He has no ideas on education or innovation. He has many ideas about whom to blame but no solutions. He'd make us weaker.

2. Stick with our allies. Their armed forces fight terrorists together. Diplomats work side by side; they give our military some staging areas and share intelligence.

Moscow & Beijing envy our worldwide alliances. They hope we'll elect a President jeopardizing that strength. If Donald gets his way, the Kremlin will celebrate. Don't let that happen.

It's no small thing when he calls Mexican immigrants "rapists" & "murderers". We're lucky to have 2 friendly neighbors on our land borders. Why'd he want to make one of them an enemy?

It's no small thing when he suggests we withdraw our military support for Japan. He said this about a war between Japan & North Korea: "If they do, they do. Good luck, enjoy yourself, folks." Does he realize he's talking about nuclear war?

Sure, our friends must contribute their fair share. I said so, long before he came onto the scene, and several increased their defense spending.

3. Embrace all tools of American power, especially diplomacy & development, to solve problems before they threaten us at home. Diplomacy takes patience, persistence, and an eye on the long game.

The stakes in global statecraft are much higher & more complex than in the world of luxury hotels. We know the tools Donald Trump brings to the table: bragging & mocking, composing nasty tweets. Instead of solving global crises, he'd create new ones. He doesn't know how to handle multiple countries with competing interests and reach a solution everyone can back.

Trump jokes

These jokes are from the Internet.

Should the U.S. build Trump's wall? Doctors couldn't reach a consensus:

Allergists were in favor of scratching it.
Gastroenterologists had a gut feeling about it.
Dermatologists had skin in the game but advised against rash moves.
Neurologists thought Trump had a lot of nerve.
Ophthalmologists considered the idea shortsighted.
Obstetricians felt everyone was laboring under a misconception.
Pathologists yelled, "Over my dead body!"
Pediatricians said, "Oh, grow up!"
Psychiatrists thought the idea was madness.
Radiologists could see right through it but waited to see what would develop.
Surgeons washed their hands of the whole thing.
Internists claimed it would be a bitter pill to swallow.
Plastic surgeons said the proposal would "put a new face on the matter."
Veterinarians admitted it could be a pet project.
Podiatrists thought it was a step forward.
Urologists were pissed off at the idea.
Anesthesiologists thought the idea a gas but said to sleep on it.
Cardiologists didn't have the heart to say no.
Dentists just brushed it off.
Nutritionists said to discuss it over dinner.

In the end, the Proctologists won out,
leaving the decision up to the assholes in Washington.

Trump's medical records were just released. According to the brain scan:

The left side of his brain has nothing right,
while the right side has nothing left.

The Pope & Trump are standing before a big crowd:

The Pope says to Trump, "Do you know that with one little wave of my hand I can make everybody in the crowd go wild with joy?"
Trump says, "I don't believe it. Show me."
So the Pope slaps him.

The White House fence will post this warning sign:

Warning: contains nuts.

The Internet offers these riddles —

What does Trump prove? You don't have to be poor to be white trash.
How is Trump like a diaper? Self-absorbed and full of shit.
What's the difference between Trump and a flying pig? The letter "f."

How does Trump change a lightbulb?
He holds the bulb and waits for the world to revolve around him.

Why were Trump's first and last wives foreign?
Because some jobs Americans won't do.

Why does Trump want to ban pre-shredded cheese?
He wants to make America grate again.

Why is the Pentagon changing the nuclear code to over 140 characters?
So Trump can't tweet it.

plus these riddles about Mexicans:

How do Mexicans feel about Trump's wall? They'll get over it.
How does Trump plan to get rid of all the Mexicans? Juan by Juan.
Why does Trump take Xanax? For hispanic attacks.

Why doesn't Mexico have a good athletic team?
Because anyone who can run or jump is already over the wall.

Why did Trump decide to build the wall?
Because China built a wall and doesn't have any Mexicans.

Trump is the opposite of Teddy Roosevelt:

Teddy Roosevelt said, "Speak softly and carry a big stick."
Trump speaks loudly and carries a big shtick.

Here are my own comments:

PMURT! Reverse TRUMP!
Disney made a movie about Trump: The Lyin' King.
Physicists discovered why Trump became President: hot air rises.
George Washington: "I cannot tell a lie." Trump: "I cannot lie and tell."

4. Be firm but wise with our rivals. I've gone toe-to-toe with Russia, China, and many other countries. I know how to stand our ground when we must, find common ground when we can. I worked with Russia to reduce nuclear stockpiles and with China to increase pressure on North Korea. Our diplomats negotiated the climate-change agreement, which Trump wants to rip up. Remember whom we're dealing with: not all allies, but countries sharing some common interests with us amid many disagreements.

He doesn't see the complexity. He wants to start a trade war with China. Many Americans have *concerns* about our trade agreements, and so do I; but a trade *war* is different. Combine that with his comments about defaulting on our debt, and it's easy to see how his presidency could create a global economic crisis.

He has bizarre fascination with dictators & strongmen. He praised China for the Tiananmen Square massacre, said it showed strength. He said, "You've got to give Kim Jong Un credit" for taking over North Korea, which Kim did by murdering everyone he saw as a threat (even his uncle). He said he'd give Vladimir Putin an "A" for leadership.

Maybe psychiatrists can explain his affection for tyrants. How could anyone be so wrong about who America's real friends are?

5. Have a plan to confront terrorists. Over the past year, I've laid out my plans to defeat ISIS. What's Trump's? He won't say. He keeps it secret. The secret is: he has no idea what he'd do to stop ISIS. Look at the few things he's said about that. He said, "Maybe Syria should be a free zone for ISIS." So let a terrorist group control a major Middle East country? Then he said we should send tens of thousands of American ground troops to the Middle East to fight ISIS. He refused to rule out using nuclear weapons against ISIS; that would mean mass civilian casualties. He doesn't have a clue what he's talking about, so we can't be certain which of those things he'll do, and start a ground war.

Through all his loose talk, one theme runs constantly: demonize Muslims. His proposal to ban 1.5 billion Muslims from entering our country violates the religious freedom our country was founded on, is a huge propaganda victory for ISIS, and alienates the countries who could help us fight ISIS. Defeating global terrorist networks takes a *realistic plan, experience, and leadership*. Trump lacks all 3.

Our troops deserve a President who sends them to battle just when needed and with a clear, well-thought-out strategy. We can't put our troops' lives in his hands.

6. Stay true to our values. Trump talks against our deepest values.

He says he'll order our military to murder the families of suspected terrorists. During the raid to kill bin Laden, our SEALs took time to move the women & children living in the compound to safety; that's what honor looks like.

He mocks the disabled, calls women pigs, proposes banning an entire religion from our country, and plays coy with white supremacists. What moral example do we set for the world & our kids if our President's a bigot?

Mr. Trump, every time you insult American Muslims or Mexican immigrants, remember that many Muslims & immigrants serve & fight in our armed forces. Trump could learn something from them.

Final point: the temperament it takes to be Commander-in-Chief.

Every President faces hard choices daily, with imperfect info & conflicting imperatives. When a revolution threatens to topple a government, or an adversary reaches out for the first time in years, what to do? The right call takes a cool head, respect for facts, willingness to hear other people's views, humility, admitting you don't know everything — because if you're convinced you're always right, you'll never ask yourself the hard questions.

Imagine Trump making life-or-death decisions for the U.S. and deciding whether to send your relatives into battle. Imagine if he had at his disposal, when angry, not just his Twitter account but America's entire arsenal. Do we want him making those calls — someone thin-skinned and quick to anger, who lashes out at the smallest criticism? Do we want his finger near the button? Making him Commander-in-Chief would undo what Republicans & Democrats did over many decades to make America strong. It would set back our standing in the world and fuel an ugly narrative about who we are. That's not the America I love.

The video of her complete speech is at:

[c-span.org/video/?410484-1/hillary-clinton-lays-national-security-priorities](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7410484-1/hillary-clinton-lays-national-security-priorities)

In the video, you can skip ahead to 3:14, which is when she starts speaking. She speaks for 35 minutes.

Some people are alcoholics.
Trump is an asscoholic: he has an insatiable desire to be an asshole.

Trump's brain is amazing. He's a walking dictionary — but without the last 3 syllables: he's a walking dic.

Trump is America's schizophrenic dog: whenever he encounters someone new, he barks, then alternates between wagging his tail and growling.

For the 2020 election: "Vote to reelect your President!"
Translation: "Up your ass!"

Lili Timmons and I add this comment:

At Thanksgiving, when demand for turkeys is up, Trump is popular, because he's a great turkey, since he likes to wing it and grab thighs, though his "wish bone" is in the wrong place.

2020 election

Trump tried to get reelected in November 2020. He failed. Biden won.

Of all the candidates who wanted to win the 2020 Presidential election, just these 33 were taken seriously (4 Republicans + 29 Democrats):

1 Republican U.S. administrator Quit (or lost)

Donald Trump	President	Nov. 7, 2020
--------------	-----------	--------------

2 Democrat U.S. administrators

Julián Castro	Secretary of HUD	Jan. 1, 2020
Joe Biden	Vice President	winner

2 Republican governors

Mark Sanford	South Carolina	Nov. 12, 2019
Bill Weld	Massachusetts	Mar. 18, 2020

4 Democrat governors

John Hickenlooper	Colorado	Aug. 15, 2019
Jay Inslee	Washington	Aug. 21, 2019
Steve Bullock	Montana	Dec. 2, 2019
Deval Patrick	Massachusetts	Feb. 12, 2020

8 Democrat U.S. senators

Mike Gravel	Alaska	Aug. 6, 2019
Kirsten Gillibrand	New York	Aug. 28, 2019
Kamala Harris	California	Dec. 3, 2019
Cory Booker	New Jersey	Jan. 13, 2020
Michael Bennet	Colorado	Feb. 11, 2020
Amy Klobuchar	Minnesota	Mar. 2, 2020
Elizabeth Warren	Massachusetts	Mar. 5, 2020
Bernie Sanders	Vermont	Apr. 8, 2020

1 Republican U.S. representative

Joe Walsh	Illinois	Feb. 7, 2020
-----------	----------	--------------

7 Democrat U.S. representatives

Eric Swalwell	California	July 8, 2019
Seth Moulton	Massachusetts	Aug. 23, 2019
Tim Ryan	Ohio	Oct. 4, 2019
Beto O'Rourke	Texas	Nov. 1, 2019
Joe Sestak	Pennsylvania	Dec. 1, 2019
John Delaney	Maryland	Jan. 31, 2020
Tulsi Gabbard	Hawaii	Mar. 19, 2020

4 Democrat mayors

Bill de Blasio	New York City	Sep. 20, 2019
Wayne Messam	Miramar, Florida	Nov. 20, 2019
Pete Buttigieg	S. Bend, Indiana	Mar. 1, 2020
Mike Bloomberg	New York City	Mar. 4, 2020

4 Democrat outsiders

Richard Ojeda	West Virginia	Jan. 25, 2019
Marianne Williamson	California	Jan. 10, 2020
Andrew Yang	New York	Feb. 11, 2020
Tom Steyer	California	Feb. 29, 2020

Early dropouts

Of the 33 serious candidates, these 20 had the good sense to drop out early (by February 8, 2020)....

Republicans:

Mark Sanford (governor of South Carolina) was also U.S. representative. Wants to balance the budget.

Joe Walsh (U.S. representative from Illinois) also ran a political radio show. Far-right. He's not the "Joe Walsh" who sang in the Eagles band.

Democrats:

John Hickenlooper (governor of Colorado) was also Denver's mayor. Centrist.

Tim Ryan (U.S. representative from Ohio) emphasized jobs, education, and health care.

Kirsten Gillibrand (U.S. senator from New York) emphasized women's reproductive rights.

Jay Inslee (governor of Washington) was also U.S. representative. He emphasized stopping climate change.

Mike Gravel (U.S. senator from Alaska) didn't become famous enough, so not invited to any Democrat debates.

Steve Bullock (governor of Montana) wasn't invited to June 2019 Democrat debates but invited to July 2019.

Bill de Blasio (mayor of New York City) was New York's *current* mayor. He's White, married to a Black woman. He's far left.

Wayne Messam (mayor of Miramar, Florida) didn't become famous enough, so not invited to any Democrat debates. Black.

Joe Sestak (U.S. representative from Pennsylvania) didn't become famous enough, so not invited to any Democrat debates.

Seth Moulton (U.S. representative from Massachusetts) didn't become famous enough, so not invited to any Democrat debates.

Richard Ojeda (state senator in West Virginia) was the first candidate to quit. He quit before the first Democrat debate, so not invited to any of the debates.

Eric Swalwell (U.S. representative from California) emphasized stopping gun violence. He was in the first Democrat debate but quit before the second Democrat debate.

John Delaney (U.S. representative from Maryland) was the first candidate to announce & actively campaign: he announced on July 28, 2017, and in August began campaigning in the first 2 states, Iowa & New Hampshire. Centrist. He gave many speeches in many towns but wasn't interesting enough.

Julián Castro (Secretary of HUD) was Obama's Secretary of Housing & Urban Development and also mayor of San Antonio, Texas. His grandma came from Mexico when she was 6 years old, so he can claim he's Mexican-American, Latino. During the debates, he didn't have much to say, so he eventually got ignored. His twin brother (Joaquin) is a Congressman.

Kamala Harris (U.S. senator from California) was also California's attorney general. "Kamala" is pronounced similar to "comma la." Her dad immigrated from Jamaica, her mom from Tamil India, so she looks Black and qualifies as being a minority. She bragged she was tough on crime and would be tough on Trump, but her toughness wasn't admired in the Democrat debates. After the debates, the winner (Joe Biden) chose her to be his running mate (Vice President).

Beto O'Rourke (U.S. representative from Texas) was born in El Paso, Texas. He was born Robert Francis O'Rourke in an Irish-American family, but his parents nicknamed him "Beto," which is short for the Spanish name "Roberto," to distinguish him from his grandfather Robert. He can speak Spanish fluently. He graduated from Columbia University. He's handsome, friendly, and reasonable. Many people considered voting for him; but in the debates he made errors, so his popularity declined.

Marianne Williamson (spiritual guru in California) was also an entrepreneur: she wrote 13 books. 4 of them became #1 New York Times best sellers in the "advice & how-to" category. Anti-war, she emphasized peace and that everybody worldwide should love each other. She's Jewish but also became a church pastor with 50,000 people watching her on TV. She was Oprah Winfrey's "spiritual advisor." She ran an organization that donated food to AIDS patients. She believed vaccines and other medicines can be useful but should be supplemented by prayers. She got lots of attention but was considered just a fun "kook." She got few votes. After she quit, she endorsed Bernie Sanders.

Cory Booker (U.S. senator from New Jersey) was also mayor of Newark, which he improved a lot. To learn about living in a low-income dangerous Newark housing project, he moved into one himself and pressed for improvements, finally becoming mayor.

He's Black. After Wayne Messam, Kamala Harris, and Julián Castro quit, he was the main "minority" candidate left in the race.

He's smart: he got a B.A. & M.A. from Stanford University, then won a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford University, then got a J.D. (law doctorate) from Yale University. He has a wonderful smile, so he's the candidate I'd most like to have lunch with. His personality was great, but his message wasn't unique enough. When asked questions, he tended to repeat himself too much without remembering what details to add.

13 finalists

After those 20 dropped out, 13 **finalists** remained. They formed 4 groups, listed here from rightist to leftist.

Republicans:

Donald Trump (U.S. president) was the incumbent and also a rich Manhattan real-estate developer and host of *The Apprentice* TV show. Impulsive. For details, read my "2016 elections" section.

Bill Weld (governor of Massachusetts) was governor long ago (1991-1997). Centrist. Nice guy. But since he opposed Trump (the Republican President), the Republican Party called him disloyal and refused to let anyone debate against Trump. In early voting, he got just 10% of the Republican votes, so he quit.

Centrist Democrats (who are also called "moderate Democrats" and "almost Republican but still anti-Trump"):

Joe Biden (U.S. vice-president) was also U.S. senator from Delaware. The third-oldest candidate. He didn't thrill anybody, but people voted for him anyway, because he seemed "safe," since he'd been senator for many years then Obama's vice-president, without screwing up much, and he didn't make any radical proposals. Democrats felt he might appeal to independents and steal some of those voters away from Trump.

He had many flaws: no creative ideas; a history of plagiarism (when younger, he got in trouble for copying, twice); a history of agreeing too much with Republicans; a speaking style that was outmoded & repetitive (he began too many talks by saying "Ladies and Gentlemen"); hugged women too much (they felt it was awkward). He seemed on the verge of dementia, since he was old and had minor memory problems: for example, he accidentally said "Super Thursday" (instead of "Super Tuesday") and said "Luhan province" (instead of "Wuhan city").

His full name is Joseph Robinette Biden, Jr.

During the Democrat debates, he tried to stay above the fray: he avoided criticizing the other candidates. He got few votes in early primaries (Iowa & New Hampshire), because he wasn't dramatic enough. But he did well in South Carolina (because its Blacks liked his Obama connection, despite his anti-busing vote long ago). Thereafter he won most primaries, until all the other Democrat candidates quit.

Deval Patrick (governor of Massachusetts) waited until November 14, 2019 to enter. Black. Since he's from Massachusetts, which is next to New Hampshire, he thought New Hampshire voters would appreciate him, since he did a generally good job of governing Massachusetts (except for a few small scandals); but New Hampshire voters ignored him, because he wasn't rich enough to have campaign funds.

Mike Bloomberg (mayor of New York City) waited until Nov. 8, 2019 to enter. The second-oldest candidate. He was born in Boston and got an MBA from Harvard but calls himself a New Yorker. He was New York's mayor before Bill de Blasio and ran that city well (improving health and dramatically reducing crime), though Blacks dislike him because his police department too aggressively confronted young Blacks on streets of dangerous neighborhoods. Like Bernie Sanders, he's Jewish with a New York accent.

Like Trump, he's a New York billionaire, but *honest*. He's a multibillionaire because he started a company selling computer services to stockbrokers. He became far richer than the other billionaires running (Trump & Steyer). His net worth became 55 billion dollars, making him the 9th richest person in the whole world before becoming a generous philanthropist.

To prove honesty, he refused all donations to his campaign, so he spent about a billion dollars of his own money to advertise his candidacy. But that eliminated him from most Democrat debates (which were restricted to candidates who got the most donations), and his competitors accused him of trying to "buy" the election. When Democrats changed the debate rules so he could finally participate, the other candidates all attacked him viciously; he replied just meekly, looking too scared to be President. Also working against him: he skipped the first 4 primaries (so he seemed to not care about those people), and he had a history of being Republican (because many of New York's previous Democrat mayors were ineffectual or corrupt).

Despite his heavy advertising, he got few votes, though many people considered him the best executive administrator.

Amy Klobuchar (U.S. senator from Minnesota) emphasized compromise between urban & rural desires. When her campaign began, she emphasized she's from the Midwest, appreciates Midwest values & needs, and would be the best person to combat Trump's popularity there. She accused other candidates of caring too much about the needs of the coasts and not enough about the needs of the middle. That pitch helped her in the Iowa primary but not in other states, so she eventually changed her pitch to: "I know how to work with both Republicans & Democrats to get things done." She bragged that in the senate she sponsored over 100 bills that got passed. Later she emphasized that people should show more "empathy" with other viewpoints.

She's smart: she got a B.A. from Yale and a law doctorate (J.D.) from the University of Chicago. Both degrees were *magna cum laude*.

The New York Times praised her, called her the best centrist. Many other newspapers praised her also. But she never got quite enough votes to win.

Michael Bennet (U.S. senator from Colorado) was also Denver's school superintendent. He has a B.A. from Wesleyan University (where his dad was president and I taught) plus a law doctorate (J.D.) from Yale, where he was editor-in-chief of the Yale Law Journal. He was also an assistant to John Hickenlooper, so it's awkward he ran against Hickenlooper to become President. His dad & granddad also had high positions in the U.S. government. When he was a kid in second grade, he was held back because he had dyslexia, but he overcame that disability.

While campaigning for President, he wrote detailed proposals about how U.S. policies should change, and he visited many towns in New Hampshire to meet voters.

More than any other candidate, he said government should make sure every kid gets good preschool education. He said funding preschool will improve more lives than funding college, though both would be nice.

I was tempted to vote for him, but he still had one limitation: he's a poor speaker. He tries to sound smoothing & calming, a candidate that's "safe" and not radical, but he doesn't appear energetic enough. He talks too slowly and has a speech impediment that makes him sound almost mumbling. He also doesn't know when to shut up: when a reporter asks him a question on TV, he tends to drone on, until the frustrated reporter cuts him off.

He got few votes. I empathize for him but reluctantly voted for a different candidate instead.

Tulsi Gabbard (U.S. representative from Hawaii) was also a major in National Guard, which sent her to Iraq as a medical specialist & Kuwait as a military policewoman. Though she was in the military, she's against most military action: she wants peace, opposes spending money on foreign wars, and wants money spent on domestic matters instead.

The second-youngest candidate. She's Hindu. She was born in American Samoa, and her father's ancestors were Samoan, so she's slightly dark and is classified as a minority. During her high-school years, she spent 2 years in the Philippines.

She campaigns in a white suit and talks tough (like Kamala Harris), so Saturday Night Live made fun of her by emphasizing how she seemed to talk darkly & ominously, like an evil spirit.

Pete Buttigieg (mayor of South Bend, Indiana) was born in South Bend, and his mom was born in California, but his dad was born in Malta, so Pete is a citizen of both the U.S. and Malta. His full name is Peter Paul Montgomery Buttigieg. He said to pronounce his last name "Buddha judge," but when people found that explanation offensive he said to say "BOOT edge-edge."

He's the youngest candidate. He's smart: when he was in high school, he was the valedictorian and won an award for writing a good essay about Bernie Sanders; that essay got him into Harvard, where he graduated magna cum laude and got a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford University (like Cory Booker). After that, instead of going for a master's or doctorate, he went to work as a business analyst & consultant.

He dresses more neatly & formally than the other male candidates and speaks more sophisticatedly, politely, and concisely (knowing when to shorten his answer and shut up), so the elderly say he acts like a perfect son; they want to vote for him, even though he's gay and married to a man. He also joined the navy, which sent him to the war zone in Afghanistan.

Many people predicted he'd become President, even though his only executive experience was as mayor of Indiana's fourth-biggest city (population just slightly above 100,000). Blacks dislike him because he fired South Bend's Black police chief, who then sued Pete for discrimination.

Pete was popular in the first 2 voting states (Iowa and New Hampshire), but then the other Democrat candidates began attacking him (for being wishy-washy, not having a firm platform), so he fared less well in later states (such as South Carolina, which has many Blacks) and promptly quit. The winner (Joe Biden) said Pete resembled Biden's wonderful dead son, Beau Biden, so Biden let Pete be in Biden's cabinet (as Secretary of Transportation, to improve the country's infrastructure).

Left-leaning Democrats (who call themselves “balanced between being centrists and being too far left”):

Tom Steyer (hedge-fund manager in California) waited until July 9, 2019 to enter. Not invited to first 3 Democrat debates. He’s a billionaire and spent lots of money campaigning but got few votes.

He went to prestigious prep schools (the Buckley School and Philips Exeter Academy), graduated from Yale *summa cum laude*, got an MBA from Stanford, became a billionaire by starting a hedge fund that invested successfully in high-risk companies (coal, privately owned prisons, and more), then quit and became a philanthropist doing the opposite (funding attacks on coal, gas, and other environmental dangers). To stop government stagnation, he wants term limits, preventing anybody from staying in in Congress (House or Senate) for more than 12 years.

Andrew Yang (entrepreneur in New York) was born in Schenectady, New York. His parents, immigrants from Taiwan, met in grad school at U.C. Berkeley and had great intellectual careers. Like them, he’s smart: he graduated from a top prep school (Philips Exeter Academy) then got an A.B. from Brown University and a law doctorate (J.D.) from Columbia University. He became a lawyer, then helped run a test-prep company, then started a company that hires college graduates to do nice things.

He said he wants government to give every adult \$1000 monthly, which he called a “Freedom Dividend” and “Universal Basic Income (UBI).” That simple procedure requires no questions about the adult’s income or wealth. He said it would energize the economy by making people spend more. During the Covid-19 pandemic, Trump & Biden partly copied his idea.

He said people should fear that computers will steal their jobs, and companies using computers should pay a value-added tax.

His supporters were called the “Yang Gang.” After quitting, he became a consultant for CNN.

Far-left Democrats (who call themselves “progressives”):

Elizabeth Warren (U.S. senator from Massachusetts) was also professor at Harvard Law School.

She urged a tax on wealthy assets: a 2% tax on wealth above 50 million dollars, 3% on wealth above a billion dollars. That’s a wealth tax, not an income tax. If you’re so rich, the tax would be on everything you own at the moment, not just this year’s income, and you’d have to pay the tax repeatedly, every year, until you become poorer. Computing the tax would be difficult: how much are your houses, lands, vehicles, furniture, clothes, decorations, equipment, and investments are worth today, even though they were acquired years ago? But she says that since the tax is just 2% or 3% per year, it wouldn’t wreck anybody, and the money could be used to fund free schooling & health. Instead of saying “2% or 3% per year,” she made it sound more modest by saying “just 2 cents.”

She bragged she had 70 proposals, with all details written. Whenever asked a question about what she’d do, she said “I have a plan for that.” But many people felt her plans weren’t realistic and her estimates of taxes collected from billionaires were too optimistically high; for example, a billionaire could hide his wealth by storing it in a “trust” instead of in his own name. So she reduced her promises and said “Medicare for All” would be delayed for 3 years. That made her sound unreliable.

She claimed she was Native American and so a minority. To prove it, she took a DNA test. Unfortunately for her, the test said she’s just a *tiny* bit Native American. Trump laughed at her and called her “Pocahontas.”

Far-leftists loved her, since she was a female far-leftist who was a Harvard professor who’d written detailed plans about how to make the far-left become reality. But she didn’t get enough votes, not even in her own Massachusetts and nearby New Hampshire, partly because in debates she acted shrill instead of friendly to other candidates, though cynics say complaints about a woman being “shrill” discriminates against women. Far-leftists eventually asked her to drop out and back the other far-leftist, Bernie Sanders. She finally quit but kept mum about whether she preferred Bernie Sanders over Joe Biden, since she’d had disagreements with both.

Bernie Sanders (U.S. senator from Vermont) was also U.S. representative from Vermont, so he’s been in *both* houses of Congress. Also was mayor of Burlington, Vermont. He’s the oldest and most leftist. He calls himself a “democratic socialist” and wants the U.S. to be more like Denmark. He’s popular among the young and Latinos, because he says the government should give more benefits to students (free tuition) and the underemployed, by raising taxes on billionaires, whom he hates. He almost won the 2016 & 2020 primaries. He praised leftists (such as Cuba’s Fidel Castro) celebrated honeymooned in Russia but realizes those autocratic governments are flawed: he believes in democracy. For details, read my “2016 elections” section.

Democrat debates

The Republicans held no debates. The Democrats held 11. These 5 candidates formed the core of the Democrat debates:

Joe Biden, Amy Klobuchar, Pete Buttigieg, Elizabeth Warren, Bernie Sanders

Debate 1 (June 26&27, 2019) was limited to 20 candidates. So was debate 2 (July 30&31, 2019).

Debate 3 (September 12, 2019) was limited to 10 candidates:

the core plus Beto O’Rourke, Kamala Harris, Julián Castro, Cory Booker, Andrew Yang

Debate 4 (October 15, 2019) had 12 candidates: those 10 plus Tulsi Gabbard & Tom Steyer. Debate 5 (November 20, 2019) had 10 candidates: the same 12 minus Beto O’Rourke (who quit) and Julián Castro (because fewer than 3% of surveyed Democrats chose him); it was parodied accurately by Saturday Night Live at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=y8EQFhj8ca4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y8EQFhj8ca4)

Debate 6 (December 19, 2019) had 7 candidates:

the core plus Tom Steyer & Andrew Yang

Debate 7 (January 14, 2020 in Iowa shortly before Iowa voted) had 6 candidates: the same 7 minus Andrew Yang (because fewer than 5% of surveyed Democrats chose him). Debate 8 (February 7, 2020 in New Hampshire shortly before New Hampshire voted) had 7 candidates again (because Andrew Yang was invited back in).

Debate 9 (February 9, 2020 in Nevada shortly before Nevada voted) stabilized on these 6 candidates:

the core plus Mike Bloomberg

Debate 10 (February 25, 2020 in South Carolina shortly before South Carolina voted) had 7 candidates: those 6 plus Tom Steyer.

Debate 11 (March 15, 2020 in Arizona shortly before Arizona voted) had just 2 candidates:

Joe Biden, Bernie Sanders

Biden's Presidency

As President, Biden faced these unexpected difficulties:

The Senate was tied: 50 Democrats versus 50 Republicans. If a vote resulted in a tie, the tie could be broken by the Vice President (Kamala Harris, who’s a Democrat), so Biden thought he could get many laws passed. But one of the Democrats, **Joe Manchin**, came from a Republican state (West Virginia), often voted like a Republican, and prevented Biden from passing many laws.

Vladimir Putin (Russia’s president) made Russia attack Ukraine (destroy Ukraine’s buildings and kill its people). The United States and Europe wanted to attack Russia back but were afraid to create World War 3.

Donald Trump made Republicans claim the 2020 election was fraudulent, Biden wasn’t really the president, and courts shouldn’t have approved Biden.

For many years, Afghanistan’s government was attacked by **Taliban** rebels. The U.S. tried to help the Afghan government repel those rebels, but the Afghan government was unhelpful and corrupt, so President Trump announced the U.S. would withdraw from Afghanistan. Biden performed the withdrawal, which went worse than expected, so people blamed Biden for inadequate planning.

The **Covid-19** virus pandemic, which started during President Trump’s reign, lasted longer than expected. People argued about how Biden should have reacted differently.

Biden sometimes disappoints.

People wished he’d give more speeches instead of staying quiet. People wished that, when he spoke, he’d speak more forcefully & dramatically. When Biden was a child, he stuttered. Now he doesn’t stutter, but he sometimes omits a consonant or syllable and accidentally says a wrong detail, such as a place’s name.

Republican fundraising

Republicans don't realize I'm a Democrat, so they send me emails begging me to donate money. The emails contain these phrases....

Phrases saying **Democrats are bad:**

Crooked Hillary...
the Left's vicious attacks and smears...
the Radical Left's fundraising machine...
a serious threat to our President's agenda and legacy...
Nancy Pelosi, Chuck Schumer, and their Liberal cronies...
far-left agenda of Nancy Pelosi and the rest of their Socialist Squad...
higher taxes, more cumbersome regulation, and other radical changes...
It's Liberal Mega Donors versus YOU.
Protect our Nation from the Radical Left.
I'm not threatened by the Left-Win MOB.
Stop Chuck Schumer and his liberal war chest.
Radical liberals pass more anti-democracy bills.
Let's show Nancy Pelosi the people want her GONE!
Stand with Mitch in the face of the left's baseless lies.
Biden was selling off a few minutes of his time for \$25,000.
Show the Left they can't buy their way into the White House.
We could find ourselves with Radical Democrats calling the shots.
We're closer than ever to beating Nancy Pelosi's political machine.
Radical Democrats are POURING MILLIONS of dollars into races.
They want a full-blown BIG GOVERNMENT SOCIALIST takeover.
We're up against billionaires like George Soros and Mike Bloomberg.
They're going to use their MEGA-HOLLYWOOD DONORS to do it.
Chuck Schumer and my liberal opponent count on coastal billionaires.
They're raking in hundreds of millions of dollars to defeat our President.

Phrases saying **Republicans are good:**

Patriot...
grassroots conservatives around the country...
Strong Conservatives are standing up to Pelosi.
Conservatives work tirelessly to put our country and its people first.

Phrases saying **hot news:**

FINAL ALERT...
Important Update for you...
Here's the bad news.
You were marked as a Top Supporter.
You've been documented as INACTIVE.
President Trump and his top allies have been trying to warn you.

Phrases saying **be part of the team:**

Friend...
Stand with Trump.
We need all hands on deck.
Thank you for staying in the fight.
Stand up for your fellow Americans.
Thank you for your continued support.
Don't let President Trump down again.
We can't win in November without YOU.
We're counting on YOU to help stop them.
I'm counting on you, Fellow Conservative.
Let your voice be heard and stand with millions of people.
President Trump and I need to know if we can count on you.
Thank you for supporting the President and his Republican allies.
it's critical we know who we can count on, heading into November.
I'm taking this list to President Trump tomorrow, Fellow Conservative.
Stand with President Trump and show we CAN take back the House in 2020.
Can we count on you to step up today?
Will you join us in our fight to catch up?
Can my father and I count on you, Fellow Conservative?
Do you have the courage to go toe-to-toe with the Radical Left's fundraising?

Phrases saying **donation is needed:**

CHIP IN \$500.

Take a Stand Now.
Failure is not an option.
Help keep the Senate RED.
Protect the Senate Majority.
Determine America's future.
Protect our GOP Majority this fall.
Help President Trump's Senate allies.
Protect our Republican-controlled Senate.
Without your support, we could lose it all.
50 strong Conservative patriots are still needed.
We need your help to defend conservative values.
Please don't let the President and his allies down.
Defeat the left AGAIN and keep the Senate RED.
Please don't ignore President Trump and his allies.
Help us fight back against the Democrats' war chest.
Everything President Trump has accomplished is on the line.
Help stop Democrats from taking the White House and Senate!
I won't sugarcoat it, Fellow Conservative. We're in real danger.
Our Conservative allies are being overwhelmed by Liberal cash.
Defend President Trump so he can continue his work for people.
This year's elections are going to influence generations to come.
Fight for President Trump, House Conservatives, and our country.
Donald Trump Jr. reached out to you because he needed your help.
With huge support from Patriots like YOU, we can send a message.
President Trump and my Republican colleagues are counting on us.
Failing to act will clear the way for far-left Democrats to seize control.
Ensure that our Conservative leaders will continue to make America great!
Have the courage to go toe-to-toe with the Radical Left's fundraising machine.

Will you help defend President Trump's Senate Majority?

Phrases saying **rush the donation:**

Last chance to sign Melania's card for Mother's Day...
LET'S SET A RECORD.
We need your IMMEDIATE support.
The American people need help NOW.
Make an EMERGENCY CONTRIBUTION.
You've let President Trump's Senate allies down.
We'll triple-match any amount you're willing to give.
Every second you hesitate puts Biden closer to victory.
Chip in right NOW to fight back against a BLUE WAVE!
Take advantage of our limited-time 400% matching offer.
We need your support before 5X matching ends at midnight.
We're shocked you're standing by and letting Republicans fall.
The House is in play. We need your help NOW more than EVER.
Please contribute \$37 or more TODAY to fight for YOUR Nation.
Make a 5X-MATCHED donation now and stop a liberal takeover!
We're giving all Pro-Trump Conservatives ONE LAST CHANCE.
Chip in now and your gift will be matched 500% until MIDNIGHT.
5x matching is only active for the next 150 Pro-Trump contributions.
You can't ignore President Trump any longer — you need to act NOW.
This was a huge letdown, but we're giving you ONE MORE CHANCE.
Please contribute \$37 or more by 11:59 PM TONIGHT to show the Left.
Your action today is so critical to the future of our conservative movement.
WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, PATRIOT???
Will you be one of the first 180 conservatives to take action?

Democrat fundraising

The Democrat machine sends me hundreds of emails. The typical email begins with fake news (such as Trump is going to shut down my town's post office), followed by a retraction (that crisis will happen just if I don't donate) and a fake survey. The survey asks my opinion (often preceded by a note from Nancy Pelosi saying she wants just my opinion, not money), but the survey's final questions ask if I feel strongly about my answers and, if so, how much will I donate.

It's clear the people who get paid for fundraising care just about how much money I can give, not what my opinions are. That's dishonest, disgusting, against everything that Democracy is supposed to stand for, and makes me feel ashamed to be part of the Democratic Party.

Economic policy

Politicians try to create an economic policy.

Reagan's summary

Ronald Reagan complained that the government's economic policy can be summed up in 3 sentences:

If it moves, tax it.
If it keeps moving, regulate it.
If it stops moving, subsidize it.

One-armed economist

The first president to appoint a council of economic advisors was Harry Truman. He enjoyed hearing the advisors' comments but wished they'd be more definitive.

He moaned, "Give me a one-armed economist," because he was tired of listening to economists who gave reasonable advice followed by, "On the other hand..."

I'd phrase the situation differently:

If you ask 2 economists for their opinions, you'll get 3 different answers.

Chaos

Here's a tale from the Internet:

A surgeon, an architect, and an economist were arguing about which profession was the most important and godly.

The surgeon said, "God's a *surgeon*: the first thing He did was extract Eve from Adam's rib."

The architect said, "No, God's an *architect*: He built the world in 7 days out of chaos."

The economist smiled, "And who made the chaos?"

2 COWS

Economics courses often begin with this lecture:

In ancient times, a farmer had 2 cows. His neighbor had 2 chickens. The farmer wanted a chicken, so he bartered with his neighbor: he'd swap one of his cows for the neighbor's chicken. Then each farmer could produce his own milk and eggs and was happy — until the first farmer realized the cow-chicken swap ripped him off, since he spent more labor raising the cow than the neighbor spent raising the chicken. That's why bartering is unfair and inadequate — and why currency was invented.

When the Internet was invented, folks started posting jokes about how different types of governments and political beliefs would treat the 2-cow farmer differently. Here are examples:

Countries around the world

Communist Russia: You have 2 cows. The government seizes both and produces milk. You wait in line for hours to get it. It's expensive & sour.

Modern Russia: You have 2 cows. You count them, realize you have 4, drink more vodka, count the cows again, realize you have eleventy-six, drink more vodka, and fall asleep. Upon waking, you realize eleventy isn't a number. You count the cows again and have 2 cows. You drink more vodka and try to drown the loss of eleventy-four cows. The Mafia shows up and takes over your cows.

China: You have 2 cows. 300 people try milking them, so you claim full employment & bovine productivity but arrest the reporter who revealed the numbers.

Japan: You have 2 cows. You reengineer them so they're a tenth as big and produce 20 times the milk. You teach them to travel on crowded trains, bow to each other, and do well at cow school. You sell cow cartoons, called Cowkimon, worldwide.

Israel: 2 Jewish cows open a milk factory and ice-cream store then sell the movie rights and send their calves to Harvard to become doctors.

Italy: You have 2 cows but don't know where they are. While looking for them, you see a beautiful woman, so you break for lunch.

France: You have 2 cows but want 3, so you go on strike, eat lunch, and drink wine. Life is good.

Switzerland: You charge for storing 5000 cows that don't belong to you.

Cuba: Your 2 cows swam away to Florida.

India: You have 2 cows. You worship both of them.

Quebec: You're allowed 2 cows just if the French-speaking one is bigger than the English-speaking one.

Afghanistan's Taliban: You get executed because your 2 cows are infidels and you're accused of teaching those female bovines to read.

United Nations: France & Russia veto you from milking your 2 cows. The U.S. & Britain veto the cows from milking you. China abstains.

American political activists

Democrat: You have 2 cows but your neighbor has none, so you feel guilty and vote for politicians who tax your cows. To get money to pay the tax, you sell a cow. The government uses the tax to buy a cow and give it to your neighbor. You feel righteous. Barbra Streisand sings for you.

Republican: You have 2 cows. Your neighbor has none. So what?

Libertarian: Go away! What I do with my cows is none of your business!

Constitutionalist: You can't have cows. Our God-given Constitution doesn't mention cows, so they don't exist.

U.S. bureaucracy

U.S. farm policy: You have 2 cows. The government takes both, shoots one, milks the other, pays you for the milk, then pours it down the drain.

U.S. foreign policy: You have 2 cows. The government taxes you enough so you must sell both, to support a man (in a foreign country) who has just 1 cow, which was a gift from your government.

Food & Drug Administration (FDA): You have 2 cows. To test, you make the first cow drink 400 gallons of water a day. It dies, so you ban water. The other cow has cancer, but you ban cancer pills because making them requires water, so that cow dies.

Automated phone system: You have 2 cows? Press 1 if that's correct, 2 otherwise.... Please hold while we connect you to an operator... (Moo-zak)... Please continue to hold. Your cows are important to us.

American security

Central Intelligence Agency (CIA): You have 2 cows but can't tell anyone about them. Yesterday they weren't at your farm. Today they're not there, again. If you ever have 2 cows, they have no names. *You* have no name. I have no name. Nobody has any names. Got it?

Disclaimer: Warning! Your 2 cows can cause bodily injury if not treated properly. Keep out of reach of children. We can't be held responsible for any bodily injury sustained by interacting with cows.

American financiers

Capitalist: You have 2 cows. You sell one, buy a bull, and build a herd.

American corporation: You have 2 cows. You sell one, lease it back to yourself, and do an IPO on the second one. You force the 2 cows to produce the milk of 4, so one cow drops dead. You're surprised but tell analysts you've downsized and cut expenses. Your stock goes up.

Enron: You have 2 cows. From your bank, you borrow 80% of the forward value of the 2 cows, then buy another cow, with 5% down and the rest financed by the seller (on a note callable if your market cap goes below \$20 billion) at a rate 2 times prime. You sell the 3 cows to your publicly listed company using letters of credit opened by your brother-in-law at another bank, then execute a debt/equity swap with an associated offer so you get 4 cows back, with a tax exemption for keeping 5 cows. The milk rights of 6 cows are transferred through a Panamanian intermediary to a Cayman Islands company owned secretly by the majority shareholder, who sells the rights to 7 cows' milk back to your listed company. The annual report says the company owns 8 cows, with an option on one more. The public buys your bull.

States

Florida: You have 2 cows: 1 black, 1 white. You hold an election to see which is best. Some preferring the white cow accidentally vote for the black; some vote for both; some don't vote at all; some vote correctly but their votes are declared invalid. Outsiders come and decide which cow is your favorite.

California: You have a cow and a bull. The bull is depressed because it spent its life living a lie, so it gets a sex-change operation, taxpayer-paid. Now you have 2 cows: 1 makes milk, the other doesn't. You try selling the transgender cow, but its lawyer sues you for discrimination. To pay damages, you sell the milk-generating cow. Now you have one transgender, rich, non-milk-producing cow, so you change your business to beef. Then PETA pickets your farm, Jesse Jackson makes a speech in your driveway, the California legislature passes a law giving your farm to Mexico, and the LA Times quotes 5 anonymous cows claiming you groped their teats. You declare bankruptcy and shut down all operations. The cows starve to death.

Hollywood: You have 2 cows. You give them udder implants and teach them to dodge bullets, climb walls, and shoot milk from udders on command.

Arkansas: You have 2 cows. That one on the left is kinda cute.
Nevada: You have 2 cows. You charge lonely men from Arkansas to spend the night with them.

Race

Racist: You have a black cow and a white cow. You abuse and fear the black cow. Then it produces less milk and becomes more violent. You say that proves the black cow was bad all along.

Rapper: You grew up with 2 cows but hated your parents, so you moved away at 16 and got shot. Now you have no cows. You say that's because you're black.

Affirmative action: You have 2 cows. The first cow has more black spots, so it gets into college.

Religious feelings

Catholic: You feel guilty for having 2 cows. Your priest says "Having cows is no sin; but if you feel guilt, free them and say 10 Hail Mary's."

Jehovah's Witness: You have 2 cows. You go door-to-door, telling neighbors.

Vegan: You have 2 cows but must not use them.

Famous characters

Bart Simpson: You have 2 cows. Don't have another cow, man!

Homer Simpson: You have 2 cows. Mmm... cows!

Spock: Dammit, Jim, you have 2 cows! They live long and prosper. That's logical.

Dave Barry: You have 2 cows. They tend to explode. I'm not making this up.

Oprah: You get 2 cows. You get 2 cows. You *all* get 2 cows!

George W. Bush: You have 2 cows. You *own* them. We'll give those 2 cows back to you and invest another 2 of those cows in the stock market to pay your retirement, and we can sell 2 of those cows. My opponent will say that's impossible, but he's just trying to scare you to vote for old-government ways to do things. Under my plan, everyone gets cows back.

Rush Limbaugh: Did you see the news that tree huggers are after a fellow who owns 2 cows? They say the cows' gaseous emissions cause global warming. Meanwhile, the femi-Nazis say udders insult women's bodies. Well, I'll just keep eating cheeseburgers and shooting cows, because that's why God made them. If white Christian men earn their cows, tax-and-spend Democrats have no right to give them away to welfare moms.

Donald Trump: You have the world's 2 biggest cows. You form a reality show called "Cowprentice," where cows compete to live on your farm. Then you discover your farm's bankrupt.

Illusionist

Quantum physics: Your 2 cows might actually be 1 cow in 2 places.

Law

Shakespeare recommended we kill all the lawyers. I recommend laughing at them instead.

John Adams

Arguing about laws can eat up lots of time & money. What a waste! What a shame!

President John Adams said:

In my many years, I've come to the conclusion that 1 useless man is a shame, 2 is a law firm, and 3 or more is a Congress.

Courtroom bloopers

In courtrooms, lawyers asked these silly questions:

Did he kill you?
Was that the same nose you broke as a child?
How many times have you committed suicide?
Were you present when your picture was taken?
The youngest son, the 20-year-old, how old is he?
You were there until the time you left, is that true?
How far apart were the vehicles at the time of the collision?
Was it you or your younger brother who was killed in the war?

Here are more courtroom transcripts of lawyers and witnesses having trouble communicating:

Are you sexually active?
No, I just lie there.

Have you lived in this town all your life?
Not yet.

Are you qualified to give a urine sample?
Yes, I have been since early childhood.

Doctor, did you say he was shot in the woods?
No, I said he was shot in the lumbar region.

What gear were you in at the moment of impact?
Gucci sweats and Reeboks.

Doctor, how many autopsies have you performed on dead people?
All my autopsies have been performed on dead people.

Officer, what led you to believe the defendant was under the influence?
Because he was argumentary and couldn't pronounce his words.

Did you tell your lawyer that your husband had offered you indignities?
He didn't offer me nothing. He just said I could have the furniture.

What can you tell us about the truthfulness and veracity of this defendant?
Oh, she'll tell the truth. She said she'd kill that son-of-a-bitch, and she did!

What did he do then?
He came home, and the next morning he was dead.
So when he woke up the next morning, he was dead?

Can you describe the individual?
He was about medium height and had a beard.
Was this a male or a female?

What is your relationship with the plaintiff?
She's my daughter.
Was she your daughter on February 13, 1979?

Mrs. Johnson, how was your first marriage terminated?
By death.
And by whose death was it terminated?

Are you married?
No, I'm divorced.
And what did your husband do before you divorced him?
A lot of things I didn't know about.

Did you blow your horn or anything?
After the accident?
Before the accident.
Sure, I played for 10 years. I even went to school for it.

How old is your son, the one living with you?
38 or 35, I can't remember which.
How long has he lived with you?
45 years.

Do you recall the time you examined the body?
The autopsy started around 8:30 PM.
And Mr. Dennington was dead at the time?
No, he was sitting on the table wondering why I was doing an autopsy.

All your responses must be oral. Okay? What school do you go to?
Oral.
How old are you?
Oral.

What did the tissue samples taken from the victim's vagina show?
There were traces of semen.
Male semen?
That's the only kind I know of.

What was the first thing your husband said to you when he woke that morning?
He said, "Where am I, Cathy?"
Why did that upset you?
My name is Susan.

She had 3 children, right?
Yes.
How many were boys?
None.
Were there any girls?

Do you know how far pregnant you are right now?
I will be 3 months November 8.
Apparently then, the date of conception was August 8th?
Yes.
What were you and your husband doing at that time?

Doctor, before you performed the autopsy, did you check for a pulse?
No.
Did you check for blood pressure?
No.
Did you check for breathing?
No.
So it's possible the patient was alive when you began the autopsy?
No.
How can you be so sure, doctor?
Because his brain was sitting on my desk in a jar.
But could the patient have still been alive nevertheless?
It's possible he could have been alive and practicing law somewhere.

Those transcripts and other weirdos were recorded by court stenographers and collected in several anthologies, such as *Humor in the Court* (1977), *More Humor in the Court*, (1994), *Disorderly Conduct* (1999), and *Disorder in the Court* (1999 & 2004).

Judges

If you're a good lawyer, you can become a judge, whose job is to make nasty remarks to other lawyers.

Famous female judges Here's a tale of two women, which would you rather be?

Both women were judges in the U.S. Both are over 70 years old.
The first woman runs a small-claims court, which decides little questions such as "Did this guy overcharge for cleaning a shirt?" The second woman was on the U.S. Supreme Court, which decides big questions such as "Is abortion legal?"
The second woman (Ruth Bader Ginsberg) seemed to have a better career, except for one detail: the first woman gets paid more. A lot more! About 177 times as much!
Ruth Bader Ginsberg's salary was \$265,600; the other woman's salary was \$47,000,000. That's because the "other woman" is Judge Judy Sheindlin, the "Judge Judy" on TV.
Which would you rather be: a respected Supreme Court jurist (like Ruth Bader Ginsberg) or a rich TV judicial comedian (like Judge Judy)?
Which of those women is more famous? Ruth Bader Ginsberg's writings will become famous through U.S. history books, but at the moment more people know Judge Judy's face. Ruth Bader Ginsberg's decisions will change the laws of the land and how they're interpreted, but Judge Judy is teaching more people how law works.
I'm glad we have *both* women.

How to become a judge A judge is supposed to be an old, wise person who's all-knowing, solving all arguments on all topics.

The British comedy troupe called *Beyond the Fringe* told of a bloke who said:

I'm a miner but plan to become a judge. When you're old, they say you can't be a miner anymore; it's just the opposite with judges. To prepare to be a judge, I'm reading a book called "*The Universe and All That Surrounds It: an Introduction.*"

Jokes

Lawyers can be mean — and so are jokes about them.

Dogs Lawyers screw their clients' opponents — then screw their own clients by charging large legal fees. Here's a tale of how lawyers screw around:

An architect, a doctor, and a lawyer held a contest to see whose dog was smartest.
The architect said "Go, Fifi!" His dog Fifi immediately constructed an exact replica of the cathedral of Chartres — out of toothpicks. Everyone clapped, and the architect gave Fifi a cookie.
Then the doctor said, "Go, Fluffy!" His dog Fluffy immediately performed an emergency Caesarian section on a cow. The cow & calf came through the operation fine. Everyone clapped, and the doctor gave Fluffy a cookie.
Then the lawyer said, "Go, Fucker." The lawyer's dog fucked both other dogs, took their cookies, and went out to lunch.

More such tales are in *Truly Tasteless Jokes* (by Blanche Knott).

Barracuda When a boat got shipwrecked, barracuda ate all the passengers except the lawyers. Why not eat the lawyers? Professional courtesy!

Doctor versus lawyer When a doctor crashed his car into a lawyer's, the lawyer asked the doctor, "Are you okay?" The doctor said, "Yeah."

The lawyer said, "Have a drink." The doctor took a swig from the flask and said "Thanks — aren't you going to have one too?" The lawyer replied, "After the police get here."

Farmer versus lawyer A lawyer went duck hunting in Texas. He shot a bird, but it fell into a farmer's field on the other side of the fence. As the lawyer tried climbing over the fence, the elderly farmer drove up on a tractor and asked what he was doing. The lawyer said, "I shot a duck. It fell into this field. Now I'm going to get it."

The old farmer replied, "This is my property. You're not coming over here."

The lawyer said, "I'm one of the best trial lawyers in the USA. If you don't let me get that duck, I'll sue you and take everything you own."

The old farmer smiled and said, "In Texas, we settle small disagreements like this with the Texas 3-kick rule."

The lawyer asked, "What's that?"

The old farmer replied, "First I kick you 3 times, then you kick me 3 times, and so on, back & forth, until someone gives up."

The lawyer figured he could easily win that against the elderly farmer, so he agreed.

The elderly farmer slowly climbed down from the tractor and walked up to the city fella. His first kick planted the toe of his heavy work boot into the lawyer's groin. The lawyer fell on his knees. The second kick nearly wiped the lawyer's nose off his face and landed the lawyer flat on his belly. The third kick, to a kidney, nearly made the lawyer give up. The lawyer, with great effort, managed to stand up and say, "Okay, you old coot! Now, it's my turn!"

The old farmer smiled and said, "No, I give up. You can have the duck."

Heart An old patient needed a heart transplant. His doctor said, "We have 3 possible donors. The first is a young, healthy athlete who died in a car accident. The second is a middle-aged businessman who never drank or smoked and who died flying his private jet. The third is a lawyer who died after practicing law for 30 years. Which do you want?"

The patient replied, "I'll take the lawyer's heart, because I want a heart that hasn't been used."

Cigars A young lawyer, on his first case defending a lawsuit, asked a senior partner whether to send the judge a box of cigars. The partner replied, "The judge is honorable. If you do, you'll lose the case."

The young lawyer's client won the case. The senior partner asked, "Aren't you glad you didn't send the cigars?"

The young lawyer replied, "I *did* send them. But I enclosed the opposition's business card."

Philly An elderly gentleman entered a bordello and asked for Norah for a night. The woman running the bordello said, "Sir, she's our most expensive woman. She charges \$1000 per night." He replied, "That's okay." He handed \$1000 to Norah and spent the night with her.

The next night, he returned, handed another \$1000 to Norah, and spent another night with her.

The third night, he did the same. At the end of that night, Norah told him, "Nobody before ever spent 3 nights in a row with me. Where are you from?"

"Philadelphia."

“Oh, I have a sister in Philadelphia!”
“I know. I’m her estate lawyer, and I was instructed to give you \$3000.”

Satan God said:

Let there be Satan, so people don’t blame everything on Me.
And let there be lawyers, so people don’t blame everything on Satan.

That quote is from Pete Luchini.

Q&A Here are questions & answers about lawyers:

How can you tell when a lawyer is lying? His lips are moving.
How does a lawyer sleep? First he lies on one side, then he lies on the other.
What’s the difference between a *lawyer* and a *liar*? The pronunciation.
Know how copper wire was invented? 2 lawyers were fighting over a penny.
What does a lawyer get when you give him Viagra? Taller.
What do you throw to a drowning lawyer? His partners.

How can a pregnant woman tell she’s carrying a future lawyer?
She has an uncontrollable craving for bologna.

What’s the difference between a good lawyer and a bad lawyer?
A bad lawyer makes your case drag on for years.
A good lawyer makes it last even longer.

How many lawyers does it take to screw in a light bulb?
3: one to climb the ladder, one to shake it, and one to sue the ladder company.

What do you call a lawyer with an IQ of 100? Your Honor.
What do you call a lawyer with an IQ of 50? Senator.

Why are lawyers like nuclear weapons?
If one side has one, the other side has to get one.
Once launched, they can’t be recalled.
When they land, they screw up everything forever.

What do you get when you cross the Godfather with a lawyer?
An offer you can’t understand.

What do you call a smiling, courteous person at a bar association convention?
The caterer.

What’s the difference between an accountant and a lawyer?
Accountants *know* they’re boring.

What’s the difference between a lawyer and God?
God doesn’t think he’s a lawyer.

What do lawyers and sperm have in common?
One in 3,000,000 has a chance of becoming a human being.

What’s the difference between a lawyer and a rooster?
When a rooster wakes up in the morning, its primal urge is to cluck defiance.

What’s the difference between a lawyer and a prostitute?
A prostitute will stop screwing you when you’re dead.

Why does the law society prohibit sex between lawyers and their clients?
To prevent clients from being billed twice for the same service.

What can a goose do, a duck can’t, and a lawyer should?
Stick his bill up his ass.

Why do they bury lawyers under 20 feet of dirt?
Because deep down, they’re really good people.

Internet More lawyer jokes are at:

IcicleSoftware.com/LawJokes/IcicleLawJokes.html

Noah’s ark

Government creates lots of laws. So if Noah were living in the U.S. now, his tale would go like this:

The Lord told Noah, “A year from now, I’m going to make rain until the whole earth’s covered with water and all evil people are destroyed. I command you to build an ark to save the righteous people and 2 of every living species.” In a flash of lightning, God delivered the ark’s specifications.

One year later, the rain began falling. But the Lord saw Noah sitting in his front yard and weeping, with no ark. “Noah,” shouted the Lord, “where’s the ark?”

Noah replied, “Lord, forgive me. I did my best, but there were big problems.

“First, I had to get a building permit for the ark. Your plans didn’t meet Code, so I had to hire an engineering firm to redraw them. Then I got into a fight with OSHA about the ark needing a fire sprinkler system and approved flotation devices.

“My neighbors complained that to build the ark in my front yard violated zoning ordinances, so I had to get a variance from the city planning commission.

“I had problems getting enough wood because there was a ban on cutting trees, to protect the Spotted Owl. I finally convinced the Forest Service I needed wood to *save* the owls, but the Fish & Wildlife Service won’t let me catch any owls.

“The carpenters formed a union and went on strike. I had to negotiate a settlement with the National Labor Relations Board before anyone would pick up a saw or hammer. Now the ark has 16 carpenters but still no owls.

“When I started rounding up the other animals, I got sued by an animal-rights group objecting that I’d take just *two* of each kind. Just when I got that suit dismissed, the EPA said I couldn’t finish the ark until I file an environmental-impact statement on your proposed flood. They didn’t take kindly to the idea they had no jurisdiction over the conduct of the universe’s Creator.

“The Army Corps of Engineers wanted a map of the proposed new flood plain. I sent them a globe.

“I’m trying to resolve the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission’s complaint about how many Croatsians I must hire.

“The IRS seized all my assets because it claims my ark’s goal is to flee the country to avoid paying taxes. The state sent a notice saying I owe a use tax and another saying I failed to register the ark as a ‘recreational watercraft.’ The ACLU made the court issue an injunction against further construction, on the grounds that ‘God flooding the earth’ is a religious event and therefore unconstitutional.

“I can’t finish your ark for at least 5 more years.”

The sky began to clear. The sun began to shine. A rainbow arched across the sky. Noah looked up and smiled. “You mean you’re not going to destroy the earth, Lord?”

“No,” He said sadly. “I don’t have to. The government did already.”

The original version of that was copyrighted in 1997 by Hugh Holub; you can read it at bandersnatch.com/noah.htm. Thanks, Hugh, for permission to print an edited version here!

War

Most wars are caused by **xenophobia**: fear of strangers. The best way to end wars is to share Pepsi and pizza.

Peace first

Before starting a war, try to resolve the conflict peacefully. If you absolutely must start a war, make sure you’re well prepared.

Back in the year 1900, President Theodore Roosevelt wrote this advice:

Speak softly and carry a big stick.

Comedian Will Rogers put the situation more comically:

Diplomacy is the act of saying “nice doggie” until you can find a rock.

Italian diplomat Daniele Varè put the matter more maturely:

Diplomacy is the art of letting someone else have your way.

My dad expressed that thought more directly:

Make the other person think your idea is *his* idea.

In 1969, John Lennon sang:

Give peace a chance.

My mom said a similar thing to us little kids at the dinner table:

Give peas a chance.

Revolutionary wars

The American government says the September 11th terrorists did a despicable “cowardly” act. I thought the word “cowardly” strange: that’s probably what the British said about us hiding

behind trees during the Revolutionary War.

In the Revolutionary War for the liberation of America, we hid behind trees and fired at the British. The British complained it was “unfair” we weren’t standing in an easy-to-shoot line: we weren’t following the rules of war; we were unfairly terrorizing the British troops, whose families were quite upset.

In the Palestinian War for the liberation of Palestine, the pro-liberationists hid in planes and kamikazeed civilians in the World Trade Towers. We said it was “unfair” that they killed civilians instead of paid soldiers.

I guess what’s “fair” depends on which side you’re on.

America’s first popcorn war

Back in the early 1960’s, John Kemeny (who invented the Basic programming language) said wars should be replaced by video games, where the opponents would fight each other on screen, winner take all.

Here’s what actually happened... the time is March 2003, and you are there...

Saddam is attacked by Baby Bush, but the media treats the “War against Saddam” as a football game, like the Super Bowl. We wait for the referee to fire the opening shot. It’s the first scheduled war: “War will begin at 8PM EST.” We get stats on the players, with pre-game comments from the coaches & quarterbacks. We see whether Bush attacks up the middle or does an end-run around the defensive tackles; whether he lobs some passes up into the air or throws straight ahead, Tomahawk style; and whether the sides, in their strategy huddles, lift their fingers with fake signals to fool the enemy. The TV shows photos of the quarterbacks, Bush & Saddam, displayed side-by-side.

While watching the battle, I was sorry to be out of popcorn. I was eating a veggie burrito instead, which fortunately is non-political, since we haven’t attacked Mexico yet.

This war was strange: for the first time, Bush was seen by most of the world as more evil than so-damn-insane Saddam Hussein. I wondered when Bush would feel tired of fighting, “bushed.”

This whole war was based on sex. Bush & Blair (heads of the U.S. & England) were young, their penises still strong and frustrated, and they wanted to attack Saddam’s opening, to cum to an orgasmic conclusion to the crisis. The heads of France and Germany were older, tired, and wanted the young headstrong men to quiet down and stop disturbing Europe’s naptime.

France

When France objected to the American war on Saddam Hussein, Americans quoted these retorts:

“Going to war without France is like going deer hunting without an accordion.”
— Jed Babbin

“The only time France wants us to go to war is when the German Army is sitting in Paris sipping coffee.” — Regis Philbin

“I don’t know why people are surprised that France won’t help us get Saddam out of Iraq. After all, France wouldn’t help us get the Germans out of France!”
— Jay Leno

“What do you expect from a culture that exerted more of its national will fighting against Disney World and Big Macs than Nazis?” — Dennis Miller

“Here’s why the French don’t want to bomb Saddam Hussein: because he hates Americans and wears a beret. He’s French.” — Conan O’Brien

“I’d rather have a German division in front of me than a French one behind me.”
— General George S. Patton

But Jacques Chirac, who was France’s president, said:

As far as I’m concerned, war always means failure.

Military advice

Here’s advice from *Infantry Journal* about how to fight:

If the enemy is in range, so are you.
Try to look unimportant: they may be low on ammo.
If your attack’s going too well, you’re walking into an ambush.
5-second fuses last just 3 seconds.

Here’s more fighting advice, from members of the military:

When the pin is pulled, Mr. Grenade is not our friend.
Don’t draw fire: it irritates the people around you.
Any ship can be a minesweeper... once.
Bravery is being the only one who knows you’re afraid.
Never tell the platoon sergeant you have nothing to do.
Never be the first, never be the last, and never volunteer.

Here’s advice about flying, from the Air Force:

It’s generally inadvisable to eject directly over the area you just bombed.
Try to stay in the middle of the air. Don’t go near its edges, which can be recognized by the appearance of mountains, ground, buildings, sea, trees, or interstellar space. It’s much more difficult to fly there!
Airspeed, altitude, and brains: two are always needed to successfully complete the flight.
When faced with a forced landing, fly the thing as far into the crash as possible.
Never fly in the same cockpit with someone braver than you.
Weather forecasts are horoscopes with numbers.
Flashlights are metal tubes kept in a flight bag to store dead batteries.
The only time you have too much fuel is when you’re on fire.
If you see a bomb technician running, follow him.
When one engine fails on a twin-engine plane, you always have enough power left to get you to the scene of the crash.
If you crash because of bad weather, your funeral will be on a sunny day.
Without ammo, the Air Force would be just another expensive flying club.
You’ve never been lost until you’ve been lost at Mach 3.
What’s the similarity between air-traffic controllers and pilots? If a pilot screws up, the pilot dies; if the ATC screws up, the pilot dies.
The 3 most famous last phrases in aviation are “Why is it doing that,” “Where are we,” and “Oh shit!”

The military likes to poke fun at itself:

Coast Guard: “Support search-and-rescue: get lost.”
Navy: “In God we trust; all others we monitor. You didn’t see me, I wasn’t there, and I’m not here now.”
Air Force: “Without weapons, it’s just another airline.”
Army: “If you spell U.S. ARMY backwards, you find out what it really stands for: yes, my retarded ass signed up.”
Marines (U.S. Marine Corps.): “Here’s what M.A.R.I.N.E.S. stands for: muscles are required, intelligence not essential, sir! Here’s what U.S.M.C. stands for: Uncle Sam’s misguided children.”

That list is part of what’s on page 140 of *Uncle John’s Bathroom Reader, 18th edition*. For more fun, get that edition and the other editions, too!

The military uses this slang:

Your mouth is called the **crumb catcher**. Your teeth are your **fangs**. If you talk too much and are useless, you’re an **oxygen thief**.
If you were forcibly “volunteered” to do something, you were **voluntold**.
If you head the team that cleans bathrooms, you’re the **latrine queen**. In the urinal, the scented cake is **officer’s candy**.
Your pistol is your **bang-bang**. Your sneakers are your **go-fasters**. Your flashlight is your **moonbeam**. Your pen is your **ink stick**. Your maps are your **comics**. Flip-flop sandals you wear in the shower are your **Jesus slippers**.
What meat are you being served? To find out, look at the **meat identifier**: if you see cranberry sauce, the meat is turkey; if you see applesauce, the meat is pork chops.
Got injured? You’re thrown in the ambulance, which is the **meat wagon**.
On your uniform, the row of medals is your **salad bar**. If you have many medals & ribbons, that’s your **fruit salad**, also called your **chest candy**.
If you’re a pilot, you’re a **zoomie** and a **flight-suit insert**. A helicopter is a **bird**; its pilot is a **rotor-head**. If you’re tight in your flight suit or (sleeping bag), that’s your **furt sack**.
Got lice in your hair? That’s your **galloping dandruff**.

If you do something strangely, that's like using a **football bat**. When things go wrong, that's like a **soup sandwich**. You're controlled strangely by the Pentagon, which is the **5-sided puzzle palace**. If you're in the army, you're just a **trench monkey**. If you're in the Coast Guard, you're just a **puddle pirate** in **Uncle Sam's canoe club**. If you're in the Navy, you're just a **pollywog** until you cross the equator; then you become a **shellback**

More examples & details are at:

military.com/join-armed-forces/military-terms-and-jargon.html

Engineers

How does a "mechanical" engineer differ from a "civil" engineer? The Internet gives this answer:

Mechanical engineers build weapons.
Civil engineers build targets.

Whose shoes?

I feel sorry for Palestinians who live in Israel and want to make an honest living. Their thinking goes like this:

Yeah, go call me "Ali Baba."
Do you want to buy a shoe?
Please don't call me now an "Arab,"
And I won't call you a "Jew."

Say I'm just from Meso'tamia
Where our Western culture grew.
Say that Israel is for "us," and
Not just "me" and not just "you."

What about the *intefada*?
Is it just for infants there?
Can us old folks have some peace, or
Must we tear out all our hair?

I am just a kind commuter,
Not a looter, not a shooter.
My computer? Want to boot her
But no 'lectric power there.

Want to calm her, but the bombers
Coming out of both sides' lairs
Make me wish I were a *kishka*
Or a *hummus* dumpling there.

Sure, go call me "Ali Baba."
Do you want to buy a shoe?
Please don't call me now an "Arab,"
And I won't call you a "Jew."

Call me "Frank." I'll call you "Moe."
Then mo' frank we both will go;
And our children, they will thank us,
And our parents will not spank us,
As together we will grow,
Searching for our heaven's glow.

— by Rasaalah Al-Walta
(Russell Walter's Arabic cousin)

Cute dictators

Donald Rumsfeld was Secretary of Defense under presidents Ford and Bush Junior. He bragged that Saddam Hussein met the same end as other bad dictators, such as Hitler, Stalin, Lenin, and that Romanian guy whose name is hard to spell.

But was **Lenin** so bad? Compared to Stalin, Lenin was cute.

So was **Saddam's son, Odai**. Though Odai had a reputation for being even crueler than his dad, when I look at photos of him I just melt, because his face is so cute! He looks like the Italian actor Marcello Mastroianni: he has the same cute smile and puppy-dog eyes. Too bad Odai's dead: he could've had a wonderful movie career. His dad raised him wrong.

Osama Bin Laden — who dictated to terrorists — looked cute too. He looked just like the Jewish longhairs I went to school with. Too bad he disliked my group and started a cafeteria food fight, throwing airplanes. I don't understand his goal: the Palestinian cause already got worldwide sympathy; what did he expect to gain by making Muslims disliked? He seemed immature. He was just a kid throwing temper tantrums, forcing the rest of the world to childproof everything, for protection from him.

African missionaries

Bishop Desmond Tutu, from South Africa, said:

When the missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said, "Let us pray." We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land.

Antiwar slogans

Antiwar protesters invented these slogans:

Slogan	Author
War is a mad game.	Jonathan Swift
Draft beer, not people.	Bob Dylan
In war, truth's the first casualty.	Aeschylus
War makes thieves. Peace hangs them.	George Herbert
When the rich wage war, it's the poor who die.	Jean-Paul Sartre
Fighting for peace is like screwing for virginity.	anonymous
Old men dream up wars for young men to die in.	George McGovern
War doesn't determine who's right, just who's left.	Bertrand Russell
Someday they'll give a war and nobody will come.	Carl Sandburg
War is just a cowardly escape from the problems of peace.	Thomas Mann
A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of colored ribbon.	Napoleon
You can no more win a war than you can win an earthquake.	Jeanette Rankin
Civilization advances. In every war, they kill you in a new way.	Will Rogers
The way to win an atomic war is to make certain it never starts.	Omar Bradley
Unlike women, men menstruate by shedding other people's blood.	Lucy Ellman
Join the Army: see the world, meet interesting people, and kill them.	1978 pacifist badge
Organized slaughter doesn't settle a dispute. It just silences an argument.	James Green
War's the only game where it doesn't pay to have the home-court advantage.	Dick Motta
Everyone's a pacifist between wars. It's like being a vegetarian between meals.	Colman McCarthy
If just one man dies of hunger, that's a tragedy. If millions die, that's just statistics.	Joseph Stalin
All murderers are punished unless they kill in large numbers and to the sound of trumpets.	Voltaire
"There are no atheists in foxholes" isn't an argument against atheism. It's an argument against foxholes.	James Morrow
A great war leaves the country with 3 armies: an army of cripples, an army of mourners, and an army of thieves.	German proverb
Anyone who's looked into the glazed eyes of a soldier dying on the battlefield will think hard before starting a war.	Otto von Bismarck
If people want to make war they should make a color war, and paint each other's cities up, in the night, in pinks and greens.	Yoko Ono
The problem in defense is how far you can go without destroying from within what you're trying to defend from without.	Dwight Eisenhower
If you shoot one person, you're a murderer.	
If you kill a few, you're a gangster.	
If you're a crazy statesman who sends millions to their deaths, you're a hero.	1939 newspaper
To delight in war is a merit in the soldier, a dangerous quality in the captain, and a positive crime in the statesman.	George Santayana

More antiwar slogans are at:

QuoteGarden.com/war.html

Citizens Police Academy

I live in Manchester, New Hampshire. Our city's police department lets people attend the **Citizens Police Academy**, free! To enroll, just fill a form to show you're not a criminal. You don't have to be a Manchester resident, though it helps to live nearby. (If you live far away, ask your city's police department whether it offers a similar program. Many do!)

Manchester's Academy meets every Wednesday evening, from 6PM to 8PM, for 8 weeks, at police headquarters. The 8 sessions have these topics:

Chief chat & tour
Gangs
Horses & dogs
How police communicate
Kids & computers
Crime-Scene Investigation (CSI)
Special Enforcement Division (SED)
Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT) & graduation

If you attend most of the sessions, you get a certificate to hang on your wall, so you can brag about your police knowledge.

I attended in 2018, learned a lot, and got my certificate. I repeated the experience in 2019, to learn more and take notes.

For each session, here's my summary (edited for brevity & clarity).

Session 1, part 1: chief chat

The police chief (**Carlo Capano**) began the session then turned it over to Officer **Steve Duquette** (who organizes the sessions and helps police relate to senior citizens).

Welcoming Carlo is nice, cheery & joking, not a stiff administrator. To put the students at ease, he began with lighthearted comments, such as:

I see some of you are repeats. I like seeing that.
Just trying to socialize with you, that's all. I want to ease into this.
When did my day start? 5:30 this morning!
Last night it got crazy. "Interesting." I should say.
I know what you guys are doing: you're sizing us up. Go ahead!

Steve said:

Welcome! You're going to hear shocking things & funny things.

Students 19 students attended. Steve asked them to say who they are and why they're here.

Some students were in their early 20's, trying to improve their careers by learning how to deal with police. Some were policemen's relatives. Some were from agencies that work with police. Others were retired but thought this class would be a fun way to spend an evening.

MCRT A student said:

I work with the **Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT)**. It's a non-profit agency with an 800 number. When we take calls, police sit with us and come with us if the crisis is too hard for us to handle. We want to keep people out of the emergency room.

Carlo added:

We received 148,000 calls last year for service.

Carlo & Steve said the police don't have enough staff to handle all calls well. Before MCRT existed, police just shoved potential suicides into the police wagon and felt sorry for them. Now those endangered people get better treatment because of MCRT help.

People are more likely to reveal the truth to MCRT than to police, because people fear telling police about illegal drugs. Carlo said:

Nobody wants to talk with cops.

Backgrounds Steve explained his background.

He spent 2 years working in the Concord NH police department then transferred to Manchester. He dealt with public housing then had other positions. 2 years ago, he switched to senior-citizen services, which he heads now. He's also been in the marines, where he had fun shooting machine guns.

Then it was Carlo's turn:

Carlo became chief last July. Before that, he spent 23 years as a policeman in many departments: Child Abuse, then many other departments, then Polygraph.

Size Carlo revealed the police department's size:

237 certified officers (including many divisions, such as detectives, the drug unit, and juvenile division), plus 70 civilian helpers. They're all organized into 6 divisions.

Of the 237 certified officers, 102 are patrol officers. But not all certified officers are available. 33 are missing from action now (as is typical), because some are injured, some are in courses, and some are in the military — so their colleagues cover for them by doing double shifts.

Heather Hamel A student asked what Carlo thought of **Heather Hamel**. Carlo gave this info:

Heather Hamel is the police department's new civilian Public Information Officer (PIO). Her job is to tell the media about the police department and how police do many things besides just handling shootings.

29 people applied for that position, but the department chose her. She was a career newscaster at TV station WMUR. She has good relations with the media.

The media & police have a history of not trusting each other. Previously, police publicity was handled by a police officer, but we wanted somebody with more experience dealing with the media.

Changes A student asked how the police department changed in the last 20 years. Carlo replied:

Social media made this job totally different: people don't believe us anymore.

When I started as a policeman, a policeman's job was to enforce the law and arrest criminals; but now 60% of a policeman's activity is to act as a social worker, just 30% or 40% to do law enforcement.

When I signed up to be a policeman, I didn't sign up to be a social worker, but you can't get out of the drug problem by doing just law enforcement. Now police must deal with the opioid crisis, mental health, and homelessness. There aren't enough beds anymore for mental-health patients and other problem people. We must deal with 76 languages, spoken in Manchester by immigrants and others.

Yes, a lot's changed! We can't arrest anymore for having drug paraphernalia. If somebody's drinking in the park, we can give him a \$50 ticket the first time, \$100 ticket the second time, a ticket to go to court the third time; but he doesn't bother to go to court, so the court issues a warrant for his arrest, then we grab him. But since the new bail-reform law lets people bail out easily (except for violent crime), offenders ignore tickets, crumple them up, and, after an easy time in court, quickly go back on the streets, doing the same things.

Manchester is New Hampshire's most populous city and has all big-city problems. But the state's lawmakers, in Concord, take input from smaller cities where bail reform might be more reasonable. Their reform is kicking our butt. The reform requires judges to be lenient about bail, unless the crime's very bad.

Other changes have been for the better. Now we can transfer some calls to the Mobile Crisis Response Team (MCRT). The Community Advisory Board meets monthly to give us suggestions.

Can we always get better? Absolutely. But 5% of the community still dislikes police.

Further comments A student mentioned:

The **Manchester Police Athletic League (MPAL)** is a non-profit program for kids, with a police officer assigned. It teaches the kids how to do sports (such as boxing) plus other skills (such as how to give speeches).

Carlo added:

We go into middle schools and get the kids to role-play — imitate cops! — so kids see the cop's viewpoint, and the cops learn about kids' reactions, too.

A student asked:

Does the **Internet of Things (IoT)** affect police work?

Carlo replied:

Yes, the officers look for doorbell cameras, etc.

Carlo added:

We've been helped by **Protective Policing**, which puts data into a crime database and onto a city map divided into 500-square-foot lots, including info about when the crime was committed. For example, it might say that at 5PM, during certain weather, a particular lot often gets hit with crime. So about 5PM, the police will go there for 15 minutes, to watch and scare away the bad guys. That system was invented by IBM & others. It reduced crime each year.

Session 1, part 2: tour

We students got a tour of police headquarters. Steve warned us:

You can't bring any weapons with you!

When you're an Academy student, here's how you tour...

Walk past a **metal detector**, which checks for weapons.

Then pass the cabinet holding keys for police cars. That cabinet used to be unlocked, but several years ago a bad police officer stole one of its keys, used the key to steal a police car, and used that car to rob a bank, so now that cabinet is locked. That cabinet is nicknamed the "**Celine 2000**," because that was the person & year when the incident occurred.

You come to 6 areas....

Booking First comes the **Booking area**, where criminals are brought when arrested. Before entering Booking, Steve puts his gun into another locked cabinet in the hallway, because even policemen aren't allowed to carry guns into Booking.

Booking includes many tiny rooms. Each room has a bench, with handcuffs attached. When a criminal is brought to Booking, he's already in some handcuffs, but those handcuffs are in turn attached to the bench's handcuffs, to keep the criminal on the bench. Behind the bench is a wall, which looks like concrete but is actually spongy, to prevent the criminal from purposely banging his head.

Rooms for kids are private, so kids & their parents can't see or hear each other.

The criminal's photo ("**mug shot**") is taken, for the FBI. The criminal's fingerprints are taken by a modern machine that uses lasers instead of ink; that system is more reliable than ink — except when the machine breaks down.

Roll Call Next comes the **Roll Call room**.

It's a classroom. Police come there at the beginning of their shift, to check in, hear the latest news, and test their guns.

Each policeman has a handgun but also a "**long gun**" rifle, which resembles a military assault rifle, is semi-automatic, and shoots farther than a shotgun, for use in extreme emergencies. The policeman stores that rifle in his police car, in a secret locked drawer that gets unlocked by pushing a secret button.

Evidence Evidence is stored in the **Evidence room**. Each piece of evidence is stored in its own locked drawer.

Heroin must be put into a bag first.

Clothes dripping with blood are first put into a drying cabinet, which has a window so you can watch the clothes dry. When dry, they're removed from the cabinet (and any blood fallen onto the cabinet's floor is wiped up & discarded); then the cabinet is bleached.

Electronics (such as phones) contain evidence that must not be erased. Criminals often tell carriers (such as Verizon) their phones were "stolen," to make the carrier erase them remotely and destroy the evidence. To prevent such destruction, police leave the phones turned on, plugged in, and stored in a special cabinet that can't be penetrated by signals from carriers. Police also tell carriers the phones belongs to criminals so don't erase them.

Call Center The **Call Center** is where civilian police employees handle incoming calls.

That room has 2 parts.

In one part, employees hear incoming calls. In the other part, called **Dispatch**, employees tell police cars where to drive. In Dispatch, each employee sits at a keyboard attached to its own 4 computer screens showing maps of Manchester.

If you phone 911 (instead of the Call Center's direct number), your call is answered by a NH state employee in Concord, who transfers the call to Manchester's Call Center. You'll get faster, more reliable service if you call Manchester's police Call Center directly instead of 911, but 911 has one advantage: the 911 system can detect where you're calling from.

Manchester's Call Center receives more calls than it can handle, so it prioritizes. If your call is about a past theft, your call gets less priority than a call about violence in progress.

Firing Range The **Firing Range** is where police practice shooting guns (pistols & rifles). It looks like an indoor bowling alley: you aim & fire. It's ventilated, to blow smoke away from your eyes.

One challenge is to wait until a fake man turns toward you, then fire accurately within 3 seconds. Then try a harder challenge: do it in the dark, while pale blue lights are flashing crazily, imitating the flashing lights of a police car. To help your accuracy, each rifle includes a laser, which shines a red dot at the target, showing where you'll hit when you fire.

For safety, the Firing Range's bullets are **frangible**, which means they disintegrate into harmless powder after they hit the target.

Besides guns & rifles, police also carry **Tasers** (stun guns). They shoot electrified darts that disable the criminal's nervous system. To discover how a criminal feels when Tasered, Steve & other policemen have tried Tasering each other. That experiment was educational but painful.

A student said Portsmouth's firing range is more advanced: it uses the **MILO Range Theater**, which has 3 big video screens that show imitation criminals attacking you simultaneously from multiple directions. Steve said Manchester can't afford that.

Parking Lot The outdoor secret **Parking Lot** holds police cars (some marked, some unmarked, some for detectives), police vans ("wagons" bringing criminals to the Booking area through a secret door), and the armored van ("**SWAT van**").

The SWAT van is a bulletproof van. It transports heavily armed police to an emergency. It also acts as a bulletproof wall ("barricade"), for police or victims to hide in or behind. It's a Ford F-350 pickup truck that's armored & souped-up.

The police get 50 SWAT calls per year, but that van is used sometimes for non-emergencies too.

The Parking Lot includes chief Carlo's car. Steve joked to the students:

The chief's car is right behind you. If you want to key it, go ahead!

Steve said patrol officers must be at least 21 years old because they must sometimes carry alcohol as evidence.

Afterwards Steve walked us back to the original seminar room, thanked us for coming, and invited us to come to the future sessions. He said:

I wouldn't miss CSI. It's my favorite session. Gory!

After the students walked out of the building, 4 students gathered outside a few minutes, to chat.

One student said that many years ago, when he was a kid, he got in trouble for having marijuana, which crushed his police career.

Another student said that when she lived in a small New Jersey town, its police were friendly & helpful, but she finds Manchester police unhelpful. For example, while she sat in her Manchester home by a picture window, somebody shot that window, putting bullet holes through it; but when she reported it to police, they brushed her off, didn't come investigate, and basically told her to get lost, because they didn't have time to investigate such matters.

Session 2: gangs

The police department includes the **Manchester Gang Task Force**. Officer Ryan Hardy us a PowerPoint presentation, based on materials he's read plus his personal experiences.

How police got involved The Gang Task Force consists of 3 officers: Ryan Hardy plus officers Segal & McGee.

The force began 3 years ago, when police started seeing gangs on Manchester's west side. Police started tracking anyone with gang involvement and started examining tattoos & clothing.

In the 1980's, gang members were mainly in California and wore khakis, Polo shirts, and bandanas. But now gangs are getting smarter. Tattoos are still popular, but clothing and other details have changed. Some gangs are national. Other gangs are local.

Manchester includes several types of gangs. Some are Latino. Others are Afro. Others are religion-based.

If you commit a crime, the judge can extend your prison sentence if he discovers you're a gang member; but police didn't know which criminals are gang members! So those 3 officers went underground to track them. Officer Segal did that first, then was joined by Hardy & McGee. They called themselves the **Gang Prevention Unit**. They gave speeches to teachers, the YMCA, and Salvation Army, to explain how to detect gang members.

Why join gangs? When kids feel oppressed, they get together to form a gang. Most gang members are boys. A boy is more likely to join a gang if he grows up without family structure: his dad is absent, mom works 2 jobs, so the boy gets lonely. He gets together with friends, hoping to get **power, wealth, and respect**. So here's why boys join gangs:

peer rejection: they have no friends yet.
no strong male role model: poor parent-child relationships.

One gang consists of African refugees. They live in Manchester's projects. They have poor family structure. One summer, they had a dozen shootings.

How members act Like most people, gang members want **wealth, power, and status**. But unfortunately, gang members resort to illegitimate means. They learn from other gang members to do deviant acts.

Gang members often have legitimate daytime jobs but tend to **bully** until people fear them.

Gangs **threaten**. The threat is constant, always there, creating fear. Example:

Many Manchester residents, when they hear gunshots, don't dare call police, because they fear retribution from gang members. When police ask "Did you hear gunshots?" the resident might lie and say "No." If the resident says "Yes" and police ask "Did you call?" the resident might reply "No, I just went back to bed."

Violence The threat from gangs is constant, and so is fear of retaliation. But actual violence is sporadic, usually retaliatory from a history of somebody doing something.

When violence occurs, police appear and stop cars. Then the gang members say to each other, "Seems hot here," so they go underground awhile, the violence temporarily disappears, and residents think the gangs left; but the gangs are still active, even if police just arrested 14 gang members.

Graffiti In the past and on the "Gangland" TV show, we saw graffiti written by gang members who entered a rival's territory and spray-painted the gang's symbol onto walls and sidewalks, to show rivalry and emphasize the sprayer's dominance. But graffiti is now mainly by artists, not gang members.

Drugs In Manchester, most crimes by gangs are drug sales, not territory wars anymore.

National gangs The national gangs belong to 3 groups:

Folk Nation includes the **Crips** and the **Gangster Disciples**.
People Nation includes the **Bloods** and **Latin Kings**.
Hispanic gangs include **Mara Salvatrucha 13 (MS-13)**.

In prison, gang members learn to be friendly with gangs in the same group. For example, the Crips are friendly with the Gangster Disciples (because they're in the same group, Folk Nation) but less friendly with the Bloods & Latin Kings (because they're in the opposite group, People Nation).

Folk Nation uses these symbols (on tattoos, shirts, walls, and sidewalks):

The main symbol is the number **6**. Also, a **6-pointed star, dice** (because they have 6 sides) showing 6 dots on the side, **3** (because it's half of 6), 3 dots (tattooed on your hand), a **pitchfork** including 3 tines (spears), the color **blue** (standing for the Colorado Rockies), an **arrow** pointing down with a loop in the middle (so the arrow looks like a 6 plus a downward arrowhead), an **upside-down 5** (because they hate the Bloods, whose symbol is 5), and **BK** (which stands for **Blood killer**). No, the "BK" doesn't stand for Burger King!

Some members get cleverer:

For example, one Crip wrote "CRIP" as a tattoo, but in numbers: since C is the 3rd letter of the alphabet, C became 3, R became 18, I became 9, and P became 16. He wrote them in Roman numerals, so 3 18 9 16 became III XVIII IX XVI. By writing just in Roman numerals, he hoped police wouldn't deduce he was a Crip, but police figured it out!

The Crips were started in 1969 in Los Angeles by Stanley Tookie Williams and Raymond Lee Washington.

By contrast, the **Bloods** use the number **5** instead of 6.

To show disrespect for 6, they write a **6 with a slash through it**. They like **bloody red** (and green & black) instead of blue. They like the letters **MOB**, which stand for **Member Of Bloods**; but if you ask a Blood what the "MOB" tattoo stands for, the Blood usually says "Money Over Bitches" to pretend he's not a gang member. Another Blood symbol is **CK**, which means **Crip killer**. The Bloods also like an **upside-down triangle** and a **dog paw**.

The Bloods were started in the 1972 in Los Angeles by Sylvester Scott & Benson Owens.

A Blood subgroup, called **United Blood Nation (UBN)**, is just on the East Coast (not West Coast) and just in smaller cities.

It was founded in 1993 in New York City's Rikers Island prison. Its members drive to rural areas in Maine and elsewhere, to sell drugs in little towns whose police forces are too small to have anti-gang units. To discover which towns lack anti-gang units, UBN's leaders peek at police Websites.

The Crips & Bloods both like the **Houston Astros** baseball team and therefore the letter **H**.

The Bloods like that team because its symbol is a 5-pointed star. The Crips like that team because the Crips noticed part of the Astros' 5-pointed star looks broken.

The **Gangster Disciples** (which, like the Crips, are part of Folk Nation) like the symbol **GD** and the number **74** (because G is the 7th letter of the alphabet, and D is the 4th). So if you see a GD tattoo, it does *not* mean the guy is religious and likes GOD. Their other symbols, used by GD's subgroups, are **IGD (Insane GD)** and **BGD (Black GD)**.

The **Latin Kings** (which, like the Bloods, are part of People Nation) include more women than other gangs.

One of its tattoos is **ALKQN** (which means **Almighty Latin King & Queen Nation**). Its main colors are **black & yellow**, but sometimes red & green. The only New Hampshire cities having lots of Latin Kings members are Nashua & Salem.

Gang symbols are fun until you get murdered for wearing them.

Gangs make laws. Most gangs say members can't use drugs themselves, but most members end up doing drugs anyway, so going to rehab is okay.

So many gangs Manchester police track 25 gangs. **Prison gangs** are in Manchester's Valley Street jail and also in Concord NH and Berlin NH. Outlaw **motorcycle gangs** (such as **Hell's Angels** and **Outlaws**) are mostly statewide and tracked

by the FBI.

But in cities, neighborhood gangs cause the most headaches....

Neighborhood gangs In Manchester, one neighborhood gang was called **180** because it began in the basement of 180 2nd Street, where a boy sat on his mom's red couch, smoking pot with his friends. Later, he changed the name to **Red Couch Gang**. Its members joined when they were 14-21 years old; now they're adults.

A competing neighborhood gang is **Orange To Laurel (OTL)**, which controlled the territory from Orange Street to Laurel Street. Its members joined when they were 18-21 years old; now they're adults. It started as a turf-war response to 180.

The 180 and OTL gangs are both mostly from African-immigrant families. The OTL gang has slightly lighter skin than the 180 gang and so thinks it's better. The 2 gangs shoot at each other, so members can show the bravado of being better than do-nothing members.

But Manchester's neighborhood gangs don't care much anymore about territory, because they have more to prove: **loyalty**, through rivalries & spray paint. They're also involved making illegal **profits**, by selling drugs & firearms & sex (prostitutes).

Another profit source, especially by Hispanic gangs, is **check fraud**:

Take a string, wrap it around a sticky bottle, drop the bottle into a mailbox, then pull it back out so it's attached to a letter. Read the letter. Hope it's a check (such as a mortgage payment).

Have a respectable-looking girl go to a bank, sign the check over to her, and deposit the check into a fake account. Take cash out of that account, and run away before the bank discovers the cheat.

Comment by student:

Some banks are trying to reduce that fraud, by tightening the rules about who can get cash. They require a better ID of the person withdrawing, such as a palm print (which is harder to fake than a fingerprint).

Unlike national gangs, **neighborhood gangs are structured loosely**: no hierarchy, no sergeants or lieutenants.

Wars start between the neighborhood gangs because of something small (such as a small unpaid drug debt or an insult to somebody's mother). But then the violence increases, until it gets "way over the top."

Those gangs used to insult each other by writing graffiti, but now they use social media instead, insulting each other on each other's Web pages and Facebook pages.

In the Bronx, neighborhood gangs post pictures of their enemies. Gangs post on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and electronically. On such social media, they offer drugs for sale, to be paid electronically by Venmo and other pay systems. So now gangs don't stand on street corners as much as before.

They want as many followers as possible, so they post electronically; but those postings are seen by police also.

Gang members like to watch & produce music videos that include guns & drugs.

One gang, based in Florida, the **Felony Lane Gang**, does white-collar crime: members drive from Atlanta to Vermont & elsewhere, to raid hotel rooms, with a printer that makes copies of ID's. (Comment by student: they often make addicts do the stealing.)

Leaving a gang A student asked, "What if a gang member wants out?" Ryan's reply:

Police often chat with gang members. Police relentlessly contact gang members and follow them down the street.

One member finally said to a patrol car, "I want to quit."

Police told a Blood member, "If you want to get out of the Bloods, police will help you get relocated."

A gang member told police he couldn't get a normal job because he didn't know how to read or write. Police said, "We'll help you write a job application."

Problem: when a gang member is in jail, nobody visits him to help him.

A gang member's mom doesn't want to get involved in solving the problem: she doesn't want to talk to police, since she might be doing something illegal herself, such as having a drug problem.

Boys join a neighborhood gang if they live in that neighborhood or are relatives of a gang member's family. If a boy moves out of the neighborhood, he's free to leave the gang; but leaving a gang that's *national* is harder. For example, one national gang requires a boy to write to Chicago headquarters a letter requesting permission to quit. The Latin Kings are very structured, and so is one of the Blood groups, which stretches from New York to Maine.

Prison Gangs are very organized in prisons. If a guy gets into prison, he might wind up in a gang.

Manchester's prisons are dominated by Folk Nation's Gangster Disciples. **New York City's** prisons are dominated by People Nation instead: of the prisons' gang members, 25% are Bloods, 11% belong to the next-biggest gang, and the rest belong to a wide variety of other gangs.

A student asked, "What percentage of gang prisoners can't read or write?" Police don't know, because when booking a prisoner, police don't ask about his education. During booking, other questions are mandatory instead, such as social-security number and birthplace. Police guess that most didn't graduate from high school.

Schools Gang members don't care much about going to school; it's not their priority. But younger brothers of gang members often recruit their own classmates to join gangs. That's an **unaccompanied-minor problem**: kids not accompanied by parents get into trouble.

Kids typically join gangs when they're in middle school (ages 12, 13, or 14). They copy their older brothers or other kids in the neighborhood.

Famous rappers Calvin Cordozar Broadus Junior (whose stage name is **Snoop Dog**) was "blessed in" to the Crip gang, which made him an honorary Crip. He uses a hand motion to throw up the Crips pitchfork symbol. He was on Jimmy Kimmel's TV show. He's rich. Police hate such examples, which encourage kids to get rich by joining gangs.

Keith Farrelle Cozart (whose stage name is **Chief Keef**) made a rap video and signed a 6-million-dollar deal.

A Red Couch Gang member named **Frenchy** (whose name is really François) made a music video called "Shootouts," plus other videos. His videos include lyrics such as:

Catch a nigger from OTL? I'm gonna burn his ass like a fucking Dutch.

"Dutch" means "Dutch cigar."

They posted videos with guns, even when they were juveniles.

Bronx In the Bronx, 24% of gang members are **Bloods**, 22% are **Crews**.

Many gang members live in the housing projects. A gang called **The 700-Block Boys** dominates the housing project in the 700 block. To "throw off" police, that gang cooperates with other gangs.

The Bronx includes 70 **Crips**, which are linked to homicides. One of those Crips is Ackquille Lorana Pollard (a rapper whose stage name is **Bobby Shmurda**). The Jimmy Kimmel Live TV show asked him to perform on TV. The Bloods urged the show to cancel that performance, but the show refused to cancel, so he performed on Jimmy Kimmel Live, after arriving with a busload of guns.

MS-13 The MS-13 is a gang from Central America. Now it tells members to be less obvious: no more tattoos or colored shoelaces; if you have tattoos, cover them up, to stop police from detecting who the gang members are.

An MS-13 trick is to send from Central America a boy, age 10, 11, 12, or 13. Since he's under 18 without an adult, he's an **"unaccompanied minor."** He tells the U.S. border patrol "I have an uncle in Manchester NH who can take care of me." So he gets a free bus ride to Manchester NH, where he meets a gang member (who's not *really* his uncle) and becomes part of the gang here. Since he has no tattoo, and Manchester police are *not*

allowed to ask about a person's immigration status, his gang status stays undetected.

Reducing gangs To discourage kids from joining gangs, Manchester police visit youth places, such as the **Manchester Police Athletic League (MPAL)**. Police try to identify new gang members and contact old gang members. Police give presentations to schools, neighborhood groups, the YMCA, and Salvation Army.

Unlike police drug & domestic-crime units, which get active just after a crime's been committed, the anti-gang unit's philosophy is:

Don't go after the crime. Go after the population.

So police talk to kids, teachers, and gang members.

A big Manchester gang was **The Squad**, which slashed women; but Officer Segal managed to jail them, so they're no longer active. Manchester doesn't seem to have any Mafia activity yet.

Sometimes the anti-gang unit works with other units, such as the anti-drug unit.

A student asked, "Is trafficking prostitution on the rise?" The reply:

In Manchester, the main gang problems are otherwise. Some prostitutes are trafficked by gangs, but other girls are prostitutes "voluntarily" because they're drug addicts who want money.

Session 3, part 1: horses

Manchester's police department includes the **Manchester Mounted Patrol**, which rides horses.

Presenters Officer **K. McKenney** gave the main presentation.

She had 16 years of police experience, in the animal-control division then the K-9 (dogs) division then the mounted division (horses). She loves horses and has her own 14-year-old horse at her home.

Her presentation was assisted by Officer **Andrew Choi**.

He had 9 years of police experience, 5 of them in Manchester (mainly in the community-service division). He started dealing with horses just recently, without any previous equestrian background.

Why horses? Here's why police use horses:

Horses are used for **crowd control**. When a horse approaches a huge crowd, the crowd immediately backs off, gets out of the way. If you try using a police car instead of a horse, the crowd will *not* back off, because the crowd knows a police car wouldn't dare run over the crowd. Without a horse, a crowd could turn into a riot. For crowd control, 1 horse is as effective as 10 policemen.

An officer on a horse is taller and **more visible** than an officer in a police car.

Horses **help police get info**. A person on the street typically fears talking to a policeman who sits in a police car, but the person happily starts chatting with a police officer on horseback. That helps police learn the secrets of what's happening in the community.

People, especially kids, like to **pet the horses**, so people admire police who let people pet horses.

Government officials like having their **pictures taken** while standing next to horses.

Horses are useful for **enforcement in parks**. They help police develop rapport with homeless vagrants there, so police can say, gently, "Hey, you got a beer. Not allowed in the park. You're getting a ticket."

Winston Churchill said:

No law machinery can evoke the public response won by a police horse.

Horses often patrol Manchester's downtown. Horses were also in Manchester's north neighborhood to combat spray painting; horses there were more effective than police cars.

Mounted officers visit schools, nursing homes, and parades.

Last year, Manchester's horseback accomplished:

73 motor-vehicle stops, 37 tickets written, 45 arrests made, 48 community events attended. 25,000 people impacted

2 horses We students saw the department's 2 horses:

General Stark is 12 years old and weighs 1500 pounds. He's friendly and loves to be around kids & dogs.

Valor is 18 years old and bigger than General Stark. He's ready to retire. He had a problem behind an eyeball, so a surgeon had to remove that eyeball, which got replaced by a rubber ball (which scares people less than an empty eye socket). That horse is stubborn and sometimes bites the officer & General Stark. He often sticks out his penis, which amazes kids who watch him.

Training Manchester's mounted police officers and their horses go to Massachusetts once a month, to be taught basics by the Massachusetts State Police. They get more advanced training from the **Royal Canadian Mounted Police**.

A different horse, used previously, was difficult: he had to be nudged by using spurs. Spurs are still used sometimes for Valor (who's stubborn) but not General Stark.

Problem: sometimes Valor falls asleep suddenly.

Funding Taxpayers don't pay for horses. Here's how horses are funded: the horses are transported in a trailer, whose sides show ads, labeled "Friends of the Manchester Mounted Patrol," paid by businesses who sponsor.

Costs include horse feed, veterinarians, other medical expenses, farriers (who take care of the horses hooves and shoes), and maintaining the barn. Every 6 weeks, horseshoes must be changed, because the horses' feet grow. A dentist must often file down the horse's teeth, which grow too fast every year.

Volunteers help take care of the horses, because they like horses!

Managing horses Horses pose this challenge: picking up their poop (especially if it's in front of a restaurant) and putting it into trash bags. Horses don't mind sirens & traffic but dislike cold winter winds that blow down the main street.

Horses need exercise: they should walk or run (4 or 5 hours per day) and go to special events. Manchester has 2 outdoor fields they can run in.

If the police officer stays calm, usually his horse will stay calm.

Buying horses To buy a new horse, police visit a horse farm and try to find a horse having good legs, a good saddle, and especially a good temperament.

Police want a **draft horse**, not a thoroughbred, because thoroughbred racehorses tend to act crazy & high-strung instead of being stable.

Male horses are preferred, because female horses tend to be moody and must be begged to do things.

Petting When you pet a horse, beware:

To a horse, **fingers look like carrots**, so the horse is tempted to eat them. **Don't stand behind a horse**, because the horse might kick you there, purposely or accidentally. **Don't uplift your palms**, because the horse might think they contain a treat and get disappointed.

Session 3, part 2: dogs

Police use dogs. Each dog is called a **K-9** (because that sounds like "canine") and is part of the **K-9 Patrol**. The students saw **Officer J. Tucker** & his dog, then watched Tucker command his dog to find hidden stuff and attack a "criminal" (who was actually a policeman wearing protective clothing).

Tucker joined the Laconia's police department then Manchester's. His dog is just 2 years old and still restless.

Dogs are useful: Tucker's dog was deployed 31 times last month.

How many dogs? Manchester's police department is supposed to have 11 dogs, but one retired and another got injured, so just 9 are useful. Of all New Hampshire's cities, Manchester has the most dogs:

Nashua has just 4. Goffstown, Laconia, and Gilford each have 1. Londonderry has 1, but it's old & retired.

A federal grant pays for the 1st or 2nd dog.

Training Each Manchester dog is trained for 14 weeks in Boston to work for a reward. The rewards are *not* food, because too much food would make dogs fat. Instead, the **rewards are opportunities to bite a toy** (or bite a person wearing a protective suit).

Tucker emphasized, “They don’t work for free!” Each dog expects to get rewarded for each action; otherwise, the dog refuses to work.

Dogs are trained to sniff for humans who hide or ran away. Dogs have good noses: they can smell a human even if he’s several rooms away, and they can also detect human odor on clothing and other articles the human touched & discarded. They’re trained to scare or bite the human, but just when commanded to.

Some dogs are specialists:

2 dogs are trained to sniff for **drugs**: marijuana, heroin, opium, cocaine, and meth.

4 dogs are trained to sniff for **Explosive Ordnance Disposal (EOD)**, which are explosives whose remnants can be smelled (in discarded guns, bullet-shell casings from bullets that were shot, and homemade explosives used to protect meth labs).

To let a dog practice finding an odor, his trainer hides an object containing an odor. That’s called an **odor drop**.

Here are more details about how dogs are trained:

A dog starts going to school sometime after the dog turns 1-year-old but before the dog turns 2. Each dog is trained by Boston’s Patrol School for 14 weeks, while the dog is accompanied by the Manchester policeman who’ll manage the dog. When the dog is 1½ or 2, the dog starts being able to focus on a task, because he knows a reward is coming.

Training is just during daytime: the dog & policeman return to the Manchester area each evening.

The dog sleeps at the policeman’s private home, as his pet. For example, Tucker’s dog sleeps at Tucker’s home, which has 4½ acres. Several times a week, Tucker plays fetch with his dog, which is a 65-pound Belgian Malinois (similar to a Belgian Shepherd). Sometimes he carries the dog in a sling, just for fun, which the dog enjoys, just like a baby enjoys being rocked in a cradle. The dog wags his tail whenever the officer’s 2½-year-old kid gives the dog cookies.

Though the training’s mainly in Boston, some training takes place at other Massachusetts locations (such as the West Bridgewater State Prison, which has fields where the dogs can sniff).

Each class has 10 dogs & their policemen. The dogs & policemen learn from instructors and by watching how their classmates screw up.

Getting a trained dog costs about \$60,000, because you must pay for the dog itself, the school, the officer’s time in school (\$1000 per week for 26 weeks), the dog’s medical exam (\$5000), a kennel (\$600, because a \$100 doghouse is not sufficient), dog toys (balls), and more.

After graduating from that school, some dogs get 10 weeks of advanced training in **bomb school**, where dogs learn to find bombs (hidden in the old schools & dark basements of Boston’s Hyde Park neighborhood).

For police work, a dog should be certified. The USPCA is the oldest certifying organization. Tucker’s dog is certified by 4 organizations: USPCA, ATF, and 2 others.

Outside the police department, special dogs get special abilities:

The fire department has an **arson dog**, which checks for accelerants. **Cadaver dogs** check for dead bodies.

Collars Whenever the dog is outside a kennel, the dog must be on a leash, 24/7. The dog wears 3 collars:

One is a regular dog collar.

One is a nylon collar the officer pulls to make the dog release the criminal. The dog also wears a **correction collar**: if the dog does something very wrong, the officer can use an electronic remote control to send a small electrical shock to the correction collar.

German To speak to the dog, the officer says **English when angry** but **German when happy**. For example, the officer usually says the English word “No!” when angry but says the German word “Aus!” (which means “go ahead”) to make the dog go ahead and grab something (such as a criminal). German is used

instead of English because German is clearer, can be yelled more forcefully, and won’t be said by bystanders who might cause trouble.

Limiting the dogs A dog should be used just for serious crimes, not just to find a parent’s kids.

He should be used just to delay a criminal from being caught, not to seriously maim the criminal. The dog is taught to bite a criminal just hard enough to scare him, slow him down, and prevent him from running away, but not hard enough to seriously injure him. (Exception: for the raid on Osama Bin Laden, dogs were trained to kill.)

The dog bites the closest part of the criminal’s body, usually an arm or leg. (During training, the person imitating a criminal wears padded “sleeves” on arms & legs.) Dogs are trained to not bite a uniformed policeman.

Some dogs have this problem: they can’t work if lots of people are watching.

Session 4: how police communicate

Rachel Page used to give this presentation, but she retired, so **Lieutenant Paul Thompson** substituted (assisted by Steve Olson).

Paul was a sergeant, then retired, then came back. He said, “I’m almost 60! I’ve been here 33 years.” He’s friendly.

He was in the police department’s patrol division then the evidence division then the detective division., but now he heads the **communications division**, which runs the **phone system & radio calls**, answers **incoming calls**, and makes **outgoing calls**.

During 2017, the communications division handled 218,240 incoming calls (averaging 597 per day) and 53,010 outgoing calls (averaging 145 per day).

Shifts The communications division puts each employee on a **4+2 schedule**: work 4 days (of 8½-hour shifts), followed by 2 days off.

So during those 6 days, the employee works a total of 34 hours (4 times 8½). “34 hours in 6 days” creates about 40 hour per week (since 34 times 7/6 is about 40), so employees get paid for 40 hours per week, even though they work just 4 days in a row, not 5. Another advantage of the 4+2 schedule is it makes some employees be present on both weekdays & weekends.

The phones are answered day & night, 24 hours, on 3 shifts: the **day shift** (8AM-4PM), the **evening shift** (4PM to midnight), and the **midnight shift** (midnight to 8AM), plus an extra half-hour per shift, so **each shift is 8½ hours**. The busiest times are from 11AM to 8PM.

The department has 16 people but hopes for 5 or 6 more.

Multitasker To work in the communications division, you must be a multitasker, doing everything simultaneously.

You must listen to the person calling you but also all noises & people in the background, while you simultaneously give instructions to that person and to officers you’re sending to a crime scene, plus you’re handling other calls at the same time!

To handle all that well, you need intensive training. Police who try to transfer to the communications division (because it’s non-violent) often fail (because they can’t multitask and can’t remember the rules they were taught), so they return to their previous positions, including more relaxed moments.

To multitask, you must react to *everything* and not act like a “scared deer in a headlight.” You must deal with 9 computer programs, all running simultaneously.

To work in the communications department as a **dispatcher** (handling outgoing calls), you need 5 years to become a *good* dispatcher. The first 12 weeks of training cost the department \$30,000 (to pay for the trainee & trainer & equipment), plus fringe benefits.

Kinds of calls You get all kinds of calls. Some are accidents. Some are about a person who got killed or needs help.

Calls fall into 8 categories:

hysterical, angry, children, elderly, suicide, well-prepared, long-winded, complaints

Manchester also receives **hang-up calls** (where the caller hangs up without saying anything). Police determine what phone number the call came from and look up whether it's from a business or residence.

If the hang-up call is from a business, the call is usually ignored, because it's probably a call where the person forgot to dial "1" first (such as to a foreign country that begins with 1-911).

If the hang-up call is from a residence, the call is taken more seriously, since it might be from a person in the process of getting murdered, so police try to look up the caller's phone number & address.

Callers are often extremely upset, go crazy, and scream, so they're hard to understand and pin down where to send police (which block, car, building, apartment, room, and person) and what resources are needed. Calls also come in to ask about traffic, parades, and other questions, even "When is Daylight Saving Time?" Many callers say just their loved one went to a bar and didn't come home yet.

These strange calls came in:

"He's got a gun in the Vine Street garage!" "I stabbed somebody and have a substance-abuse problem." "Got a bullet in his head!" "We got in an argument, shot 5 times, some nigger, Black." "He's probably drunk or high." "I can't get Comcast!"

This call needed more thought:

A woman said she shot a guy in the face, accidentally: she & a group of friends were sitting in a circle, passing around a gun, thought the gun was unloaded, so she pointed it between a guy's eyeballs and pressed the trigger.

On her phone call to police, she screamed & yelled. The officer taking the call asked her exactly where she was and told her to calm down, but she didn't know the address and didn't even know the street's name.

The officer eventually figured out she was in an illegal apartment (an unnumbered hidden apartment in an upper floor of a building that wasn't supposed to have apartments, and accessible just through just a back alley).

Some calls are from parents who can't find their kids. Police policy was to wait 24 hours before searching for kids (because kids would probably wander back home by then), but now police start searching immediately (because many anti-kid crimes are committed now).

A woman called because she found a child who was walking the streets, lost. Police successfully found the kid's parents.

Call routing If a person calls 911, that phone call goes to a NH general office, where an operator reroutes the call to the appropriate city (such as Manchester).

For faster service, phone Manchester's police department directly, but the NH general office is more sophisticated: it can **detect where your cell phone is calling from** and send **emergency warnings** (such as "flood!") to everyone in the area.

Unlike other carriers, Apple protects a caller's privacy: it doesn't let a third party use GPS tracking to determine a caller's location.

To discover who a caller is, police can **ping** the caller's phone number. Then a Website reveals the phone's carrier (such as "Verizon"), so the police call the carrier, who tell police which person owns the phone. But if the phone's an Apple, it's harder to get that info.

When a call is made to 911, routing the call from the NH general office to Manchester causes a delay of 3 or 4 minutes. The caller's phone number is put in a database.

Alarms 98% of burglar & fire alarms are false, accidentally set off while a business is opening or closing its doors.

Places Manchester has 115,000 people, divided into 12 patrol routes. Manchester police don't deal with Manchester's airport, which is partly in Londonderry. If a criminal crosses the state line, the FBI gets involved.

Radio Radios are in 14 police cars and in extra vehicles & devices.

When chatting on the radio, police can use these codes:

What to say	Meaning
10-6	Stand by.
10-19	Drunk driver.
Code 1	Routine.
Code 2 (or 3)	Urgent.
Code 4	Slow the response down.
Code 7	Chat just about emergency (emergency radio traffic only)

During a big emergency, several towns work together. Police departments in different towns use different radio frequencies, but in emergencies the 8 frequencies are patched together, so police from different departments can radio each other on Channel 3, which unfortunately isn't encoded: criminals can listen in.

Difficulties Handling a call can be hard. While hearing a caller scream, you must simultaneously type notes, listen to the 911 operator who referred the call to you, encourage the caller to calm down, and ask for the address.

To make the caller calm down, sometimes it's best to just let the caller talk & scream, until the caller gets tired. Sometimes a 911 operator (in Concord) is too eager to press for the caller's address and doesn't realize it's important to let the caller calm down first.

To handle a phone call about a person wanting suicide, you need training about suicide and **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)**. Mental-health doctors warn, "You're going to fail some of those cases."

Almost 70% of Manchester residences are apartments, not houses. Ask the caller:

What color is the house? What floor or apartment? Did you see anyone suspicious? As I look at your house from the street, where's the person: left or right? Any vehicles involved?

Other questions to worry about:

Is the case in progress? How solvable is the case? Is it urgent? Should we send detectives? On the phone you found, what's the serial number & the personal ID?

911 can get a translator, help the hearing-impaired, and accept text messages.

Dealing with an accident takes 1 or 2 hours of police time. Police hope to get a faster system.

To take away a person's freedom, you need lots of evidence the person did something wrong. Arrest is the easy part; the hard part is the follow-up paperwork & prosecution. To take somebody to jail usually requires a signed form.

Disappointments The department must often disappoint a caller by saying, "That's a civil problem, not a police problem." Police get involved in disputes just if violence or self-destruction is included. It's not a police job to enforce court orders about equity (who must pay whom), but police do enforce restraining orders (about who must stay away from whom).

Many calls are about landlords, property arguments, child custody, and yelling.

Underfunded The public's main complaint about police is: it takes too long to get police to arrive to investigate. But cops are expensive. A cop costs about \$100,000 per year, plus benefits.

Session 5, part 1: Kids

Detective Guy Kozowyk showed us a PowerPoint presentation titled **Juvenile Law**, intended for new policemen but also fun for us. His career:

He started as a patrol officer, then switched to dealing with schools (as a **school-resource officer**) then juvenile investigations. (A school-resource officer just protects the school's security and is not a truant officer.)

Now he and 5 other detectives do juvenile investigations, so 6 detectives on the team.

One of his responsibilities is to find kids who need help; such as kid is called a **Child In Need of Services (ChINS)**. 3 of the detectives specialize in stopping **Child Abuse and Sexual Exploitation (ChASE)**. Another topic is **Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC)**, which is handled by different detectives, called the **Cybercrime Unit**, described later.

When people hear about police dealing with kids, they think of the movie "Kindergarten Cop," when a cop handcuffs kids; but that movie is just fiction; reality is different.

In Manchester schools, he's had to deal with BB guns and little knives but not much violence. One problem is social-media & online threats, such as "I'm going to bring a bomb to school."

He wishes school buildings were built more securely. He said:

Central High School is an archaic structure, but that's what we must work with.

On Election Day, students disappear, so that day is used for security training: the fire department, police dispatchers, and teachers come to school to practice what would happen in an emergency. A fake emergency is staged, and everybody must practice how to react. One topic is learning the best **Civilian Response to Active Shooter Events (CRASE)**. He thinks active-shooter training should be given to schools, supermarkets, and buses. At issue is whether teachers & others should be allowed to carry guns, concealed or open-carry.

On school days, a police car (cruiser) is stationed in front of the school, to make traffic slow down (and avoid hitting kids) and discourage shooters. Proof that a cruiser can help: in Sandy Hook, Connecticut, a shooter (Adam Lanza) went to a school but got scared when he saw a cruiser, so he went to a different school instead to do the shooting; he shot 26 people there.

Police worry about kids playing the Fortnite video game, which encourages violence.

Some kids pretend they'll blow up the school. That's because they want to have the fun of seeing police react by sending in a SWAT team. A little girl named Suzy might say, "I'm upset. I'm going to bring a bomb to school."

One caller said, "I'm Timmy. I killed. Will kill again." But he was actually calling from Bulgaria.

Police can dismiss a case if the kid's under 13.

If violence is happening "down the street" near the school, police must lock down the school, for safety.

If the school is told "Shelter in place," nobody is allowed to go to the bathroom. That happens if there's a medical emergency (such as a seizure) in the hall.

Sexting Girls often do sexting (send their boyfriends nude selfies) because boyfriends request them. Police warn girls not to, because those nude photos will eventually be seen by others than their boyfriends, and distributing those photos is a crime: it's distributing pornography involving a minor.

Bullying Police get calls about bullying, such as, "At 2AM, my kid's being bullied on cellphone."

Treat kids gently The police try to avoid arresting kids. Instead, they try to counsel the kids and then release, because they don't want to give the kids a police record hurting employment later.

New Hampshire law allows an adult to punish a child and use

force to hurt the child; but judges don't like seeing marks on the skin the next day, and it's a felony to hurt a child who's under 12 years old.

When an **adult** commits a crime, police try to **rehabilitate, deter, and punish**; but when a **child** commits a crime, police try to **counsel, treat, supervise, and rehabilitate**.

Many cases involve the **Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF)**.

These rules make kids be treated more gently than adults:

Police can't keep a kid in a cell for more than 4 hours: the kid must be released to his parents (or, if the parents are unwilling, to somebody else willing to supervise the kid).

If a child's only wrongdoing is to be a runaway, **police aren't allowed to put the child in a locked cell**. The cell must be unlocked. (But if the kid tries to *escape* from the cell, police can keep him in the cell.)

If police grab a kid because he's drinking alcohol, police must release him to somebody over 25 years old who's willing to take responsibility.

When an **adult** is arrested, police are supposed to read him his "Miranda rights"; but when a **kid** is arrested, police are supposed to read him his "**Benoit rights**" (a simplified-English version of the Miranda rights).

When an **adult** is tried in court, the adult is supposed to plead "guilty" or "not guilty." But **kids aren't forced to say the word "guilty"**: when a kid is tried, the kid is supposed to plead "true" or "not true." Such a kiddie trial is called a **B14 hearing**, because it follows the rules of New Hampshire law B:14.

If a kid travels across a state line, police can't simply return him.

Police can handcuff a kid, but just as a last resort.

For a kid, a "trial" is called just an "**adjudicatory hearing**," and a "sentencing hearing" is called just a "**dispositional hearing**."

Illegal possession If a kid's at least 12 years old, he can be arrested for having tobacco. If a kid's at least 14, he can be arrested for having alcohol.

Messed-up families Here's a famous case of child abuse in Manchester:

Samantha & James Grenier lived with their kids & dogs in a house full of clutter. Feces were on the floor & wall. Bite marks were on the crib. A kid was strapped to his bed, so his feces were all over his bed. But what was illegal? To make a case, the police accused them of "reckless conduct" and using feces as a "weapon."

Neighbors knew dogs were there but didn't know kids were there too.

When encountering a messed-up family, the police Juvenile Division works with the Domestic-Violence Division. DCYF will also try to help.

A law requires neighbors to report child abuse. But homelessness is not a crime.

Session 5, part 2: computers

Adam Cortesi explained the police **Cybercrime Unit**, which has 3 members. (It used to have 4 members, but 1 retired.)

That unit does **digital forensics**: it analyzes the insides of computers & smartphones used in crimes.

It also does **investigations**, such as **Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC)**, **network intrusion**, **crypto-locking** (making a computer stop working, act locked up, until its owner pays a ransom), and **phone jamming** (making many fake calls to a business's phone system, so the phones stop working until the business pays a ransom).

It also runs a **polygraph machine** (lie detector).

Training Adam got 6 weeks of training (with certifications) provided by the U.S. Secret Service at campuses of the **National Computer Forensics Institute (NCFI)** in Los Angeles, Alabama, and elsewhere.

Use copies The basic rule of digital forensics is:

Don't work on the original data.

Instead, make a copy of the data, then work on the copy.

That's to make sure you don't do anything that modifies the original data. You want to preserve the original data, unmodified, in its original device, in case you must bring it to court as evidence. So fiddle with just the data's **copy** (called the **image**).

Hidden data Criminals don't realize: when they try to delete data (from their computers or phones), they're not *really* deleting the data; they're just deleting *entry* to the data. The original data is still in the device, hiding (until eventually it gets replaced by newer data). Police have special software letting them peek at that hidden data and its image.

Exams There are 2 kinds of digital forensic exams:

The best is a **live-box exam**: the criminal's device is still turned on. The alternative, **dead-box**, where the device had been turned off, is less effective.

So when police grab a device from a criminal, police are told to leave the device on: don't turn it off yet!

The exam usually reveals the device's history: what Websites it visited and what email accounts it used & chatted with. Apple's newest devices have security features making it harder for police to peek at that history.

Drug dealers often make the mistake of storing, in phones, photos of drugs, money, and the safe where goodies are stored. Those photos help police investigate.

By using a search warrant, police can force Google to reveal the criminal's Google account, which reveals where the criminal traveled. So if the criminal says "I wasn't in that city," police can prove he's lying.

For a kidnapping case, police can make the phone company **ping** the kidnapper's phone and discover the location of the phone & kidnapper.

Child abuse Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) means using computers to sexually abuse children. **Tumblr** showed many photos of child porn, but now Tumblr blocks all nude photos. 17 cases of child sexual abuse are pending in Manchester.

PhotoDNA is a Microsoft program (with improvements by Dartmouth professor Hany Farid) and donated by Microsoft to the **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)**. It can tell whether 2 photos are very similar (have the same DNA), even if one of the photos is heavily altered. It can scan databases of porn photos, to determine which photos are modified versions of others, which help police see how the porn is being distributed.

In Nashua & Lebanon NH, police pretended to be minors online, set up meetings with sexually deviant men, and arrested them, after logging their conversations.

Once, when police knocked on a door, the occupant yelled back, "Is this about all the child porn on my computer?"

Extra tidbits Here are more tidbits.

To get privacy, people often use **2-factor authentication** but don't know it often lets police discover the device's phone number.

The typical family has many phones in the house. Police must decide which phones to analyze, since analyzing *all* those phones would take too long.

When a parental-control program tries to restrict an app, the kid will just switch to a different app that's uncontrolled, such as the chat apps in video games.

To communicate with each other, some criminals use the **Tor network**, which hides the criminals' locations & data (until the criminals accidentally screw up).

The **ICAC task force** (a national network of police agencies) has a huge database of deviant people. It recently locked up 89 people in Georgia.

The U.S. government's **Department of Homeland Security** investigates human trafficking.

The U.S. Secret Service can be helpful. For example, it gave 3 Manchester officers \$10,000 each in equipment.

Session 6: CSI

In a **Crime-Scene Investigation (CSI)**, detectives visit a crime scene (typically where somebody was killed) and try to figure out who killed:

Was it a suicide or murder? If murder, by whom?

Presenter Ken Loui (pronounced "LOO-ee") presented this session.

He spent 2½ years on patrol then 5 years as detective. He spent 2½ years in the burglary unit. He admits he's a nerd. He's also in the cybercrime unit.

He says he's not an official "expert" (since he lacks a formal degree in CSI or cybercrime), but he has *lots* of experience. He's been involved in police work for 12 years, the last 6 of them in CSI. He got his first taste of CSI work when he was working for the New Hampshire attorney general's office, investigating how a policeman got murdered.

He's an Asian-American who grew up in New Hampshire and eventually married a Filipino.

Before working for police, he worked for a technology manufacturer that sent him to Asia often. He enjoyed those travels, until the travel budget got cut. He enjoys police work more.

6 months ago, when I was attending the previous Citizens Police Academy, Ken told me this story about himself:

When he joined the police, acquaintances would ask him, "Oh, you joined because you like to bully people?" He said, "No!" He joined for the opposite reason.

When he was a kid, about 7 years old, another kid tried to bully him, but a friend protected him from the bully. He thanked the friend and thought to himself, "Gee, when I grow up I want to be like my friend: protecting people from bullies!"

Years later, when he tired of working for a technology company, he searched for a job more helpful to society and make him proud. A friend suggested, "Why don't you follow your childhood dream of protecting people from bullies?" So he became a policeman.

His relatives, like most Americans, feel nervous around policemen, so (unfortunately) they feel nervous chatting with him.

Fingerprints & palm prints Manchester has a machine that uses a laser to scan a person's fingers & palm and stores that data (along with the person's name & criminal history) into the **Automated Fingerprint Identification System/Automated Fingerprint Identification with Palm (AFIS/AFIP)**.

Manchester keeps data on nearly 50,000 sets of prints. If a crime scene has a fingerprint or palm print that doesn't match Manchester's database, Manchester checks the bigger database in Concord, which includes all of New Hampshire. If Concord's database doesn't find a match either, Manchester checks the FBI's database, which has 130 million sets of prints.

When police keep an object (such as a weapon) that shows fingerprints, police store that object in a *paper* bag, not a plastic bag. Here's why:

Moisture degrades DNA, so keep moisture away from the fingerprint. If the object is wet, make it dry! It dries faster in a paper bag than in a plastic bag.

Some criminals burn off their own fingertips, to avoid leaving complete fingerprints; but their DNA is still left on objects.

Partial fingerprints are good enough for identification, since just 8 **points of minutia** (places where the fingertip's ridges meet each other) are enough to compute the distances between those points and be stored in police databases. It's hard to burn off the points of minutia.

20% of the time, police find useful fingerprints at the scene. Fingerprints won't be useful if smudged. Twins share the same DNA but have different fingerprints. Besides having unique fingerprints, people also have unique toe prints, but police don't have a database of toe prints.

Searches Ken gave the class this test question:

Suppose a guy robs a bank then drives home. How many places should you search, and how many search warrants do you need?

Answer:

Search 3 places (the bank, the getaway car, and the home), but you need just 2 search warrants: 1 for the car and 1 for the home, since they're private, but not for the bank, which is a public area.

The CSI team investigates just a *major* crime (where there's death or serious injury or an attempt to cause them). The CSI team won't investigate a death if the deceased is elderly or has a history of medical problems, since that death was probably *not* a murder. In a typical year, the CSI team investigates just 2 or 3 homicides; but each investigation takes lots of effort, a long time.

When the CSI team arrives at the crime scene, the team takes photos to help determine whether the death was murder or just suicide.

Real crime scenes Ken showed us photos of real crime scenes that happened in Manchester. Each photo was gory, including the dead body. Ken asked us whether each death appeared to be murder or just suicide. Here are 3 examples.

Scene 1: dead guy on couch.

Dead guy is on a living-room couch, in a sitting position. His head's top portion was blown off and missing. Blood's on his head and splattered onto walls. A rifle is propped between his legs and pointed up into his mouth. Murder or suicide?

Fragments of his skull are found in the kitchen.

There are no obvious signs of a fight, even though he's a big guy. No ashes are spilled from the nearby ashtrays. A dust layer is still undisturbed on the coffee table, so there was no struggle.

There's indeed a suicide note, which *seems* to match other examples of his handwriting. (But nobody in the CSI team or New Hampshire government is a certified handwriting expert so must rely on just common sense, unless the handwriting samples are passed to the U.S. Secret Service, which includes handwriting experts. Manchester's police department gets along well with the Secret Service & FBI. Hollywood movies wrongly pretend there's territorial conflict. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security trained Manchester's police for 6 weeks about many matters.)

Blood splattered on the wall matches his sitting position, so apparently the body wasn't moved. If the wall has a blank area in the middle of the splatters, another person was there, but there's no such blank area. If a bullet is shot fast, droplets on the wall are tiny; fatter droplets would indicate a slower bullet. But the *very* big red splats on the wall aren't just his blood: they're pieces of his organs!

Since the rifle is long and its handle is still between his legs, how did he reach his hand far enough down to pull the trigger? Answer: to pull the trigger, he used his toe!

Conclusion: suicide.

Scene 2: dead guy on floor.

This dead guy is lying flat on the kitchen floor of a rooming house. He's face-up.

The trails of blood on his clothes & body are in the wrong direction, seeming to indicate the blood dripped up instead of down to the floor, but that would defy gravity. Solution: somebody rolled the body over. That would seem to indicate somebody murdered him.

Nearby is a knife with an 8½-inch blade. He was killed by that knife, plunged down into his upper chest. That's a strange angle for a suicide! But if there was a murder from a knife fight, there should be defensive wounds. No such wounds are found, and no perpetrator blood is found anywhere.

Eventually, after heavily interrogating the rooming-house tenants, the CSI team discovered the truth: the death was a suicide; but when another rooming-house tenant came in (1 hour after curfew) and saw the body, he turned the body over (to see its condition), got scared of being accused of murder, and ran away. He eventually admitted doing that.

There's an extra knife cut across the neck, but that was caused by a **hesitation move** (a hesitant move before the final suicide was committed), followed by reaching high over his head and making the knife's final plunge down into his chest.

Conclusion: suicide.

Scene 3: dead guy on pavement.

A guy didn't show up at work, even though a meeting was scheduled. The business got a message saying, "You guys will be okay without me." To investigate, a colleague drove to the guy's apartment building and rang the bell. He got no answer. But when driving away, his car suddenly got splattered with blood. The bleeding body was found on the pavement. Murder or suicide?

Here's what the CSI team discovered. The victim's apartment is on the 16th floor. It contains no signs of a fight; nothing is disturbed. Furniture is still in the right places. Dust (pollen) is still on the Ottoman and a sliding glass door to the balcony. That door's screen is still unbroken. So it looks like no violence occurred, and the victim simply decided to jump out the window, a suicide.

But a cleaning lady, working on the 4th floor, had heard yelling on the 5th floor. The victim's shoes & hat are found on the 5th floor. On the victim's dead body, his face was horribly deformed, and the chest's right side is roughed up (abraded). Despite those peculiarities, the death turned out to be a suicide. The guy, in his 16th-floor apartment, walked out to his balcony and jumped; but he didn't know the 5th floor was a parking garage that jutted out, with a railing; so instead of landing splat on the ground, his face smashed onto the 5th floor's railing, making him yell as his face got deformed, and making the railing scrape against his chest, as his shoes & hat fell off and he bounced off that railing, onto the pavement 5 floors below. A painful death!

His bedroom contains a baseball bat, but there's no blood on it, and his body isn't batted. The bat turned out to be a sports-memorabilia gift from his dad, who died a few days earlier from cancer. The dad's death depressed him, so **he committed suicide even though he had a good life.** (Ken said, "So did Robin Williams.")

The police discovered he had no criminal record, was in no gang. His family said his phone contained no interesting messages.

Priorities To handle a crime scene, first make sure all people are safe. Police, firefighters, and **emergency medical technicians (EMT)** try to save the victim (but might accidentally trample on the evidence).

Next, the police **secure the area** and photograph it. Every officer gets a phone with a digital camera on it. Each photo includes data mentioning the photo's GPS location. The police secure a *big* area, using crime tape, in case a runaway criminal dropped something.

First, take *plain* photos, showing the scene as unaltered as possible. Then take photos that are **scaled** (showing measured distances between the objects).

The CSI team is taught to follow 6 steps:

Step 1: get a **search warrant**. 2: take **photos**. 3: **identify** what to collect. 4: document the **location** of those items. 5: **collect** the evidence. 6: **release** the scene (depart but leave a copy of the search warrant).

Getting a search warrant Unfortunately, getting a search warrant takes *several hours*, because it must be approved by a judge. Some judges are available on-call, to approve warrants.

You *don't* need a search warrant to search the victim, arrest the perpetrator, and get a quick overview of the premises. But longer looks at the premises require a warrant.

Kinds of photos Take 3 kinds of photos:

The first is an **overview shot**, showing the whole room and where objects are in the room. Take *several* overview shots, to show all 4 corners of the room. The second kind of photo is **midrange**, showing just the object and what's next to it. The third kind of photo is a series of **closeup shots**, showing the object's details from several angles.

When shooting a photo, make sure it includes something from the previous photo, to help orient the viewer about what's where.

Manchester police bought a fancy digital camera, made by **Faro**.

Manchester paid about \$80,000 for it. That was a discount price; the list price was much more. Fancier brands cost 3 times as much, but the Faro brand is good enough. Manchester is quite happy with it. Boston bought 7.

The camera mainly takes photos of a crime-scene room. The camera rotates itself automatically, taking photos of the whole room (including the corners, floor, ceiling, and everything in the room), and automatically stitches the photos together to form a 3D virtual video tour of the room. It also automatically computes the distances between everything in the room (by

using its laser beam with trigonometry).

It can handle rooms and outdoor scenes. The laser beam can shoot far, up to 350 meters.

It can't see objects hiding under or behind other objects, until you move it to a different vantage point; but after you move it and it takes a different shot, it stitches the shots together.

If somebody in the room is walking, that person screws up the shot and must be erased from the shot, manually. (Fancier cameras, which cost 3 times as much, erase that person automatically.)

It can analyze the scene and predict where the perpetrator was shooting from.

Faro's first cameras were used by surveyors & the construction industry (to measure distances & angles) but now are used by police too.

Collecting evidence To grab evidence (such as guns), police wear **gloves** (to avoid smudging fingerprints & DNA) and obey these rules:

After grabbing a sample of evidence, **switch gloves** before grabbing the next sample, to avoid mixing DNAs.

If a gun was used, grab the **bullet-shell casings** and put them in plastic & tins (to preserve any DNA). If you find **hair**, pick it up with a plastic instrument and put it in a plastic bag. To photograph **footprints & shoe prints**, aim straight down, to avoid distortion.

Photograph **tire tracks**, because tires have unique nicks. Photograph at least 8 feet of them, because a tire's circumference (tread) can be up to 8 feet long. The tracks take 72 hours to cure; send them to the lab, with the sand.

If you find a **computer or phone** that's still turned on, leave it on (because if you try to turn it off, the device or Verizon might detect you tried and so might automatically encrypt the data to hide it). Swab a computer's keyboard & monitor for fingerprints & DNA. To examine a phone's contents, you need a special search warrant, beyond the building's general search warrant.

Grab samples of splattered **blood** (such as by cutting out the part of the wall that got the blood), so the lab can analyze it and determine whose blood it is.

Get blood samples from near the victim but also from far away, since the far droplets might be from the perpetrator and identify him. (That's because when a perpetrator uses a kitchen knife to stab, his hand typically slips off the handle and gets cut, creating those faraway blood drops.)

Notice which blood droplets are wet and which have dried, to get a time sequence of events.

When a gun makes a bullet hole through the victim, his blood typically splatters out the hole's back and also the hole's front, as a mist that winds up on the perpetrator's gun, so swab the gun for samples of the victim's DNA.

Notice how many lines of blood are on the wall. If several lines, the victim was shot (or battered) several times.

Notice the direction of each droplet, from its fat part to its long thin part. That tells you what direction the gunshot came from. Droplets can also tell you about the bullet's speed and gun.

Even if the perpetrator tries to wipe blood off his gun and other objects, the blood's traces can still linger there and be detected by using "Blue Star," a chemical that makes blood protein turn blue.

Session 7: SED

The **Special Enforcement Division (SED)** consists of 3 divisions that handle special problems:

Street-Crime Unit (SCU)
Special Investigative Unit (SIU)
Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT)

This class session explained the first 2 divisions (SCU and SIU), which work together closely.

The **Street-Crime Unit (SCU)** investigates high-crime neighborhoods. It's headed by Greg DiTullio; 9 officers assist him. He's been involved for 13 years. The SCU mainly deals with drugs & prostitutes but also handles robberies, violent felons, and random complaints. It receives Crime Line tips (from anonymous neighbors) plus direct calls about suspicious vehicles & houses. It also visits random locations. Hot areas are 7-11 stores, school zones (where kids pick up discarded drug needles), and Econo Lodge. It makes several arrests per day.

The **Special Investigative Unit (SIU)** investigates illegal drugs, prostitutes, gambling, and their gangs. It's headed by Bob Bellenoit; 6 officers assist him. He was hired 17 years ago, in 2002. He spent his first 7 years as an ordinary patrol officer, then 5 years as a detective, then the midnight shift, but now he's a sergeant.

Everybody in SCU & SIU is a **detective** (also called an **investigator**). The SED is the only police division that's ever in plainclothes. It's in plainclothes *usually*, pretending to be prostitutes (to arrest johns), johns (to arrest prostitutes), and drug buyers (to arrest drug sellers). The SED infiltrates gangs by pretending to be gang members. It collects info from neighbors, criminals, and database histories. It gets help from confidential informants, who often give enough info to generate a search warrant. It makes many arrests per day.

Working in the SCU The SCU detectives are hand-selected and must act fast: it's a high-speed unit. For example, Greg had to hurry to work today: his work started at 4:30AM.

When police start in the SCU, they learn a lot by making drug arrests. It's a big transition for a policeman to suddenly switch to being undercover, in plainclothes and a plain car. For their safety, the SCU puts 2 detectives per car instead of 1.

When working undercover, police use these tricks:

Wear a special undershirt, which hides body armor, which is inserted into the undershirt's pockets.

Try to wear clothes that hide guns, etc. That's harder to do in the summer! In summer, wear sweat clothes.

Don't wear disguises. They look too fake. But you might shave your beard & mustache and add a goatee.

When you're sitting in public, pay attention but don't look like it.

If plainclothes policemen look too "normal" when they sit in a car and watching the neighborhood too long, bad guys will deduce they're policemen, so policemen try to *not* look "normal": they try to dress sloppily. But if policemen are White in a minority-ethnic neighborhood, they'll be detected anyway. Some criminals notice which undercover cars police sit in and notice when police return.

Policewomen can search inside a woman's bra, or at least look for a protrusion there. When undercover male & female sit in a car together, the female messes up her ponytail, so they can look like they're just dating, not police.

Police notice small examples of abnormal behavior, such as wearing a heavy coat in 95-degree weather. Police can spend an hour watching a weird-looking guy but react just if the guy looks like he might hurt somebody or himself.

SCU & SIU detectives get many informative phone calls & emails. Each incoming call is assigned to a detective. 4 detectives are also assigned to faraway units (state, federal, DEA, and FBI). The SCU team sometimes contributes a detective to the SIU team.

Detectives often make deals with informants, who pass info about drugs, burglaries, thefts, and robberies.

Drugs Even when in plainclothes, police stop people and announce, "We're from the drug unit." For example, they saw a woman buy drugs, so they stopped her car and said, "We work in the drug unit." She replied, "Just visiting my boyfriend." But then they examined the goods in her car.

To stop a car, sometimes police make up an excuse, such as "You forgot to use your turn signal." If the driver refuses to let police search the vehicle, police can impound the car. Usually police stop and request a search just if police already know the car contains drugs.

Police often stop people with "small fruit" (just a gram or two of an illegal drug) then get confidential info from them in return for leniency. Those people typically have been spending between \$40 and \$80 per day on themselves. Some of them had prescription pain pills legally but then their prescriptions ran out, so they started buying pills illegally.

Here's a sample procedure:

SCU arrests you for having drugs. Then you agree to become a **confidential informant (CI)**: you give confidential info to SIU, which tries to protect your safety while promising to either pay you for info or help you get a reduced jail sentence, your choice! Those promises make you go into a house to buy drugs and report back to SIU on your experience.

In case anything goes wrong when you're in that house, SIU develops a hostage-rescue plan beforehand. The SIU tries to find out whether the drug dealer has kids or guns, which apartment, whether he buys half a kilogram at a time, and from where. At least once a day, the typical drug dealer goes to Massachusetts (Lawrence or Methuen) to get resupplied.

10 grams of heroin is called a **finger**, because it's about as big as your finger. Many druggies use body parts to conceal drugs. Police use dogs when there's a search warrant to search for drugs in a car. Druggies drive south to get heroin in small quantities (6 grams) or half a kilogram (500 grams) or anything in between. A finger that costs \$70 in Dorchester MA can sell for \$300 here, so transporting drugs is very profitable!

75% of home invasions are to steal money to buy drugs.

Between 50% and 70% of drug dealers on the street are armed. During a drug deal, the parties are required to remove pistols and rest them on a countertop.

Manchester detectives are all deputized to arrest anywhere in New Hampshire. That's useful when a druggie is coming back from buying drugs in Massachusetts.

Tidbits:

Police say, "Everybody or a family member knows somebody who has a drug problem." If a guy buys a \$500,000 house and has many visitors but no job, police figure he's a drug dealer. In Manchester, if police see a car from Plymouth NH and the driver is on the phone, it's probably a drug deal. Many drug dealers now use apps that are harder to listen into. Sometimes the FBI or DEA will pick up a case; that makes the case more likely to result in jail time.

On Elm Street, the **homeless** were overdosing on **spice** (modified opiates) and lying on the sidewalk. The spice cost under \$10 per small bag. It felt like heroin & fentanyl but was harder to detox from. Police worked with the DEA, which finally declared it a **controlled substance**, so the dealer could be arrested. Eventually, after a month, the dealer was arrested. That was a few weeks ago; now spice is mainly gone.

Investigating anything is frustrating: police can't let the public know headway is being made, because that would jeopardize the investigation.

If the drug is from New York or Massachusetts, the feds can help. Example:

A Manchester meth dealer was operating in his house, using supplies mailed from California. The feds helped Manchester police get him and 20 guns.

In Manchester, police don't see much marijuana, though they occasionally see people bringing a pound from Massachusetts. Police mainly see heroin, meth, and crack; most come from Massachusetts (Lawrence, Methuen, and Lowell). **Carfentanil** (which is much stronger than fentanyl and was intended just to tranquilize elephants) was a problem that spiked one day; but police found its source, so the problem ended.

It's hard to charge a drug dealer if he uses runners, so Manchester police get federal help from the DEA task force. Police get further help from arrested druggies, neighbors, and police surveillance (in a car or a park). For undercover surveillance, police use just regular car models, though a *few* have police lights.

5 years ago, Manchester bought a device called **TacticID-N**. It shoots a laser at a drug then tells what type of drug it is (such as meth or THC).

When seeing a drug, don't touch it with your fingers, since it can infect you. Police wear masks to reduce how many particles get into a policeman's nose & mouth. Police carry **Narcan** (which reverses an overdose) but just to help an overdosed policeman. The proper procedure is for police to get any drug into a plastic

bag, seal the bag, put the policeman's initials onto the bag, then drive the bag to Manchester's **evidence bay**, which sends the bag to a state lab for testing.

The feds give a course on how to dismantle a meth lab.

Gunshots Neighbors sometimes report hearing a gunshot. But it's hard to determine the specific house or street where the gunshot came from, since the sound bounces off buildings. If the shot came from an apartment building, it's hard to determine which apartment. But police know where bad guys live.

Prostitutes Prostitutes are arrested once a month in a highly publicized sting, with newspapers publishing photos of prostitutes, pimps, and johns.

Girls arrested for prostitution on Maple Street and nearby are usually homeless. Police try to show them homeless shelters and other services, but the girls usually wind up back at the same place on the street. Other prostitutes are in hotels and North End houses.

One detective concentrates on **prostitute trafficking**, which takes a long time to analyze and needs help on a federal level, since it involves tracking airline flights.

Maps Every month, the detectives have meetings, to learn about new hot spots to patrol and see **maps** of drug arrests & violent crimes. Maps of violent crimes used to show just shootings, but now they also show robberies & thefts. "Thefts" include stealing mail and entering unlocked doors.

Modified vehicles Police & drug dealers both modify vehicles to hide things under the floorboards, in the console, and by using hidden hydraulic buttons.

Session 8, part 1: SWAT

Special Weapons And Tactics (SWAT) are used when police are tempted to bust into a room because a criminal barricaded himself there, typically because he has hostages or a drug stash. SWAT are also used in other dangerous situations.

The SWAT team includes 3 kinds of specialists:

the **entry team** (who can smash into rooms)
snipers (who position themselves outside the building)
negotiators (who try to talk the criminal into a peaceful resolution)

The SWAT team's members have other police jobs but are called in whenever such a dangerous emergency arises. Manchester uses its SWAT team between 50 and 70 times per year.

Presenters This session was presented by 2 men:

Jason Feliciano has been a policeman for 15 years, 8 of them on the SWAT team. He grew up in Florida, but when his wife became a prosecutor near Manchester he moved here. He has 3 kids.

Eric Boblato has been here 2 years as part of the Street-Crimes Unit (SCU). Before that, he was in Salem NH and part of a regional policing organization. He got married 2 weeks ago. He's a trainer. He can do "almost anything" except explosives.

They let us students touch their fancy equipment and wear SWAT helmets.

Training Getting onto the SWAT team requires 16 weeks of training in a police academy, then 3 years of experience as a Manchester police officer (starting in the patrol division), where you must do well (not be on probation).

After all that, you take a test to get admitted to the SWAT class. Some applicants come from Los Angeles, Houston, and other high-crime cities. During the test, you must prove:

You can shoot well, using a rifle & handgun. You're recommended by your supervisor. You pass a physical test: do pullups, carry 30 pounds upstairs, and run 1½ miles fast (but if you're old, you're allowed to take a little longer).

Then you must be interviewed, to discover your peculiarities.

Out of 7 applicants who took that test recently, just 2 passed and got into the SWAT class, which lasts 2 weeks.

Manchester's SWAT team has no age limit. (The *State Police* SWAT team is different: it has an age limit of 36 years old and no formal training requirement!)

Life on the team When you finally get onto Manchester's SWAT team, you're initially restricted to standing *outside*, not breaking into houses, until you get more experience.

Manchester's SWAT team is part of a regional team that helps handle New Hampshire emergencies.

The team permits no "babysitting": each team member must pull his own weight and be committed. The team is used just occasionally, when an emergency arises; but if you're on the team, you must always be on-call, ready to come immediately when phoned.

Manchester's SWAT team has 24 active members plus 4 commanders. Two-thirds of the members typically come at once, to handle an event. Each member has another job also, such as patrol or SIU. When the member is called to a SWAT event, that member must find a sub for his other job.

The team includes 5 CMT-certified medics. All team members become part of the NH Tactical Officers Association. Most SWAT teams attend school, but state troopers don't.

SWAT teams work with other teams:

During the recent emergency at Quality Inn, Manchester's SWAT team got help from Nashua's team. Manchester's SWAT team gave help to Rochester NH's SWAT team when a guy with an AK-47 rifle was shooting at a police helicopter. At Manchester's big convention center (called the "Southern New Hampshire University Arena"), Manchester's SWAT team got practice together with the fire department, handling a simulated emergency.

So yes, Manchester's SWAT team works with Nashua's SWAT team, plus a SWAT team from the Southern NH Region. They'd studied at the same SWAT school together, so the teams work well together, except for one difficulty: radio communication, since the different teams use different radio frequencies. Solution: during an emergency, all teams can temporarily share a special radio frequency, but that special frequency isn't secure; criminals can listen in.

Every 4 years, when politicians come to Manchester for presidential elections, SWAT teams are ready to help protect them.

Summoning the SWAT team When an emergency occurs, a supervisor on the street tries to solve the problem, decides if the public might get hurt, and then, if necessary, phones a SWAT commander.

If Manchester's drug unit wants to catch a drug guy, it fills a form to decide whether to call the SWAT team.

Hierarchy The SWAT team is run by a **captain** & **lieutenants**, plus **leaders** of the 3 specialist groups (entry, snipers, and negotiators). Those leaders act as the SWAT team's eyes & ears; they watch what's happening in the field.

If team members want to gas the criminals (to make the criminals choke & surrender), they must get permission from a commander, who then passes the command down. The team must choose between lethal & non-lethal (Taser) munitions. The team includes two K-9 (dog) officers.

Rush in? SWAT teams used to rush into buildings, but now SWAT teams tend to gas a building instead, to make it uncomfortable for the criminal, so he decides to give up & come out. But if the situation involves hostages or a mall shooting, SWAT teams must rush in. Other advice:

If the criminal is flushing drugs down the toilet, don't use that as an excuse to rush in.

If the criminal is barricaded, just shoot gas and negotiate.

Maybe run a robot inside, to make sure nobody's hiding in a closet. (The robot includes a camera & microphone. Manchester's robot is just a basic one. Once, Manchester threw the robot down the stairs to the basement, where it found a criminal. Fancier models, used elsewhere, include a speaker and can drag bodies. Dallas used an extra-fancy robot that blew up itself and the criminal. Salem NH doesn't have any robots at all.) After the robot checks the rooms, have a dog double-check.

Dogs are used mainly on the perimeter, to chase runaways.

Snipers use a long rifle, with a scope. They sit on the top of nearby buildings and overwatch. They see through windows and gather intelligence. Snipers & K-9 officers get 16 hours of training, plus more.

Negotiators learn in school, from psychologists, what keywords to avoid that would escalate the situation. They try to develop a rapport with the criminal but also listen for hostages & accomplices.

Explosions To break into the building is called **breaching**. If the building is barricaded, you can use **explosive breaching** (use explosives to blow up a door & the surrounding sheetrock).

Explosive breaching uses water pressure; it just bends the door from its hinge. Explosive breaching is faster than banging the door. But before using an explosive, analyze what materials the door & its frame are made of. (Explosives are planted quietly, secretly, by a SWAT member who sneaks around, like a cat.) When using explosives, wear headphones to muffle the bangs.

An explosion can distract the criminal. You can use a **flash-bang device**, which does no harm but just makes a big noise to distract him. (Steve, who runs the Citizens Police Academy, said he accidentally set off a flash-bang device once; it blew out his windows and made him think he accidentally fired his gun.)

Another technique is to just punch a hole in the sheetrock, to peer inside.

BearCat The SWAT team uses many tools, which the team calls **toys**.

One tool is the fancy armored truck, called a **BearCat**, made by Lenco for the military & police. It's a heavily modified Ford F-350 pickup truck, with a diesel engine plus many extra parts.

In New Hampshire, BearCats are owned by Manchester, Nashua, state police, and regional police. (One region covers 9 cities in southern New Hampshire. Another region covers the seacoast.)

Equipment The SWAT team has **gas masks**. (Each mask includes a built-in microphone & speaker.)

The SWAT team has **rifles**. (Each rifle is a .308, made by Sig Sauer, and includes a red-dot laser. You can change the red dot's size: if the dot's is too big, the dot covers up the target. The rifle can shoot up to 500 yards, but the red dot is normally set for 100 yards.)

Each SWAT member wears a **protective vest**. (It has pockets, to include armored plates and a med kit. When its pockets are fully loaded, the vest weighs 30 or 40 pounds.)

Grants The SWAT team gets grants from U.S. Homeland Security, plus grants to combat opioids.

Session 8, part 2: graduation

Steve handed certificates to all students who regularly attended. For each student, he called out the student's name and had the student proudly walk to the front of the class, to receive the certificate.

The certificate is colorful, pretty, includes the logos of Manchester City and the Manchester Police, is signed by Steve and the police chief, and includes these words:

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

This certificate is awarded to [student's name] for participation in the Manchester Police Department's Citizens Police Academy.

It doesn't say the student is smart; it just says the student showed up.

Morals

We'd all like to be moral, but how?

Ethics

I spend most of my life worrying about how to make ethical decisions.

Questions

Here are ethical questions. I don't have simple answers. Do you?

Time management My hardest ethical decisions involve time, because that's what I'm shortest of.

Which needy person or needy organization should I spend my time helping? If two of my customers both need my attention, whom should I help first? How much time should I devote to my family & friends instead of strangers? To which nonprofit organizations should I donate money and time?

What's the most moral way to spend *your* time?

I wish I believed in God, because I could sure use His advice on time management, so I could learn to become a better person and stop feeling guilty about all the people I haven't helped because I don't have enough time.

Most Americans believe they should be nicer to close acquaintances than to strangers, but *to what extent*?

To what extent should you be nicer to your family than to your neighbors, nicer to your neighbors than to other humans, nicer to born humans than to fetuses, nicer to humans (born and unborn) than to other animals, nicer to animals than to plants, nicer to plants than to computers, other machines, and other natural resources?

For example, suppose your kid is sick. To what extent should you take time off from work to care for your kid?

What if giving the kid attention won't help the kid much? For example, what if the kid is already 18 years old and has just a cold? What if many people at work depend on you to meet a crucial deadline?

If your kid commits a crime, to what extent should you protect the child from people and law authorities seeking retribution?

If 2 people at work both demand your attention, how do you decide which person to give your time to?

Should you feel guilty if you don't give to a charity?

What if your money and time are better spent on other charities instead? Or should you spend it on your family instead — isn't your first responsibility to your own family?

If you relax, should you feel guilty for not working?

Isn't there some work you should really be doing instead of relaxing? But if you never relax, won't you become a nervous wreck and a one-dimensional workaholic? When is relaxing moral? Is it immoral to watch TV instead of doing some sort of "active relaxation," such as sports?

Found money If you see some money on the sidewalk, should you pick it up? If you do, should you keep it or report it to a lost-and-found?

What if the money is just a penny? A dime? A quarter? A dollar? A \$20 bill? A wallet containing \$100? A wallet containing \$1000?

Should you leave the money there — so the person who lost it has a chance to find it, or some low-income person or kid gets thrilled by finding it — or should you keep the money yourself, figuring that you're probably more deserving than the average nutcase who walks down the street?

Cut in line If you're waiting in line but a friend ahead waves you to join him, should you cut in next to him?

Would it be more moral for your friend to drop back to visit you?

Under what circumstances is it okay to "save a place in line"?

What if the line is for getting cafeteria food? A hotel room? An airplane seat?

Honesty When should you tell the truth?

What if telling the truth would make the other person upset, wreck that person's day, and make that person act so miserable that all the person's acquaintances would be miserable too? But if you get in the habit of lying, and everybody else does too, won't this world become a scary, untrustworthy place where everybody turns paranoid at not knowing the truth?

If you're served food you dislike, is it more moral to eat it (to be polite) or to not eat it (to be honest)?

Killing How immoral is it to kill an animal?

What if the animal's just a tiny bug? A dog? A human?

Sure, it feels wrong to kill an animal. But if a plant had a vocal cord and could cry "help," wouldn't you feel bad killing a plant too?

Should animals be treated better than plants just because animals yelp or writhe when in pain? Do plants feel pain? Do they "hurt"? Does "thou shalt not kill" apply to viruses? What if an animal *wants* to be killed? Are you allowed to kill yourself?

Wouldn't an animal be happier being slaughtered (just a few seconds of pain!) than left to die of old age and painful diseases?

Revenge

Suppose someone treats you badly, by stealing your money, lover, job, career, or reputation or by just having a good laugh at your expense. How should you respond?

Some folks say:

Don't get mad. Get even.

I say instead:

Don't get even. Get ahead.

The best way to get ahead is to walk away from the situation and get on with the rest of your life. Don't waste more time worrying about the matter. I've seen folks waste too much time plotting revenge. Instead, plot other rewards for yourself. When you're running in the rat-race of life, and another runner bumps into you, don't waste time bumping him back: run faster!

Mahatma Gandhi said:

If we all practice "an eye for an eye," pretty soon the whole world will be blind.

Martin Luther King, Jr. said it briefer:

The old law of "an eye for an eye" leaves everyone blind.

If somebody performs a crime against you, be a good citizen by reporting it to the police, to prevent the crime from reoccurring. But after doing that civic duty, move on with the rest of your life.

Life's too short to spend mulling about hate. Just realize that the person who screwed you is a sorry, maladjusted individual who will probably waste his life playing hit-and-run games and never know the meaning of true peace and friendship.

Arguing about love

If your lover jilts you or cheats on you, don't yell about it: your hatred won't get you improved love. Instead, ask why your lover feels less loving. Then decide whether you want to patch things up or give up and start a new life.

Contradictory advice

Here's famous contradictory advice.

Should you take time to plan ahead?

Yes: look before you leap

No: we'll cross that bridge when we come to it

Should you hurry?

Yes: the early bird catches the worm

No: haste makes waste

Should you be extra careful?

Yes: anything worth doing is worth doing well

No: don't be a fusspot

Should you complain?

Yes: the squeaky wheel gets the grease

No: patience is its own reward

Should you fight?

Yes: stand up for your rights

No: turn the other cheek

Should you be honest?

Yes: honesty is the best policy

No: be tactful

Make a difference

If something about the world bothers you, improve it. Dare to make a difference. Don't just grumble to yourself: take a stand!

Mahatma Gandhi said:

Be the change you wish to see in the world.

Martin Luther King Jr. said:

Human salvation lies in the hands of the creatively maladjusted.

Ralph Waldo Emerson said:

Don't go where the path may lead. Go instead where there's no path and leave a trail.

In his play *Man and Superman*, George Bernard Shaw said:

The reasonable man adapts himself to the world. The unreasonable one persists in trying to adapt the world to himself. Therefore, all progress depends on the unreasonable man.

Wish you could travel to a different kind of world, a different time, using a time machine? Here's a secret: your soul already *includes* a time machine! Just use it! In the 2002 movie "The Time Machine" (based on H.G. Wells' novel by the same name), the character Uber-Morlock says:

We all have our time machines. Those that take us back are memories. Those that carry us forward are dreams.

If you take action instead of just accepting a lousy world, you'll be happier with yourself. Albert Camus said:

But what is happiness except the simple harmony between a man and the life he leads?

When you try to change the world, others will give you a hard time. Gandhi said:

First they ignore you. Then they laugh at you. Then they fight you. Then you win.

David Brinkley (the NBC-TV anchor and journalist) said:

A successful person is one who can lay a firm foundation with the bricks that others throw at him.

But here's a warning from Yip Harburg (who wrote the lyrics for "Over the Rainbow" and all the other songs in "The Wizard of Oz" and many other musicals):

Mozart died a pauper.
Homer begged for bread.
Genius pays off handsomely
After you are dead.

Are you afraid to stick your neck out by telling the truth and doing what's right? Just do it! President Franklin Roosevelt's wife (Eleanor Roosevelt) said:

Do what you feel in your heart to be right — for you'll be criticized anyway. You'll be "damned if you do, and damned if you don't."

Atheist view

Does God exist? Is everything in the Bible really true, or is some of it bullshit? Atheists say:

It's called the "Bible" because people "buy bull."

Prejudice

President Obama warned that if you're a Black male, you'll always be distrusted — just like himself. He said that in the USA:

Nearly all Black men have experienced being followed — when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me.

Nearly all Black men, when walking across streets, have heard locks click on car doors. That happened to me, at least before I was a senator.

Nearly all Blacks, when going on elevators, have seen a woman clutch her purse nervously and hold her breath until she had a chance to get off. That happens often.

But if you're White, you can't help feeling nervous. Edward R. Murrow said:

Everyone is a prisoner of his own experiences. No one can eliminate prejudices — just recognize them.

So keep your eyes open! Here's a fun look at prejudice, stereotypes, and racism....

Arab-Americans

The 9/11 terrorist attacks made it harder for Arab-American comedians to stay funny, so they tried harder.

Ahmed Ahmed (an Egyptian-American comedian) said:

Before 9/11, a lot of my material was talking about being Arab, but it was like, "Hey, I'm Arab. Check me out." After 9/11, it was sort of like, "Hey, I'm Arab. Don't shoot."

His routine includes these comments:

When I get pulled over by the Los Angeles Police Department, I just tell them I'm Black. I'm going to catch a beating either way, but I don't want to get killed too.

You have no idea how rough it is to be an Arab these days. I went to the airport to check in. The man at the ticket counter asked, "Are those your bags?" I said, "Yes, sir." He asked, "Did you pack them yourself?" I said, "Yes, sir." They arrested me.

I've read a statistic saying that after 9/11, hate crimes against Arabs & Muslims went up 1,000%, which still puts us in 4th place behind Blacks, gays and Jews. We're still in 4th place — so what do we have to do?

Maz Jobrani (an Iranian-American comedian) said:

Before 9/11, Bush was an easy target for me to make fun of, since I voted for Gore. But once 9/11 hit, I found myself being pro-Bush, since it would have been comedy death to get up on stage the week after and say anything anti-Bush.

I used to make fun of Middle Easterners who pretended to be Italian, because I've had friends who were named Hussein or Farid then changed their names to Tony. But once 9/11 hit, in my next show I told people, "That's how I deal with the new changes. Now when people ask me where I'm from, I look them straight in the eye and say, 'I'm Italian.'"

Kareem Omary (a Syrian-American comedian) said:

It's hard for me to watch movies & TV, because we're the bad guys in everything. When the news comes on, it's even worse. The news is 90% Arab shit, and the other 10% is sports & weather. I'm waiting for *them* to start shitting on us. Can you imagine? "Coming up, on Weather News 9, hurricane Mohammed wages a jihad of a storm, displacing thousands of God-fearing, innocent Christians."

Many Americans are afraid of Blacks, but even more are afraid of Arabs. Many Arabs look white; others are darker. Dean Obeidallah (a Palestinian-American comedian) told his audience:

How many people are White here? That's great. Scared?

If you have a Muslim or Arab name, you're probably immune to identity theft. I have a friend whose first name is Osama. He can leave his driver's license and credit card in a crack house, and nobody would dare steal it.

Amer Zahn (a Palestinian-American) said:

I get a lot of reactions when I tell people I'm an Arab. One of two reactions, usually.

One is, "You don't *look* Arab"; I usually reply, "Thank you."
The other reaction is, "I'm sorry."

Maysoun Zayid described herself accurately:

I'm a Palestinian Muslim virgin with cerebral palsy from New Jersey. So if you don't feel better about yourself, maybe you should.

I'm a virgin. People are like, "Really? You're a virgin?" They feel sad for me. I just want you guys to know I'm a virgin *by choice*. That's my father's choice.

Azhar Usman (an Indian-American comedian) said:

I visited Britain. It's a different vibe over there. I'm used to people hating me for being Muslim. It was nice to finally be hated just for being American.

Stupidity jokes

Some jokes begin, "Did you hear about the moron who...," but that makes fun of the mentally handicapped. When I was a kid, many jokes began, "Did you hear about the Polack who...," but that makes fun of an ethnic group, the Polish.

On my landlady's bookshelf, I saw a book from the 1940's that had many jokes beginning, "Did you hear about the nigger who..." That book was published before insulting Blacks was considered even more distasteful than insulting the Polish.

Modern comedians insult blondes instead. That pleases the country's arbiters of taste (New York publishers and TV networks), since most blondes are volunteers (it's an honor to dye for) and Republican.

Race quotas

The University of Michigan judged some of its applicants on the basis of 150 points, 20 of which were given for race. Is that "discrimination" or "affirmative action"? The case went to the Supreme Court, which in 2003 ruled that colleges can give preference to Black applicants if there's no fixed quota or fixed number of points for race.

Here's my summary of the ruling:

It's okay to be nice to Blacks, if you don't make a point of it.

That decision to "let bias in favor of Blacks, but don't quantify it" is silly. It could lead to a system where dark Blacks get 20 point but light Blacks get just 10 points and Hispanics get 15 points, but instead of calling it "race" it's called just "other factors."

Some justices added their own comments:

Sandra Day O'Connor said she hopes that, 25 years from now, racial preferences will no longer be needed and the Court will try then to scrap the current "quick fix."

David Souter mused that if a point system is allowed, why not a system where Blacks get 100 points, effectively making it a Black-only program?

Clarence Thomas, who's Black but conservative, said that if Blacks are given easier admission to colleges, then nobody will take Black degrees seriously, and all Blacks will suffer.

Recently, a new issue came up: if you discriminate in favor of Blacks, aren't you discriminating against Whites and Asians? The Supreme Court is considering the issue again. Stay tuned.

Extreme politicians

I'm waiting for the media to invent an extreme politician saying things such as:

I believe in the sanctity of human life. We should protect even the lives of the unborn. Abortinists are murderers. The Bible says, "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth," so all abortinists are murderers that should be executed, and so should all women who arrange abortinists, and so should all women who ever had abortinists. Kill them all! That would also stop the world's overpopulation.

And to end racial discrimination now, all Americans shall be required to look the same, by applying purple tanning cream before leaving their homes — except for Muslim women, who have permission to wear veils instead. Get your purple tanning cream at Purple Tanning Centers, a government-sponsored chain of pleasure shops for the racially purp-lexed.

Martin Luther King

According to historians, throughout American history there were just 2 surprising great speeches: Martin Luther King's "I have a dream" speech (in Washington DC) and Lincoln's "Gettysburg Address." (Other good speeches were less surprising.)

How the speech arose King borrowed passages from another preacher, but King improved the oratory's cadence. The speech was an improved variant of many similar speeches King gave during the preceding year. Towns in Michigan and North Carolina have their own celebrations claiming "the dream began here." Those communities praise him for coalescing thoughts that had been building up. While giving those earlier speeches, King learned his audiences looked depressed until he started talking about "dreams," so he began emphasizing the "dream" angle more.

For the Washington speech's first half, King was reading from a script; but for the last half, he spoke off-the-cuff, combining phrases that had been churning in his head for years, as he surveyed the crowd's mood.

Opportunities If America keeps treating Martin Luther King Day as a second-class holiday, America is missing a "marketing opportunity." That holiday should be treated like Presidents Day — to sell cars, with inspiring ads like this:

Elvis was King. Martin Luther was King. Now *you* can be King too, in your new SUV! Martin Luther had a dream — now you can have a dream car too! Or go for racial harmony — in the sports car that's cool to race and makes you feel comfortable, too! Black, white, or colored — your choice!

On Martin Luther King Day, ice cream vendors should sell **Dreamsicles** (Creamsicles covered in chocolate that's dark, delicious, heavenly), so we can all say, "I have a Dreamsicle!"

His other advice Besides his famous speech, I like this quote from him:

We must develop & maintain the capacity to forgive. He who's devoid of the power to forgive is devoid of the power to love.

There's some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us. When we discover this, we're less prone to hate our enemies.

Let's blend

Many Americans are biracial. At the University of Maryland, the Multiracial and Biracial Student Association's Vice President (Laura Wood) said:

It's important to acknowledge who you are and everything that makes you that. If someone tries to call me Black, I say "Yes — and White."

Racial analyst Lili Timmons said this (as edited slightly by me):

People segregate themselves for 2 reasons: financial classes and racial groups.

The first reason is easy to explain: low-income people can't buy a house or rent an apartment in high-priced areas. If you *have* the cash, you can laugh "ha-ha-ha!" knowing your areas are inaccessible to those who don't (except burglars).

But *racial* segregation is a mark of ignorance. I believe in social and personal melting pots! Mix it up and stir in different cultural spices (customs), to create amazing results: you develop new menus, broaden your list of acquired tastes, and understand & accept what you might have turned away before.

I'm better because of the different people I've met along my way. I feel sorry for those who want to pull off into the corner of segregation: they don't

know what they've lost. Throughout history, groups tried to build walls around themselves because they felt they'd learned all there was to know and wanted to keep that knowledge to themselves, only to discover they were actually keeping continual growth and wisdom out!

The number of bi- or multi- racial/ethnic children is increasing. They probably won't be meek, but "they shall inherit the earth." *Blending* makes the blandest "bedders" better!

What God looks like

What does God look like? A bumper sticker asks:

Is God black or white? She's Black, and boy is she pissed!

I keep waiting for a movie about that. To make that movie succeed, it would have to play on stereotypes: God would have to be a sassy Black woman (like Whoopi Goldberg or Queen Latifa), who addresses new heavenly arrivals with words of wisdom like this:

What did you *expect* God to be, a honky?

Why did my son, Jesus, got so much attention? Because he was Black! Is it *my* fault he later decided to put on whiteface to blend in? Hah, that whiteface! Look where it got him! Ku Klux Klanned!

He was a nice kid, but letting himself get nailed was the dramatic end of a kid who had more passion than common sense. Common sense? Just a *mom*, like me, has enough to run the whole universal show!

Stop blaming me about worldly weather! If you guys piss me off and I want to piss on you back, that's fair, isn't it?

While you're up here, shape up or ship out! If we ship you out, we're shipping you down to you-know-where, which will give you a new understanding of the term "hot and spicy." You like hot buns? They'll be *yours!*

Stop telling me about "turn the other cheek." That was Jesus's idea. He was naïve, that kid o' mine. If you slap my face, you ain't getting my other cheek: I'm gonna whup your ass!

You thought heaven was going to be a piece of cake? Well, it is, if you don't fudge it up. No foolin' around with other angels! Keep your nose clean, Christian soldier!

Evil

The world contains evil. How should you deal with it?

Religions were invented to help humans handle evil. Different religions take different approaches to dealing with evil.

Shitology

According to the Internet, here's how the world's religions & philosophers view evil misfortunes ("shit"):

Catholics

General Catholic: If shit happens, I deserve it.
Classic Catholic: You're *born* shit, you *are* shit, and you'll *die* shit.
Charismatic Catholic: Shit happens because you deserve it, but we love you anyway.

Protestants

Calvinist: Shit won't happen if I work harder.
Episcopalian: If shit happens, serve the right wine and hold a procession.
Unitarian: Maybe shit happens. Let's have coffee and doughnuts.
Fundamentalist: If shit happens, you'll go to hell unless you're born again.
Baptist: Just total immersion in shit will suffice.
Quaker: Let's not fight over this shit.
Christian Science: If you can't get a shit, don't call a doctor: pray!
7th Day Adventist: No shit on Saturdays.
Jehovah's Witness: Knock, knock. "Shit happens."
Televangelist: Send money (tax-deductible), or shit will happen to *you*.
Moonie: Only *happy* shit really happens.
Creationist: Shit's been happening just since October 23, 4004 B.C.

Other religions

Jew: Why does shit always happen to *me*?
Hare Krishna: Please take this lovely little flower and buy our shit.
Voodoo: Shit doesn't just "happen": someone dumped it on you.
Rastafarian: Smoke that shit.
Taoist: Shit happens, so flow with it.
Pagan: Shit happens and is part of nature.

Shinto: You inherit the shit of your ancestors.
Hindu: This shit happened before.
Buddhist: It's just an *illusion* of shit happening.
Zen: What's the *sound* of shit happening?
Confucian: Confucius say: shit happens.
Muslim: If shit happens, it's Allah's will. Kill the person responsible.

Self-help movements

I2-step: Shit happens, one day at a time.
Scientologist: To learn why shit happens, take our course.
Transcend. Meditator: Shi-i-it. Shi-i-it. Shi-i-it. Shi-i-it. Shi-i-it. ...
New Age: This isn't shit if I really believe it's chocolate.

Negativists

Atheist: There's no such thing as shit. No shit!
Agnostic: Maybe shit happens, and maybe it doesn't.
Secular humanist: Shit evolves.
Existentialist: Shit doesn't *happen*; shit *is*.
Apathetic: I don't give a shit.
Denialist: What shit?
Nihilist: Let's blow this shit up!
Procrastinator: I'll tackle this shit — tomorrow.

Professionals

Psychologist: All happenings are shit, but some repress their shittiness.
Chemist: Gee, what'll happen if I mix this and... Oh, shit!
Doctor: Yes, it's definitely a case of shit happening. \$90, please.
Lawyer: For a fee, I can get you out of *any* shit.
Statistician: There's an 83.7% chance that shit will happen. Maybe.
Bureaucrat: To make shit happen, fill the form.
Waitress: You want fries with that shit?

Famous scientists

Darwin: Survival of the shittiest!
Einstein: Shit is relative.
Heisenberg: Shit happened. We just don't know where or how much.

Politicians

Julius Caesar: I came, I saw, I shat.
Nixon: Shit didn't happen, and if it did I didn't know about it.
McCarthy: Are you now — or have you ever gotten — shit?

Patriotic

Nationalist: Our shit, right or wrong.
Navy: It's not just shit, it's an adventure.
Nazi: Scheiße über alles.

Financiers

Materialist: Yes, I really *do* need all this shit.
Yuppie: It's *my* shit! All mine! Isn't it beautiful?
Marketer: Package shit right, and everyone will buy it.
Mafioso: Rub the little shits out.
Red Cross: Shit happened: send money.

Leftists

Marx: Workers take all the shit but will dish it back.
Communist: It's *everyone's* shit.
Politically correct: Processed nutrition-depleted biological output happens.
Environmentalist: Shit is biodegradable fertilizer!
Vegetarian: If it shits, don't eat it.
Feminist: Men are shit, and shit isn't funny, so stop laughing.

Pleasure seekers

Hedonist: Shit is fun.
Masochist: Go ahead, give me *more* shit: I love it.
Mystic: This is really weird shit.
Stoic: Shit is good for me.
Mom: You'll *eat* this shit and *like* it!

Fictitious

Energizer Bunny: Shit happens and happens and happens and happens....
Robin: Holy shit, Batman!
Pangloss: This is the best of all possible shits.

Why evil exists

Here's a reason for evil shit: when you're faced with it, you get an experience that forces you to develop yourself into a stronger person. Novelists call that "character development, the hard way." Priests and politicians say of such a tragedy, "Let that be a lesson for us all." President Franklin Roosevelt's wife (Eleanor

Roosevelt) said....

A woman is like a teabag:
you never know how strong she is until she gets into hot water.

Faith

Keeping the faith can be a challenge when evil things happen.

Each day, God feeds me shit.
My job is to devour.
If life is like a flower,
Why does the flower spit?

God knows the point of it:
He wants to make me strong,
Stand firm and never split,
Distinguish right from wrong,
And with His guiding hand
Come learn to make life grand.

Yip Harburg said:

No matter how I probe and prod,
I cannot quite believe in God;
But oh, I hope to God that He
Unswervingly believes in me.

Christian fun

Christianity is serious business. Here's a look at its lighter side.

Puzzle

Hey, kids, how well do you know the Bible? Try this tricky one-question Bible quiz:

How many animals of each species did Adam take aboard the ark with him?

Most kids answer "2," but the correct answer is "0," because Adam wasn't the guy who went on the ark.

Church signs

Many churches have funny signs to encourage folks to come in or at least think about God. Here are samples:

Drive to heaven

Free trip to heaven. Details inside!
Headed in the wrong direction? God allows U-turns.
Why pay for GPS? Jesus gives direction for free.
Get right or get left.
Give God what's right, not what's left.

Come into church

Free coffee. Everlasting life. Yes, membership has its privileges.
Try our Sundays. They're better than Baskin Robbins.
Sunday special: free people.
Walmart isn't the only saving place.
Running low on faith? Stop in for a fill-up.
Searching for a new look? Have your faith lifted here!
Come in and pray today. Beat the Christmas rush!
This is a CH__CH. What's missing? UR
Shock your mom! Come to church.
Easter is more than something to dye for.
Sign broken. Message inside this Sunday.

Get baptized

Church parking: trespassers will be baptized.
Baptist church! Hey kid, God says it's bath time.

Avoid bad death

Honk if you love Jesus. Text while driving if you want to meet him.
Come in and let us prepare you for your finals.
Don't wait for 6 strong men to bring you to church.
How will you spend eternity — smoking or non-smoking?
Party in Hell canceled due to fire.
Exposure to the Son may prevent burning.
Son screen prevents sin burn.

Jesus: your get-out-of-Hell free card.

People are like tea bags — put them in hot water to find out how strong they are.
How do we make holy water? We boil the Hell out of it.
Bring your sin to the altar and drop it like it's hot.

Feel better

In the dark? Follow the Son.
Need sleep? Don't count sheep. Talk to the Shepherd.
If you don't like the way you were born, be born again.
The best vitamin for Christians is B1.
God can heal a broken heart if He has all the pieces.
Sorrow looks back. Worry looks around. Faith looks up.
Life is a puzzle. Look here for the missing peace.

Get the power

God wants to reign on your parade.
You can accomplish more in an hour with God than a lifetime without Him.
The most powerful position is on your knees.
Sin knocks a hole in your bucket of joy.
God is like Tide soap: He gets out the stains others left behind.
Body piercing saved my life.
God intervenes in your affairs by invitation only.
Read the Bible: it will scare the Hell out of you.
Dusty Bibles lead to dirty lives.
You're already on Heaven's most-wanted list.

Come work for the Lord. The work is hard, the hours long, and the pay low.
But the retirement benefits are out of this world.

People make mistakes

Most people wish to serve God, but just in an advisory capacity.
Most men forget God all day but ask Him to remember them all night.
God does not believe in atheists. Therefore, atheists do not exist.
God wants spiritual fruits, not religious nuts.
If you'd shut up, you could hear God's voice.
Staying in bed and shouting "Oh, God!" doesn't count as going to church.

Join Jesus

Jesus is a friend who knows all your faults and loves you anyway.
Jesus is a friend who walks in when other walk out.
Try Jesus. If you don't like him, the devil will take you back.

Go beyond the Internet

Some questions can't be answered by Google.
Google can't satisfy every search.
God answers knee-mail.
Facebook: you have one new friend request from Jesus. Confirm/ignore.

Take heart

The heart is happiest when it beats for others.
Those who deserve love the least need it most.
Success comes in cans. Failure comes in can'ts.
Don't give up. Moses was once a basket case.

Avoid anger

Swallowing angry words is better than eating them.
Forgive your enemies. It messes with their heads.
To forgive is to set a prisoner free and discover the prisoner was *you*.
Pick your friends, but not to pieces.
The best way to get the last word is to apologize.

God quotes

"Will the road you're on get you to my place?" — God
"Need directions?" — God
"Keep using my name in vain. I'll make rush hour longer." — God
"That 'Love Thy Neighbor' thing, I meant it." — God
"We need to talk." — God
"Tell the kids I love them." — God
"Get off of Facebook and into *my* book." — God
"Read my #1 bestseller? There will be a test." — God
"You think it's hot *here*?" — God

To see more examples, go to —

[Pinterest.com/explore/funny-church-signs](https://www.pinterest.com/explore/funny-church-signs)

or go to Google.com and search for "church signs" — or visit your local church!

On the Internet, fake photos from a fake church (“Crystal Methodist Church of Effing, SC”) show these signs —

Adultery is a sin. You can’t have your Kate and Edith too.
Masturbation is Satan’s typewriter.

Orgasms are superior within the confines of a church-sanctioned marriage.
Forbidden fruits create many jams.

You don’t have to eat makeup to be pretty inside.
What would Jesus do? Well, he wouldn’t be cooking meth.

Jesus loves you more than Kanye loves Kanye.
If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it.

Be an organ donor. Give your heart to Jesus.
If you don’t love Jesus, go to Hell.

“I’m also making a list and checking it twice.” — God
Santa Claus never died for anyone.

Wash your hands and say your prayers, ’cause Jesus & germs are everywhere.
Trust in God but lock your car.

Do you know what Hell is? Come hear our preacher.
Bring your spiritual marshmallows. Our preacher is on fire.

What happens when you die? Come join us and find out!
Don’t let worries kill you. Let the church help.

Time heals all wounds, unless it gets infected.
Our church isn’t full of hypocrites. There’s always room for 1 more.

Heaven is just 1 faulty brake job away.
Any stairway is a stairway to heaven, if you’re clumsy enough.

Never be ashamed of who you are. That’s your parent’s job.
God wants full custody, not just weekend visits.

The 3 hardest things to say: “I’m sorry,” “I need help,” “Worcestershire sauce.”
Christmas — easier to spell than Hanukah.

plus these signs having sexual double-meanings:

Bored? Try a missionary position.
God specializes in happy endings!

Watch what you say. Any sentence is sexual if you think long & hard about it.
Easter comes once a year. How often do you?

A loose tongue often gets one in a tight place.
Forgiveness is to swallow when you want to spit.

Jesus hears you crying his name Saturday night. Why not Sunday morning?
Pray for a good harvest but continue to hoe.

We accept everyone. Stop ramming your homosexuality down our throat.
Remember you’re butt dust and into dust you shall return.

Bumper stickers

If you like religious humor, put it on a bumper sticker!

For example, many bumper stickers show this quote from Dawn Ewing:

Lord, help me become the person my dog thinks I am.

Here’s another classic bumper sticker:

Is God black or white? She’s black, and boy is she pissed!

Mara Faustino included these bumper stickers in her book *Heaven and Hell*:

The road to Hell is bumper-to-bumper. Make a U-turn.
Give Satan an inch and he’ll be a ruler.
Never give the devil a ride! He’ll always want to drive.
The devil wants to control you. God wants to lead you.
Satan can’t bring you down any further than your knees.

This bumper sticker has the opposite sentiment:

Religion: treat it like a penis. Don’t wave it in public and shove it down a child’s throat.

That bumper sticker is abridged from this longer sentiment, which appeared at DearBlankPleaseBlank.com:

Religion is like a penis: it’s fine to have one and be proud of it, but please don’t whip it out in public, start waving it around, and shove it down a child’s throat.

The Internet includes this variant:

Religion is like sex: if you’re forced to have it as a kid, you’ll hate it as an adult.

Songs

Songs get cynical about how Christianity is practiced today.

What would Jesus do? What would Jesus do if he were alive today and had modern technological help? Ryan Smith & Julie Wittner wrote a song about that; here are the lyrics (revised and abridged by me):

He died for our sins on the cross,
Technology not on his side.
He’d have much more luck in a **Ford** pickup truck:
That is what Jesus would drive.
Terrain in the desert is tough.
A Honda? You’d barely survive!
So God’s only kid needs a ride that won’t skid:
Ford is what Jesus would drive.
Disciples don’t fit in a Pacer.
God’s gun racks don’t fit Subaru.
If you’re a truck buyer, be like your messiah:
Only **Ford** pickups will do!

To live in the desert? You’re thirsty!
To hang on a cross makes you think.
Jack Daniels, not water, can soothe the pain farther:
Jack is what Jesus would drink.
Disciples make great drinking buddies,
But Judas can get on your nerve.
When *your* friend’s a shyster, don’t drink Jägermeister:
Jack is what Jesus would serve.

Not everyone liked what he stood for.
They thought that to blaspheme was cute.
He’d teach them a lesson with God’s **Smith & Wesson**:
That is what Jesus would shoot.

So here is what Jesus would do:
He’d buy just American, always be true.
His thorns, ground and round, would bleed red, white, and blue.
That is what Jesus, your sin-saving Jesus,
Your truck-loving, booze-craving, gun-toting, flag-waving Jesus
Would do.

Watch them sing their original (which is better) at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=pe-er9FqhYA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pe-er9FqhYA)

How to act Catholic Tom Lehrer’s ragtime song, *The Vatican Rag*, explains how to be Catholic. Here’s his main thought:

Get in line in that processional.
Step into that small confessional.
There the guy who’s got religion’ll
Tell you if your sin’s original.

If it is, try playing safer:
Drink the wine and chew the wafer.

Hear him sing the full song (which is funnier) at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=_YcGRNmKB00](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_YcGRNmKB00)

Puritanism

H.L. Mencken gave this definition.

Puritanism: the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy.

Tales

The Bible includes tales of experiences by Jesus and his followers. Here are newer tales, according to our new Bible: the Internet!

Letter from grandma A grandma sent this letter to her family:

I went to the local Christian bookstore and saw a “Honk if you love Jesus” bumper sticker. I was feeling sassy because I’d just come from a thrilling choir performance followed by a thunderous prayer meeting, so I bought the sticker and put it on my car’s back bumper.

Boy, I'm glad I did! What an uplifting experience followed!
At a busy intersection, I stopped at a red light, got lost in thought about the Lord and how good He is, and didn't notice the light change. It's a good thing someone else loves Jesus, because if he hadn't honked, I'd never have noticed!

I found *lots* of people love Jesus! Why, while I was sitting there, the guy behind started honking like crazy then leaned out his window and screamed, "For the love of *God! Go! Go! Go!* Jesus Christ, *Go!*" What an exuberant cheerleader he was for Jesus! Everyone started honking!

I just leaned out my window and started waving and smiling at all those loving people. I even honked my horn few times to share the love!

One man back there must have been from Florida because I heard him yelling something about a "sunny beach."

I saw another guy waving in a funny way with just his middle finger stuck up in the air. I asked my teenage grandsons in the back seat what that meant. They squirmed, looked at each other, giggled, and said it was the Hawaiian good-luck sign. Since I've never met anyone from Hawaii, I leaned out the window and gave him the good-luck sign back. My grandsons burst out laughing. Why, even *they* were enjoying this religious experience!

A couple of people were so caught up in the joy of the moment that they got out of their cars and started walking towards me. I bet they wanted to pray or ask what church I attended, but just then I noticed the light turn yellow, so I waved to all my sisters and brothers, grinned, and stepped on the gas.

It's a good thing I did, because I was the only car to get across the intersection. I felt sad to leave those friends, after all the love we shared. So I slowed the car, leaned out the window, and gave them all the Hawaiian good-luck sign one last time as I drove away.

Praise the Lord for such wonderful folks!

Love ya all,
Grandma

How to meet Jesus Here's the tale of the boy who wanted to meet Jesus:

A boy was sitting on the curb and crying. A rich man walked up to him and asked, "What's the matter, kid?"

"I want to see Jesus Christ."

Then man said, "I can't help you do that, but here's a dollar to put in the Offering." Then the man went away.

Next, a priest came up, saw the boy crying, and asked, "What's wrong, son?"

"I want to see Jesus Christ, Our Lord."

"I'm His representative. Isn't that good enough?"

The kid said, "No." The priest shrugged his shoulders and went away.

Finally, a drunk bum came up and asked, "Whazza matta, shunny?"

"I want to see Jesus Christ."

"I'm Jesus Christ."

"I don't believe you."

"I *am*, and everybody knows it!"

"Prove it!"

"Okay, gimme that buck and get on my back."

The kid gave him the Offering and climbed on the bum's back. The bum carried him down the street to a bar and walked in. Sure enough, the bartender exclaimed, "Jesus Christ! You back again?"

Bizarre Bible quotes The Bible can be prophetic:

A man walked into a boarding house. When he asked for dinner, he was served cabbage stew. When he complained, the waiter told him, "Sorry, but cabbage stew is the only item on the menu." So he ate it.

The next morning, breakfast was just of fried cabbage. For lunch, he was served cabbage pie. For dinner, he was served cabbage stew again. He just folded his hands, looked up at Heaven, and said, "Hebrews 13:8."

If you look in the New Testament's Book of Hebrews, chapter 13, verse 8, you see: "Jesus Christ! — the same yesterday, today, and forevermore!"

Bible quotes can talk back to each other:

A new pastor moved into town. On Saturday he went out to visit his parishioners. All went well until he came to a house where obviously someone was home but nobody came to the door, even after he knocked repeatedly. So he took out his card, wrote on the back "Revelation 3:20," and stuck it in the door.

The next day, when he was counting the offering, he found his card in the collection plate, but below his message was scribbled "Genesis 3:10."

Revelation 3:20 says, "I stand at the door and knock. If any man hears my voice and opens the door, I'll come in to him and dine with him."

Genesis 3:10 says, "I heard thy voice in the garden; and I was afraid, because I was naked."

3 men and heaven This tale is constructed cleverly:

3 men stand in line to enter Heaven. Saint Peter tells the first, "Heaven's nearly full, so I've been asked to admit just people who've had particularly horrible deaths. What's your story?"

The first man replies, "I suspected my wife's been cheating on me, so today I came home early to catch her red-handed. When I entered my 25th-floor apartment, I felt something wrong but couldn't tell where the other guy was hiding. Finally, I went out to the balcony, and sure enough, there was a man hanging off the railing, 25 floors above ground! I was really mad, so I beat & kicked him, but he wouldn't fall. I went back into my apartment, got a hammer, and started hammering his fingers. He finally let go and fell, but into the bushes. He was stunned but okay. I couldn't stand him anymore, so I ran to the kitchen, grabbed the fridge, and threw it over the edge. It landed on him and killed him instantly. But all the stress and anger got to me: I had a heart attack and died there on the balcony."

"That sounds like a pretty bad day to me," says Peter and lets the man in.

The second man comes up. Peter says Heaven's nearly full and asks for his story. "It's been a strange day. I live on the 26th floor of my apartment building. Every morning I exercise out on my balcony. This morning I must have slipped, because I fell over the edge. But I got lucky and caught the railing of the balcony on the floor below me. I knew I couldn't hang on long, when suddenly this man burst out onto the balcony. I thought surely I was saved, but he started beating and kicking me. I held on, best I could, until he ran into his apartment, grabbed a hammer, and started pounding on my hands. Finally I just let go, but again I got lucky and fell into the bushes below, stunned but alive. Just when I thought I'd be okay, a refrigerator comes falling out of the sky and crushes me instantly, so now I'm here." Once again, Peter concedes it sounds like a horrible death.

It's the third man's turn. Peter asks for his story.

"Picture this," says the third man, "I'm hiding naked inside a refrigerator..."

Why God ain't a professor

Professors & instructors at Kansas State University and Allen County Community College have decided God isn't good enough to become a tenured professor, for 7 reasons:

1. He published just one book. Worst of all, it was in Hebrew, had no references, and wasn't published in refereed journals. Some doubt he even wrote it himself!
2. He isn't known for his cooperative work.
3. Sure, he created the world, but what has he done lately?
4. He didn't get permission from any review board to work with human subjects. When one experiment went awry, he tried to cover it up by drowning all the subjects. When sample subjects don't behave as predicted, he deletes the whole sample.
5. He rarely comes to class: he just tells his students to read the book. Though he has just 10 requirements, his students often fail his tests.
6. He expelled his first two students for learning.
7. His office hours were infrequent and usually held on a mountaintop.

Heaven versus Hell

When you die, Christians believe you'll go to either Heaven or Hell, whichever you deserve. Which do you prefer?

Mark Twain (the author) said:

I don't like to commit myself about Heaven and Hell — you see, I have friends in both places. Go to Heaven for the climate, Hell for the company. What a man misses mostly in Heaven is company.

He also said (in *Letters From the Earth*) that in Heaven the angels all sing and play harps continuously; but you won't enjoy having to sing and play the harp all day, every day, repeating that same monotonous song praising God; in fact, the average person sings terribly, can't play a harp, and can't sit through a choral concert for more than 2 hours without wanting to vomit.

Isaac Asimov said:

Whatever the tortures of Hell, I think the boredom of Heaven would be even worse.

Javier Bardem (the actor) said (to *Parade* magazine's Walter Scott in 2011):

I don't know if I'll get to heaven. I'm a bad boy. Heaven must be nice, but is it too boring? Maybe you can get an apartment there and then go to hell for the weekends.

The Internet says:

The fact there's a highway to hell but just a stairway to heaven says a lot about anticipated traffic numbers.

If you're a **good person** (nice to everybody and act responsibly) but your religion isn't Christian, will you go to hell?

Some Christians say you'll go to hell; some say you'll go to heaven; some say you'll be stuck temporarily in an intermediate place, called **purgatory**, which is sort of a forsaken motel, without air conditioning, on the hot highway to heaven.

Ronald Ulinsky said:

Of course there's a heaven and hell. Each of us lives in one or the other, each day of our lives. Both heaven and hell are mankind's creations: thoughts of reward or eternal damnation keep us civilized, usually. When we die, we return to where we were before birth: without cognizance. Any eternal life that's achieved comes from instilling a thought or tradition in another human so it can continue, no matter how small.

Valerie Stevens said:

He's a loving God but also a perfect gentleman. He'd never force someone hating him to spend eternity with him. Hell is just where God is not."

Bill Haas said:

When people do wrong, they must be in great pain to act so bad. When John says eternal life goes to whoever "believes in Jesus," he meant "believes in his message of love: treat one another as God's children."

Those 3 thoughts appeared in *Time* magazine's "letters to the editor" (issue of May 2, 2011).

Was Jesus ridiculous?

Jesus gave advice that could be considered "extremist" now. Here are oversimplified versions of his advice, followed by what he actually said. The oversimplified versions make Jesus sound ridiculous, but what he actually said is more reasonable.

Oversimplified version

What he actually said

Don't have any sexual urges.

Any man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. (Matthew 5:28)

If you do something wrong with your eye, pluck it out; if you do something wrong with your hand, cut it off.

If your right eye makes you sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It's better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. If your right hand makes you sin, cut it off and throw it away. (Matthew 5:29-30)

If you marry a divorced woman, you're committing adultery.

Anyone who divorces his wife (except for marital unfaithfulness) makes her become an adulteress; and anyone who marries the divorced woman commits adultery. (Matthew 5:32)

If someone hits you, invite him to hit you again.

Don't resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other cheek to him also. (Matthew 5:39)

If you lose a lawsuit, pay more than the judgment.

If someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. (Matthew 5:40)

Don't save money.

Don't accumulate for yourself treasures on earth, where moths & rust destroy and thieves break in & steal. Instead, accumulate for yourself treasures in heaven, where moths & rust don't destroy and thieves don't break in & steal. (Matthew 6:19-20)

Don't plan for the future.

Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own. (Matthew 6:34)

Don't become wealthy.

Sell everything you have and give to the poor; then you'll have treasure in heaven. (Mark 10:21)

If someone steals from you, don't try to get it back.

Give to everyone who asks you. If anyone takes what belongs to you, don't demand it back. (Luke 6:30)

Sell everything you have and give it to the poor.

Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Give yourself a purse that won't wear out, a treasure (in heaven) that won't be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. (Luke 12:33)

Hate your father, mother, wife, children, even your own life.

If a person coming to me doesn't hate his parents, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even his own life, he can't be my disciple. (Luke 14:26)

Don't work to feed yourself.

Instead of working for food that spoils, work for food that endures to eternal life, which I'll give you. (John 6:27)

Editing the Bible

As an editor, I dream of the day I get a wonderful book in my hands to edit, like this....

I'm sitting in my office. My feet are propped up on my desk. I'm smoking a fat cigar, Philip Marlowe style, and enjoying a rare quiet moment dreaming of the future and life's meaning. My reverie is interrupted by a knock on the door. I figure it must be fate. "Come in," I say.

An old geezer walks in. I ask, "Who are you?"

"God," he says.

I check my calendar. I made no appointment with "God" but figure I should be nice to this stranger anyway, so I size him up. He looks like a bum: unshaven, with a long beard and wearing a long ragged robe. He looks positively ancient.

I ask, "What can I do for you?"

He holds up a manuscript that's dog-eared and isn't even stapled. He says, "I wrote this book. I want you to publish it."

"What's it called?" I ask.

"*The Bible*."

"That name is boring. Who knows what *The Bible* is? If you want me to publish it, give me a punchier name, like *The Adventures of Punch and Judy*."

"Actually, you could almost call it *The Adventures of Punch and Jesus*," he volunteers.

"I never heard of *Jesus*," I replied. Who in hell is *Jesus*?"

"He's my son."

"So it's a book about a kid? A kid's book?" I thumb through it. "I can't sell a kid's book unless it has pictures. Hey, maybe you got a photo of *Jesus*? How about a baby photo, or a photo of him as a teenager? That would really sell."

"Sorry, we didn't have cameras when he grew up."

So this book's a lost cause, but I thumb through the chapters anyway, to be courteous. I give my honest editorial opinion: "This stuff's too long. Nobody's gonna read it all. Every modern editor knows that fiction over 200 pages can't sell."

"It isn't fiction," he insists. "It's a reference, an encyclopedia of higher thought."

"Whoop-dee-doo!" I retort. "It smells like fiction: full of tales, like a trashy historical novel. But here's your main problem, God-baby: your book isn't funny! You have no sense of humor. Throw in some laughs, even if nobody completely understands them. This tome is too heavy, like a tomb, an albatross around your neck. And you're lousy at writing romantic scenes: yours are really boring, just dull sentences such as *He lay down with her*. Did you write all this boring blather yourself?"

"I had help from a team of writers: Moses, Mark, and others. They recorded my thoughts."

"So you hired stenographers?" I try giving his Bible a lift, but it's a heavy subject. "This pile of puzzling platitudes must have been produced by cheap labor. I bet you paid them below minimum wage. But we can still credit them in the acknowledgements. What are their last names? Moses Schwartz and Mark O'Brien, or something similar?"

"Sorry, their parents didn't give them last names."

"So they're orphans? Maybe we could play up the *I'm-just-a-poor-orphan* angle."

"No, the team wouldn't appreciate that. Anyway, they're all dead."

"Then we can play up the *dead-baby* angle! That would fit nicely with the tale of your dead son."

"No, please."

"So they want to be just ghost writers? Okay, we'll say the book's a blog written by a band called *God and the Holy Ghosties*, who rap about the Bible. That's the best way to market to kids today. For old fogies, we'll give you a different handle: *The-Hell-I-Knew-Ya Chorus*."

"Drop it."

"Hey, I'm just trying to concoct a way to market your crapola. Your stuff's too long and its English too stilted. Reading it makes me just want to hang down my head and crawl into a tomb. Your *Bible* is really hard to read. It's Greek to me!"

"That's because we wrote it in Greek, Hebrew, and Aramaic. You're reading a translation."

"Why didn't you just write it in English? You speak English well."

"Where we grew up, people didn't speak English."

"So you're an immigrant? I bet you're illegal."

"Yeah, people are warned not to mention me in public places."

"Then let's bravely market this thing as *The Underground Shushed-Up Super-Secrets of God*. Underground books sell like hotcakes! But to protect your identity, we must keep you hidden."

"I already am." And with that comment, he vanished.

Christianity summarized

Some folks find Christianity hard to swallow — especially when they try to summarize it.

On YouTube, Tyler Oakley gives this summary of Christianity:

You worship a cosmic Jewish zombie who's his own father. He can give you eternal life if you symbolically eat his blood & flesh and telepathically tell him he's your master. If you do that, he'll remove the evil spirit that's deep within your soul. That evil spirit's in every human because a naked woman was convinced by a talking snake to eat fruit from a magical tree.

The video, called "Christianity in a Nutshell," is at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=uDHFAsY6rSA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uDHFAsY6rSA)

George Carlin gave this alternative summary:

Religion's convinced people an invisible man lives in the sky. He watches all you do, every minute of every day. He has a special list of 10 things he doesn't want you to do. If you do any, he has a special place full of fire, smoke, burning, torture, and anguish, where he'll send you to live, suffer, burn, choke, scream, and cry, forever. But he loves you!

The Internet provides this quote:

When you believe in an imaginary figure that *just you* can see or hear, it's called a "**psychological problem**." When you believe in an imaginary figure that *even you* can't see or hear, it's a "**religion**."

Extra miracle by Jesus

Could Jesus really perform miracles? A woman gave this example on the Gawker.com Website:

On our first date, I took a risk when Mr. Keverdene asked me about religion. I'd been around the block a few times, so I was kind of done with first-date pretend-y nonsense. I took a swig of my drink and said, "I think Jesus was probably an asshole." Hubby claims this was the moment he fell in love with me. The rest is blissful romantic history. That's kind of a miracle. Thank you, Jesus!

Judaism

I was born into a Jewish family that practiced Judaism. We practiced but didn't always succeed. Here's what it means to be a Jew....

3 Jewish flavors

Jews come in 3 popular flavors:

Orthodox Jews	perform all the old rituals.
Reform Jews	ignore all the old rituals.
Conservative Jews	compromise, by performing <i>some</i> of the old rituals.

Since Reform Jews ignore the rituals, Orthodox Jews accuse Reform Jews of being negligent and non-religious. Since Orthodox Jews perform all the old rituals, Reform Jews accuse Orthodox Jews of being hopelessly old-fashioned and out of touch with modern needs.

But although Orthodox Jews consider Reform Jews to be misguided, and vice versa, they respect each other. Jews don't despise each other the way Protestants and Catholics do in Northern Ireland. Christians have wars about religion; Jews don't. Jews are quiet people.

Do Jews fight?

Although Jews are quiet, they aren't humble. They don't agree with Jesus's recommendation to "turn the other cheek."

If a Jew gets into a fight, he'll run away or defend himself or try to talk the opponent out of fighting. But he won't let himself be turned into a punching bag. Jews don't believe in self-sacrifice.

Jews try to avoid fights just if they're "typical" Jews, not commanders of the Israeli military, who are paid to love war. It's amazing how a paycheck can change one's sense of values.

Life after death

Christians worry about whether they'll go to Hell instead of Heaven. Jews ignore the issue of "life after death," since the Old Testament hardly even mentions the issue.

Once a year, at the Yom Kippur holiday, they pray that God will put their names in His white book instead of His black book. But they believe that if they're good, their rewards will occur relatively soon, rather than in the hereafter.

According to Christian doctrine, all non-Christians are sinners: they can't go to Heaven and must instead go to Hell or at least "purgatory" (which is a nightmare that resembles a Howard Johnson's restaurant on the lonely road from Hell to Heaven). Jews, by contrast, believe non-Jews can get to Heaven and that Jewish rituals just help Jews get an "in" with God. ("Hey, guys, we Jews are God's chosen people. If you join us, we'll help you get into Heaven; we've got contacts up there. We'll help you reach the Top through our old 'Jew-boy' network. Just follow our rituals — come to our synagogue and bow down at the right times — and do good deeds; then we'll make sure God treats you right.")

Missionary position

Since Christians think all non-Christians are sinners, Christians hire missionaries to turn non-Christians into Christians. That's why Christianity is called a missionary religion.

But Judaism's not a missionary religion: Jews don't hire

missionaries to turn the rest of the world into Jews. That's because Jews consider Judaism to be an aid but not a necessity for getting into Heaven.

To be a good Jew, you must perform many Jewish rituals. If a Christian wants to convert and become a Jew, the rabbi is required to warn the Christian how difficult Judaism is. In fact, according to Jewish law, the rabbi is required to try 3 times to dissuade the Christian from converting. If, after the 3 attempts to dissuade the Christian, the Christian still wants to become a Jew, the rabbi knows the Christian is serious, so the rabbi must help the Christian complete the conversion process, by teaching the Christian about Judaism, until the Christian can pass a test proving the Christian understands Judaism thoroughly — more thoroughly than the average Jew!

Bar Mitzvah

When a Jewish boy turns 13, he undergoes a ceremony called **Bar Mitzvah** (Hebrew for “son of the commandments”). In the ceremony, he agrees to observe all the Jewish commandments forever. If he breaks any commandments after making that agreement, he's considered a jerk.

Before a kid is 13, he can do whatever he wishes, and God won't blame him for it. God will say, “he's just a dumb kid.” But when the kid turns 13 and goes through the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, suddenly God's attitude to the kid becomes: “You agreed to become one of my chosen people; so if you fool around any more, you're breaking the agreement and I'm gonna make sure you get screwed!” (Jews think God is vengeful, unlike Christians, who think God is forgiving. Christians believe it's okay to sin if you afterwards say you're “sorry.” Jews believe that if you sin, the only way to repent is to do so many kind deeds that they outweigh your past.)

Since the Bar Mitzvah ceremony marks the kid's acceptance of adult responsibilities, it's become a manhood ritual, accompanied by lavish feasts & presents.

To outdo rich Christians who throw ridiculously opulent weddings, rich Jews throw ridiculously opulent Bar Mitzvah parties, where the spoiled 13-year-old brat becomes king for a day. Rabbis bemoan those bloated pagan Bar Mitzvah feasts. The Rabbis warn that “Bar” means “son of,” “Mitzvah” means “the commandments,” and that too much attention is being placed on the “Bar” and not enough on the “Mitzvah.”

Even if a Jewish boy skips the Bar Mitzvah ceremony, Jewish law still considers him an “adult responsible for his actions” when he turns 13 (unlike the U.S. constitution, which considers him “just a kid” until he turns 18 or 21).

Do Jews belittle women?

Judaism is a male religion. In traditional Orthodox Judaism, the men go to the synagogue while the women stay home to cook. Modern Orthodox synagogues let women enter but force the women to sit in the back and to the side, in the “ladies” section. Some women feel as if they were blacks being forced to sit in the back of a bus.

To hold an Orthodox Jewish ceremony, you must gather at least 10 *men*: women don't count. That's because in the traditional Jewish family, the man is supposed to take care of problems with God, while the woman takes care of problems with kids.

On Friday night, the woman is supposed to light candles. The **Talmud** (the book of Jewish law) says that since a woman threw the world into darkness (when Eve let herself be tempted by the snake), women should atone by bringing the world back to light.

In Jewish hierarchy, women are lower than men. For example, every morning when an Orthodox man wakes up, he's supposed to say this prayer:

Praised be the Lord that I'm not a vegetable.
Praised be the Lord that I'm not a mineral.
Praised be the Lord that I'm not a woman.

In a feminist magazine, a Jewish woman wrote an article on

how to be an Orthodox Jew and a feminist simultaneously. She found the assignment difficult!

Modern Orthodox Jewish men have invented a new excuse for that discrimination: those men say they admire women so much that they give women the *privilege* of not having to go to synagogue.

Conservative and Reform Judaism try to let women get more involved.

For example, Conservative and Reform Jews have created a ceremony called **Bas Mitzvah** or **Bat Mitzvah** (depending on your accent), which means “daughter of the commandments.”

In the Bas Mitzvah ceremony, the 13-year-old girl pretends she's a boy and goes through the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. That ceremony financially strains the girl's parents, who must throw a huge party for the 13-year-old girl but keep saving money in case she wants a wedding party 5 years later.

Since girls mature faster than boys, girls may get Bas Mitzvahed when they turn 12. Yes, Jewish law considers a girl to be an “adult” when she turns 12, though a boy at that age is still considered “just an irresponsible kid.”

Holidays

In the Christian calendar, each day begins at midnight. For example, Thursday begins at Wednesday's end, at midnight.

The Jewish calendar begins each day at sunset instead, so a Jewish “day” consists of evening followed by night followed by morning followed by afternoon. That's because the Book of Genesis says that when God created the universe “It was evening and then it was morning, one day.” So the Jewish Thursday begins at the end of Wednesday (at sunset) and continues until the end of Thursday (at sunset).

Sabbaths Jewish tradition says the most important holiday is the **Sabbath** (Saturday). Jews start celebrating it Friday's end (at sunset) and keep celebrating it until Saturday's end (at sunset).

During the Sabbath, Jews go to the synagogue to pray — especially in the evening, after Friday's sunset, during what Christians call “Friday night.” So on “Friday night,” while Christians throw wild parties, Jews are stuck in the synagogue, praying. What a drag!

During the Sabbath, Jews aren't allowed to work.

Orthodox Jews carry the “no work” law to an extreme: they refuse to use any machine. For example, they refuse to use cars and phones and refuse to turn on any lights or stoves. (To get around that restriction, they put their lights and stoves on timers.) To attend the synagogue on the Sabbath, they walk, since they refuse to use cars. If an Orthodox Jew lives too far from the synagogue to walk, he stays home.

Yom Kippur (which means “Day of Atonement”) is a special holiday, nicknamed “The Sabbath of Sabbaths.”

Jews spend the whole day of Yom Kippur in the synagogue, where they beg God's forgiveness for the past year's sins and beg Him to put their names into his white book instead of his black book. During the whole day, Jews fast. I don't mean the stupid little token fast practiced at Lent by Christians (who give up just meat) or by Muslims during their religious month. No, when Jews fast, they fast totally: throughout the entire Yom Kippur day, Jews eat nothing, and drink nothing, not even water! The only Jews exempt from fasting are kids too young to be Bar Mitzvah, pregnant women, and the gravely ill.

Having no food and no water for 24 hours might sound dreadful, but actually it's fun. Kids think it's fun to try surviving like that for a day — especially since the fast is preceded and succeeded by a big celebratory meal. The fast is easier than it sounds, since you can sleep after the first big meal and after praying. And after the first few hours of fasting, your body adjusts to the lack of food, and your hunger goes away.

Though nicknamed “The Sabbath of Sabbaths,” Yom Kippur doesn't necessarily fall on a Saturday. Like all Jewish holidays, it begins at sunset and ends at sunset.

So the most important days on the Jewish calendar are Yom Kippur and all the Saturdays. Jews take them very seriously. According to the Bible, the penalty for desecrating Yom Kippur is excommunication, and the penalty for desecrating the 52 other Sabbaths is even stronger (death!), according to the Bible's Book of Leviticus (chapter 23, verse 30) and the Book of Exodus (chapter 31, verse 15).

Lesser holidays Much less important than Yom Kippur and the Sabbaths is **Rosh Hashanah**, the Jewish New Year's celebration. Lower than all them are the other holidays, such as **Passover**, **Purim**, **Succoth**, and **Chanukah**. (To correctly pronounce the "Ch" in "Chanukah," say an "H" while gargling.)

What a drab religion, to have the biggest holiday, Yom Kippur, be a day of fasting! And what a boring religion, to have the 52 other important holidays all be Saturdays that are identical to each other and all prohibit you from driving your car and even from phoning your friends! Of all the world's popular religions, Judaism is the most morose.

To make the best of a sad religion, Jews often laugh about their difficulties and sometimes do a peppy line dance to the tune of **Hava Nagila**. Here are the lyrics:

Original Hebrew	Translation	Vegetarian version
Hava nagila,	Let's rejoice,	Have a banana!
Hava nagila,	Let's rejoice,	Have <i>two</i> bananas!
Hava nagila	Let's rejoice	Have <i>three</i> bananas:
Venis'mecha!	And be happy!	They're <i>good</i> for you!
Hava nagila,	Let's rejoice,	Have a banana!
Hava nagila,	Let's rejoice,	Have <i>two</i> bananas!
Hava nagila	Let's rejoice	Have <i>three</i> bananas:
Venis'mecha!	And be happy!	They're <i>fun</i> to chew!
Hava neranenah,	Let's sing,	Have a banana now:
Hava neranenah,	Let's sing,	Have one, don't have a cow!
Hava neranenah	Let's sing	Have a banana now:
Venis'mecha!	And be happy!	Don't have a cow!
Hava neranenah,	Let's sing,	Put it right in your mouth.
Hava neranenah,	Let's sing,	Once there, don't take it out.
Hava neranenah,	Let's sing,	Hey, no, don't take it out,
Venis'mecha!	And be happy!	And please don't pout!
Uru,	Awake,	Oo! Ee!
Uru, achim,	Awake, brothers,	Oo! Ee! Chewy!
Uru, achim, b'lev sameach,	Awake, brothers, with happy heart,	Have a banana, can ya?
Uru, achim, b'lev sameach,	Awake, brothers, with happy heart,	Stick one in your bandana!
Uru, achim, b'lev sameach,	Awake, brothers, with happy heart,	Slice it, just like a man. You
Uru, achim, b'lev sameach,	Awake, brothers, with happy heart,	Know, dear, that's what we plan to!
Uru, achim, uru, achim,	Awake, brothers, awake, brothers,	But now please, don't you sneeze,
B'lev sameach!	With happy heart!	Or I can't be hugging you.
Hey!	Hey!	Oo!

Now Orthodox and Conservative Jews demand two days off from work for each holiday. Reform Jews have cut back to just one day per holiday. So Orthodox and Conservative Jews seem twice as religious as Reform! But actually, the typical Orthodox or Conservative Jew doesn't go to synagogue on the holiday's second day: instead, he hides from the rabbi and goes fishing!

What Jews eat

In the Old Testament, God gave 613 commandments. He made Moses put the 10 most important ones onto a tablet but warned that the other 603 must be obeyed also. Several commandments concern food.

No meat with milk God said:

A kid goat shall not be cooked in its mother's milk.

God felt so strongly about that commandment that he said it twice: he said it in the Book of Exodus (23:19) and also in the Book of Deuteronomy (14:21).

Apparently, God thought it's okay to eat a goat and drink milk, but boiling a goat in the milk of its own mother is gross. The Jewish God always insisted on good manners! You must eat the goat *before* drinking the milk, or vice versa.

That law can be hard to enforce: if you go to a supermarket to buy goat meat and some goat's milk (true delicacies!), how can you be sure that the goat who produced the milk isn't, by some weird coincidence, the mother of the goat you're eating? You'd be upset if, while drinking the milk, you nibble at the goat meat and suddenly God stabs you with a lightning bolt. It could ruin your whole day.

To protect against lightning bolts, Jews adopt a simple insurance policy: never eat *any* meat with *any* milk. Jews won't even eat chicken with cheese, even though the chicken's mother didn't produce the cheese.

"Never eat any kind of meat with any kind of milk" has become a Jewish law, but Jewish lawyers (who are very clever) noticed the law contains a vague word: "with."

What does it mean to eat meat *with* milk? For example, if you eat meat and then 5 minutes later drink milk, did you eat meat *with* milk?

To make sure Jewish eaters don't take liberties, Jewish lawyers rewrote the law to say this: after eating meat, you must wait several hours before drinking milk. But how long is "several hours"? In Eastern Europe, Jewish lawyers say you must wait 6 hours; in Germany and most other countries of Western Europe, Jewish lawyers say you must wait just 3 hours; in Holland, Jewish lawyers are very permissive and say you must wait just 72 minutes.

So if you eat meat, you must wait before drinking milk. But if you drink milk, you do *not* have to wait before eating meat; it's okay to eat meat immediately after drinking milk. But it's *not* okay to eat meat immediately after eating hard cheese — because hard cheese sticks to your teeth! After eating hard cheese, you must wait an hour for the cheese to disintegrate. That law about hard cheese was invented by a rabbi and called the **sticky-cheese amendment**.

If two Jews sit side-by-side, and one eats meat while the other drinks milk, have they mixed meat and milk? Fortunately, the answer is "no." If the meat eater wants to drink orange juice but and the only cup in the house is the one used by the milk drinker, can the meat eater rinse that cup, quickly fill it with orange juice, and drink? Jewish lawyers decided the answer is no: the milk cup must be rinsed then dried for *several hours* before it can be used by a meat eater. As my Christian friends say, "Leave it to a Jewish lawyer to make life difficult!"

But I have good news for you: if the cup's made of *glass*, you may put milk into it, rinse it, and use it for orange juice in a meat meal without delay — because glass is non-porous. That rule, invented by a kind rabbi, is called the **glass amendment**.

When I was a kid, a friend decided to become an Eastern European style Orthodox Jew, even though his parents were not. (His parents were Reform.) When I visited his house, his mom made him a chicken sandwich then gave him a cup of orange juice. He refused to drink the orange juice, because his mom couldn't guarantee that the cup had been milk-free for the previous 6 hours. (Lesson: if you're a mom whose kid turns into an Orthodox Jew, he's going to give you Hell!)

To avoid the problem of watching each cup (to make sure it didn't contain milk within the previous 6 hours) and watching each plate (to make sure it didn't contain meat with the previous 6 hours), Orthodox Jews buy 3 sets of tableware: one set is for meals based on meat; the second set is for meals based on milk; the third set is for Passover, which requires its own tableware! Each set of tableware must be washed separately. That's why, in ancient times, each Jewish home had three sinks. And that's why, in modern times, the typical Orthodox Jewish American Princess makes her husband buy 3 dishwashers.

No pork Besides the prohibition against eating meat with milk, the Bible contains other laws about meat. For example, it prohibits eating meat from any animal that has a "cloven hoof." Since the most popular animal that has a "cloven hoof" is the pig, Jews can't eat pork.

Although beef is okay, the cow must be killed in a special way — by slitting the cow's neck while saying a blessing. The cow probably doesn't appreciate the blessing, but God does.

No shellfish The Book of Deuteronomy (in chapter 14, verses 9 and 10) lets you eat a fish just if it has fins and scales. So you can't eat shellfish: Jews can't eat shrimp, lobsters, or clams.

What about swordfish and sturgeon, which have fins and scales for just part of their lives? Orthodox Jews refuse to eat them, but Conservative and Reform Jews indulge.

4 categories All those rules about food are called the **dietary laws** or **kosher laws**. (**Kosher** is the Hebrew word for "clean.")

Jews view all food as falling into 4 categories:

acceptable meat
unacceptable meat (and shellfish)
milk products
neutral foods

Acceptable meat is called **kosher** meat. Unacceptable meat and shellfish are called **trayfe**, which is the Hebrew word for "dirty." Milk products (such as milk, cream, butter, and cheese) are all called **dairy** and can't be had with meat. Neutral foods (such as grains and fruits) can be eaten with either meat or milk and are called **pareve**.

Symbols When I was a kid, the symbol for "**kosher**" was a tiny K in a circle, and the symbol for "**pareve**" was a tiny P in a circle. For example, if you went into a supermarket and bought a package of Jewish meat, you'd see a circled K on the package; and if you bought a package of ordinary cereal (such as Kellogg's), you'd see a circled P on the package, which meant that you could eat the cereal even if you were Jewish.

Now the circled K has been switched to an uncircled K, and pareve foods have a K instead of a P (because the typical stupid Jew doesn't know what "pareve" means). In short, the K today simply means "this product contains nothing that would discourage a Jew."

The K costs money. For each box of cereal that Kellogg sells, Kellogg must pay a rabbi, who inspects the cereal to make sure it's manufactured in a clean and unsurprising way. Paying the rabbi is like paying the Mafia: "If you don't pay me, I'll make sure the sales of your cereal to Jews will decline."

Instead of a K, you'll sometimes see a circled U, which means the food is approved by the Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations.

Christmas competition When American Jews saw their Christian neighbors enjoy Christmas and throw wild Christmas parties, they got jealous and began placing an artificial emphasis on Chanukah, since Chanukah (like Christmas) involves giving presents and comes at the same time of the year. But according to old Jewish tradition, Chanukah is supposed to be a *minor* holiday, because it just commemorates a minor favor God gave a group of Jewish warriors: He let the oil in their synagogue burn for 8 days. A little tale about high-grade oil can't compete with Christmas and Easter, the two Christian holidays that marked the beginning of all Christianity!

During Christmas, Jews feel lonely at being left out of Christmas parties and secretly wish they were Christian. Reform Jews often buy Christmas trees but tell their Orthodox friends that the trees are just "Chanukah bushes." While Christians preach love at Christmas and say "keep the Christ in Christmas," Jews just say "keep the Ch in Chanukah." While Christians give gigantic presents on Christmas day, Jews must be stingy and give tiny presents instead, because Chanukah lasts 8 days and you're supposed to give each person 8 presents: one each day! For example, if there are 3 other members of your family, you must buy a total of 24 presents for them!

Celebrate twice In ancient Israel, the Jews weren't sure which days the holidays fell on, because the calendar depended

on the moon's phases. On a cloudy night it was hard to tell whether the moon was full. So to be sure they celebrated Rosh Hashanah (the Jewish New Year) on the right day, they celebrated it twice.

The Jews who lived outside Israel were even less certain about the holidays, since they had to wait for a messenger to travel from Israel and tell them what the Israeli judges had decided about whether the moon was indeed full yet. So outside Israel, to be safe, Jews celebrated *most* holidays for an extra day.

For example, if Passover was theoretically supposed to fall on a Thursday, the Jews outside Israel celebrated it on both Thursday and Friday, just to be sure they didn't miss the right day. They performed the entire Passover ceremony on Thursday, and then repeated the entire ceremony again, word for word, on Friday, while trying not to snore.

The main exceptions were Yom Kippur (no Jew would stand for fasting two days in a row!), the Sabbath (no Jew could afford to relax more than 1 day per week), and Chanukah (8 days is enough already).

Substitute foods Since Jews can't eat pork, Jewish hot dogs are all-beef. Since Jews can't eat bacon (which is made from pork), Jews eat "imitation bacon" made from soy. Since Jews can't have meat with milk, Jews avoid milk products: they use margarine instead of butter and use "non-dairy creamer" instead of real cream in their coffee.

Obey all that? Orthodox Jews obey all those rules all the time. Reform Jews usually ignore all those rules.

Conservative Jews adopt a creative compromise: they obey all those rules at home (they "keep a kosher home") but ignore all those rules when they visit restaurants. So at restaurants, they "pig out" and eat everything they're not allowed to eat at home.

Chinese restaurants Conservative Jews love to eat at Chinese restaurants, because Chinese restaurants serve everything that Conservative Jews can't eat at home, such as pork, shrimp, and lobster. Here's another reason why Jews love Chinese restaurants: those restaurants, like Jewish culture itself, are ethnic adventures.

The fastest way to find a Jewish community is to look for a Chinese restaurant. In the typical Chinese restaurant, most of the customers are Jews!

To compliment a Jew, say "You're like sweet-and-sour pork, but without the sour and without the pork: you're just sweet!"

Jewish intellectuals

Judaism's an intellectual religion.

To become a good Jew, you must study many rituals. For example, to prepare for Bar Mitzvah, the Jewish boy must undergo many months of training.

Judaism is based on the Old Testament, in which Abraham, Moses, and the rest of the gang continuously debate with God.

Reading the Old Testament is like reading the record of a legal trial: in the end, God wins, and the Jews agree to obey His 613 commandments, but the *interpretation* of His commandments fills another set of books, called the **Talmud**, written by Jewish religious lawyers. In the Talmud and later writings, Jews analyze what God means: Judaism is an analytical religion. Studying Judaism is good preparation for being a lawyer. Several American law schools offer courses in Jewish law.

Maimonides One of the wisest Jewish scholars was **Maimonides**, a Jewish doctor who was born in 1135 A.D. and lived in Spain during the Middle Ages. He was interested in medicine but also Jewish law: his Jewish mom was proud that he was a doctor and a lawyer! He put the finishing touches on the Talmud (the book of Jewish law). He also developed the

ladder of charity, which went far beyond anything ever proposed by his predecessors (such as Jesus).

Maimonides' ladder of charity had 8 steps. At the lowest step, the rich man gave money to the poor man in an obvious way: the rich man knew who the poor man was, and the poor man knew who the rich man was and felt embarrassed. At higher rungs, the charity was given anonymously, so that the poor man didn't know who the rich man was, the rich man didn't know who the poor man was, and the rich man couldn't "gloat" over the poor man. But the very highest step on Maimonides' ladder involves no money: instead, the rich man spends time with the poor man and trains him in a new skill, so the poor man can get a job and won't need charity anymore!

Maimonides wasn't the only person to think of that. For example, the Japanese have an old saying that summarizes Maimonides' ladder; the Japanese say: "If you give a man a fish, he'll eat for a day; but if you give a man a rod instead, he'll eat for a year." Actually, the Japanese say it using Japanese grammar, like this: "Give man fish, eats for day; give man rod, eats for year."

Notice that Jews, like Maimonides, worry about climbing social ladders, whereas the Japanese say "hell with society" and prefer to simply eat fish.

No blind faith Although Christianity encourages "blind faith," Judaism does not. Judaism encourages *thought* more than faith. Jews are told to *think* about how to interpret God's law.

No Pope Catholics are told the Pope is infallible — always right — and to obey the Pope's command without questioning. Jews have no Pope. The word *rabbi* means just "teacher": a *rabbi* is just a scholar who's studied religion thoroughly but who, like any other human, might be wrong. It's okay for a Jew to argue with his *rabbi*.

Unlike a Catholic priest, a *rabbi* has no mystical powers. You don't need a *rabbi* to perform a Jewish service: you need just 10 ordinary men, and one of the men must agree to act as the leader.

You need a *rabbi*'s signature just on legal documents, such as marriage contracts and divorce papers. So a *rabbi* is just a bright guy who's also empowered to act as a notary public.

Study hard Jewish parents encourage their kids to study hard: finish college then get advanced degrees.

Top 5 The Western world's top 5 intellectuals were all born Jewish. Each explained everything his own way:

Moses	said law is everything.
Jesus	said love is everything.
Marx	said capital is everything.
Freud	said sex is everything.
Einstein	said everything is relative .

What Jews think of Jesus

Jesus was Jewish. His Last Supper was a Passover ceremony.

Jesus was a teacher ("rabbi") who was more humane than most other rabbis. He criticized the other rabbis for being greedy, bureaucratic, and pigheaded — and was right.

According to Jewish tradition, a Messiah would come. Many nuts claimed to be the Messiah. Jesus, too, claimed to be the Messiah. Other Jewish rabbis believed that Jesus, too, was a nut.

Jesus's most important contribution to our culture was to emphasize the importance of love and forgiveness. He turned away from the harsher ethics espoused by other rabbis.

Modern Jews think Jesus was a great teacher but still just a human whose advice, though quite wise, could still be further improved and refined.

Jewish money

Jews have been stereotyped as being "money-grubbers." The connection between Jews and money has a long history that was actually the fault of the Christians!

A terrible disease began spreading over Europe in 1349. It was called the

plague, the Black Death. People didn't know it was caused by germs, so they blamed it on the Jews. In several cities — such as Frankfurt, Germany — mobs burned the houses of all the Jews, forced the Jews to live in a segregated area (called a **ghetto**), and prohibited Jews from participating in normal life. Since the ghetto was surrounded by walls and was undersized, life in the ghetto was dangerously crowded.

Outside the ghetto, Christians developed a **feudal system** (which required farmers to swear a Christian oath of loyalty to their noble or king); and all employees in a shop or a craft were forced to join a **guild** (union), which admitted only Christians. So Jews couldn't become farmers or shopkeepers or craftsmen.

The Catholic Church forbade Catholics from lending money at interest. But Catholic businessmen couldn't run their businesses without getting loans, so they permitted Jews to come out of the ghetto for one occupation only: to give Catholics loans. Charging interest on loans was against Jewish tradition as well as Catholic tradition, but the Jews had no choice: the only kind of job Jews were allowed was lending money. That's how Jews became bankers and pawnbrokers. That's how Jews became associated with money. The Catholic Church forced them into it!

Catholics then adopted a strange attitude: they criticized the Jews for charging high interest rates, but nevertheless went to the Jews frequently because they prohibited their fellow Catholics from lending money!

Since lending money was the only way Jews could survive outside of the ghetto, Jews had to become wise about money, to survive. Instead of spending money recklessly, Jews had to learn how to save it and invest it. To Jews, having money became a form of security.

Jews still view money differently than Christians.

Christians view money as something to spend immediately and enjoy; Jews view money as something to put in the bank to protect against impending disaster. When Christians think of money, they think of the joy of spending it immediately; when Jews think of money, they think of the disasters money protects against. When a Christian looks at his piggy bank and sees it's half full, the Christian is happy about the thought of spending the half-full piggy bank immediately; when a Jew looks at a half-full piggy bank, the Jew sees it's half empty, and worries that a disaster might strike for which a half-full piggy bank won't be enough.

Jewish merchants tend to be long-nosed but also hard-nosed. Shakespeare exaggerated when he said the Jewish merchant Shylock demanded a pound of flesh, but even now Jewish merchants often tell their complaining customers, "You don't like it? So sue me!" That's why Jews tell this tale:

Did you hear about the new Japanese restaurant for Jews? It's called "Sosumi."

Jews are worrywarts

Jews always worry. They worry whether the meat they're eating is kosher. They worry that they don't have enough money in the bank. They worry that the Christians and Arabs will persecute Jews again or at least give Jews a hard time.

Those worries extend to the rest of life also.

Jewish mothers worry that their sons won't become famous doctors; they also worry that their daughters will marry dumb, brutal Christians. During the 1960's, Jewish students worried about Viet Nam; the whole antiwar movement was begun by 2 groups of left-wing agitators (the Students for a Democrat Society and the Weathermen), who were all Jewish! If it weren't for those Jewish students, we'd probably still be in Viet Nam!

Jewish men, always worrying, are never happy-go-lucky. That's why Jews don't drink much beer: Jews can't adopt the ho-ho-ho attitude that beer-drinking requires. Instead, Jews prefer wine, which is quieter and more morose.

All Jewish culture is summarized in the personality of one man: Woody Allen.

In his films, Woody spends most of his time worrying. In his earliest films, he worried about household appliances taking over his life. In later films, he worried about whether Diane Keaton loved him. In his most recent films, he worries about problems that are more profound.

When Jewish men (like Woody Allen) try to date, they continually worry that their girlfriends will reject them. Jewish men's fear of women continues even after the men are married.

Yes, Jewish men are always pessimistic about sexual relationships — unlike Italian men, who are always optimistic. The contrast between Jewish men and Italian men is the subject

of this famous joke:

What's *Jewish* foreplay? Three hours of begging and pleading.
What is *Italian* foreplay? "Stella, I'm home!"

Jews like Soft & Dry deodorant because of Soft & Dry's ad:

Nervous is why
there's new Soft & Dry.

Since Jews are always nervous, they're always deodorizing.

Jews worry about illness. Another tale from the Internet:

An Italian said, "I'm tired. I'm thirsty. I must have vino."
A Greek said, "I'm tired. I'm thirsty. I must have ouzo."
A Mexican said, "I'm tired. I'm thirsty. I must have tequila."
A Jew said, "I'm tired. I'm thirsty. I must have diabetes."

Yiddish humor

German Jews invented a dialect of German called **Jewish German** or **Yiddish German**. It used German grammar & vocabulary but borrowed some words from Hebrew. The Yiddish German language was written using Hebrew characters instead of the German alphabet. As Yiddish grew popular, it spread to nearby countries (such as Hungary and Russia) and borrowed words from Slavic and Russian languages. It developed its own brand of humor, which still gives smiles to Jews all over the world.

One of the most popular techniques of Yiddish humor is to answer a question by giving a counter-question. For example, suppose a Yiddish Jew is trying to quit smoking, but hasn't succeeded yet. If somebody asks him "Are you still smoking?" he'd reply, "Do fish swim?" or "Is the Pope Catholic?" If somebody else asks him "Have you *stopped* smoking?" he'd reply, "Can a fish climb a tree?" or "Is the Pope Jewish?"

Schmuck Though Yiddish is based on German and Hebrew, cynics call it a *perversion* of German and Hebrew. For example, consider the German word **schmuck**, which means "ornament."

The Jews borrowed that word and used it as a euphemism for "penis." For example, a Yiddish-speaking girl might walk up to a boy, notice his penis is making his pants bulge, and say, "That's a nice schmuck you got there." It's quite clear which "ornament" she's referring to! Among American Jews, a favorite Yiddish expression is, "You stupid schmuck!" which means "You stupid cock!" or "You stupid fucker!" Since American Jews use the phrase "stupid schmuck" so often, people think "schmuck" means "fool"; but historically, it means "penis" or "ornament." That's how schmuck, which is the German word for "ornament," became the Yiddish word for "penis" and then the English word for "fool."

The history of schmuck became an issue when NBC was filming Saturday Night Live. In one of the scripts, a portrait of Lincoln was supposed to say to Nixon, "You're a schmuck!" Al Franken, who wrote that script, thought "schmuck" just meant "fool." But one of NBC's censors knew that "schmuck" could also mean "penis," so he censored the script. Instead, Lincoln had to say to Nixon, "You're a dip." Lorne Michaels, the producer, passed the bad news to the writers by sending them this memo: "You can't say 'schmuck,' you schmucks!"

Schlemiel The most popular pair of Yiddish words is "**schlemiel & schlimazel**." Both words refer to unlucky guys. A schlemiel is a bungler who causes many disasters (accidentally); a schlimazel is a guy who's continually the victim of disasters (caused by schlemiels).

For example, suppose 2 waiters accidentally spill hot soup onto your lap — 5 times each. The waiters are schlemiels; you're a schlimazel.

Goy The Yiddish language divides the world into 2 kinds of people: those who are Jewish, and those who are not. A non-Jew is called a **goy**.

A goy boy is called a **shegetz**, which means "blemished person."
A goy gal is called a **shiksa**, which means "cute blemished person."

A typical Yiddish war-cry among Jewish mothers is:

Oy, what am I going to do? My son, he wants to marry a shiksa!

In Yiddish life, everything is classified as being either Jewish

or goy. If an activity is mindless — totally devoid of cleverness or originality — it's called **goy**, because it requires no clever strategy.

Baseball is goy; football is *not* goy, since it requires clever strategy. Americana (such as Coca-Cola and McDonald's) are goy; competitors running clever ads (Pepsi, Burger King, and Wendy's) are less goy.

Aha Jews love to say "Aha!" (To say it properly, say the "A" softly in a bass pitch, then say "ha" loudly in a treble pitch.)

This story shows the meaning of Aha!

In New York City, a Jew named Morty goes to his favorite Jewish restaurant (as he does every day), goes to his favorite table (as he does every day), sits in his favorite chair (as he does every day), and asks for a bowl of soup (as he does every day). The waiter brings him the soup. But as the waiter leaves the table, Morty yells, "Waiter!"

"Yes?"

"Taste this soup."

"What do you mean, 'Taste this soup'?"

"Taste this soup."

"But Morty..."

"Taste this soup!"

"But Morty, you've come in here every day, for 10 years, you sit at the same table, in the same chair, and order the same bowl of soup. Have I ever served you a *bad* bowl of soup?"

"Taste this soup!"

"Okay, okay.... Where's the spoon?"

"Aha!"

Hebonics After some schools started considering "urban black street talk" to be a foreign language called "Ebonics," an Internet report joked that the New York City Board of Education declared "Hebonics" (Jewish English) to be a foreign language also.

In Hebonics, each question is answered with another question that implies a complaint:

Question: "How are you?"

Hebonics response: "How *should* I feel, with *my* feet?"

Instead of beginning the sentence with a subject, the subject is moved to the sentence's end, with the subject's pronoun put at the beginning.

Normal English: "That girl dances beautifully."

Hebonic phrasing: "She dances beautifully, that girl."

For sarcasm, "shm" is put in front: "mountains" becomes "shmountains"; "turtle" becomes "shmurtle." The two words are then used together:

Remark: "I'm going up to the mountains."

Hebonic reply: "Mountains, shmountains. You want a nosebleed?"

Remark: "He's as slow as a turtle."

Hebonic reply: "Turtle, shmurtle. Like a *fly* in *Vaseline* he walks."

Here's how to reply Hebonically:

Question: "What time is it?"

Hebonic reply: "What am I, a *clock*?"

Remark: "I hope things turn out okay."

Hebonic reply: "You should *be* so lucky!"

Remark: "Hurry up! Dinner's ready."

Hebonic reply: "What's with the 'hurry' business? Is there a *fire*?"

Remark: "I like this tie you gave me. I wear it all the time!"

Hebonic reply: "So what's the matter, you don't like the *other* ties I gave you?"

Remark: "I got engaged to Sarah. Doesn't she have a great figure?"

Hebonic reply: "She could stand to *gain* a few pounds."

Question: "Would you like to go riding with us?"

Hebonic reply: "Riding, shmiding! Do I look like a *cowboy*?"

Remark: "It's my birthday."

Hebonic reply: "Too bad. A year *smarter* you should become."

Remark: "It's a beautiful day!"

Hebonic reply: "The sun's out? Big deal. So what *else* is new?"

Remark: "Hi, mom! Sorry it's been a while since I phoned."

Hebonic reply: "You didn't wonder if I'm *dead* yet?"

Jewish women

Jewish women look like Italian women.

In Boston's red-light district, Italian hookers complain that guys mistake them for being Jewish. That's partly because Italian hookers, like some Jewish women, love money.

JAPs Most Jewish women are wonderful, but a few are obnoxious. A young Jewish woman who loves money obnoxiously is called a **Jewish-American Princess** or **JAP**.

At Jewish parties, scared Jewish guys tell each other, "Let's get out of here! The JAPs are coming!" They aren't talking about the Japanese.

Such Jewish women — JAPs — love to wear a long dress having a long slit up the side. I learned that lesson the hard way, by embarrassment:

One day, I told my mom I saw an amazing woman who was wearing a very long dress with a long slit up the side. My mom immediately said, "If she's wearing that dress, she must be Jewish."

I said, "I don't know. I didn't ask her."

My mom asked, "What's her last name?"

I said, "Abrams."

My mom said, "Hah! I told you so!"

Those Jewish women decorate their homes with art that's abstract and gaudy. Though my own family is Jewish, we can't help calling that art style "**kike modern**."

Such Jewish women wear lots of jewelry. That tradition began centuries ago, when Jews were chased from country to country, and the only valuables small enough to carry easily were jewels.

Jewish girls have a reputation for being frigid. The joke about how the typical Jewish man begs for 3 hours to get the girl to say yes is typical of the way Jewish girls like to be treated.

Jewish mothers No matter how good a Jewish boy is, his mother will nag him to do even better, even after he's become an adult. According to the Internet, here's what celebrities' mothers would say, if they were all Jewish:

Moses's Jewish mother: "That's a nice story. A wonderful story! A writer you should be. Now tell me where you've *really* been the last 40 years."

Mona Lisa's Jewish mother: "After all that money your father and I spent on your braces, that's the biggest smile you can give us?"

Michelangelo's Jewish mother: "Can't you paint on walls, like other kids? You've maybe no idea how hard it is to get that stuff off the ceiling?"

Columbus's Jewish mother: "So, Mister Big Sailor Boy, I don't care what you've discovered, how come you didn't write?"

Paul Revere's Jewish mother: "I don't care where you think you gotta go, young man. Midnight is past your curfew."

George Washington's Jewish mother: "Next time I catch you throwing good money across the Potomac, you can kiss your allowance good-bye!"

Napoleon's Jewish mother: "Okay, Little Emperor, so if you aren't hiding your report card inside your jacket, take your hand out of there and show me."

Abraham Lincoln's Jewish mother: "What's with that ridiculous hat again? Can't you just wear a baseball cap like the other kids?"

Thomas Edison's Jewish mother: "Of course I'm proud you invented the electric light bulb. Now turn it off and get to bed!"

Albert Einstein's Jewish mother: "Listen please, Albie. For your own good I'm telling you. It's your senior picture. Couldn't you do something about your hair? Figure it out. A comb, maybe?"

Jewish mothers are hard to buy presents for, as seen in this tale about trying to please a Jewish mother who loved reading the Torah (first five books of the Bible):

4 Jewish brothers (a doctor, a lawyer, and two businessmen) were prosperous. They bragged about the presents they gave their mom.

The first said, "I had a big house built for her."

The second said, "I had a hundred-thousand-dollar theater built in the house."

The third said, "I had my Mercedes dealer deliver her a car with a chauffeur."

The fourth said, "Listen to this. You know how she loved reading the Torah and can't anymore because she can't see well? I met a rabbi who told me about a parrot that can recite the entire Torah. It took 20 rabbis 12 years to teach him. I had to pledge to contribute \$100,000 a year for 20 years to the temple, but it was worth it. Mom just has to name the chapter and verse, and

the parrot will recite it."

After the holidays, their mom sent them these thank-you notes....

"Milton, the house you built is so huge! I live in just one room but have to clean the whole house! Thanks anyway."

"Menachim, you gave me an expensive theater that could hold 50 people! But all my friends are dead, I've lost my hearing, and I'm nearly blind. I'll never use it. Thanks for the gesture just the same."

"Marvin, I'm too old to travel, so I stay home and have my groceries delivered. I never use the Mercedes, and the driver you hired is a Nazi, but thanks for trying."

"Dearest Melvin, you're the only son having the good sense to give a little thought to your gift. The chicken was delicious!"

Relating to kids

Here's another story, passed to me by my crazy Jewish relative....

Dr. Morris Fishbein calls his son Irving in Los Angeles and says, "I hate to ruin your day, but your mom and I are divorcing. 45 years of misery is enough."

"Pop! What are you talking about?" Irving screams.

"We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," Morris says. "I'm sick of talking about this, so call your sister Shirley in Chicago and tell her."

Irving frantically calls his sister, who explodes on the phone, "Like *hell* they're getting divorced! I'll take care of this."

She calls her father immediately and yells at him, "You're *not* getting divorced! Don't do a single thing until I get there. I'm calling Irving back and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, do nothing. *Do you hear me?*"

Her father hangs up and turns to his wife. "Okay," he says, "They're coming for Passover — and paying their own airfares."

How Jews treat Blacks

Blacks and Jews can be friends — or enemies.

When I was a kid, my teacher showed my class a documentary movie called *The Poor Pay More*.

Shot in Manhattan's Black ghetto (Harlem), it showed how businessmen ripped off poor Blacks. It showed a butcher (whose scale exaggerated the weight), a supermarket (that raised its prices each week on the day when welfare checks were issued), and other immoral business practices perpetrated by furniture stores, refrigerator salesmen, etc. In every case, the victims of the scams were blacks, and the perpetrators were Jewish. That's because, in Harlem, most of the shops were run by Jews. Though some Jews in Harlem were honest, many were rotten. In Harlem, Blacks and Jews viewed each other as opponents: the Jews cheated the Blacks, then the Blacks mugged the Jews.

But the first national political organization for Blacks — the NAACP — received most of its donations from Jews. That's because Jews — especially Jewish liberals living in rich suburbs — believe strongly in fairness, equality, and liberty for all.

The NAACP lobbied to help Blacks. But its very name (the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples) smacked of compromise and Uncle Toms. In the 1960's, when groups such as the Black Panthers and Black Muslims began preaching Black equality through violence, the Jews got scared and stopped donating money to Black causes. Another reason why Jews stopped donating money to Black causes is that Black politicians (such as Jesse Jackson) befriended Arabs, and Jews fear a coalition of Arabs & Blacks will try to snatch Israel away from Jews.

The history of Jews resembles the history of Blacks. Both groups are minorities. Both groups have been persecuted for many centuries.

Blacks in Africa were captured by slave traders, brought to America, turned into slaves, and separated from their families. Similarly, the Bible says Egyptians turned Jews into slaves and forced Jews to build the pyramids, until a rabble-raising Jew named Moses convinced the Jews to run away to Israel. Later, Jews were ruled by the Romans and other conquerors and forced to leave their homeland.

Jews in the town of Brookline, Massachusetts, get together with Blacks and celebrate Passover together, since the Passover ceremony, which commemorate the escape (by Moses and his Jews) from slavery has meaning for both Jews and Blacks.

In New York City's Harlem, you can find a group of Black Jews.

They claim to be descended from the Biblical Jacob, who had sex with one of his Black maids. Those Black Jews read Hebrew and practice Orthodox Judaism; but in the middle of their otherwise traditional Orthodox Jewish service, they suddenly break into a wild Afro dance while singing "Hallelujah!"

Jews everywhere

Just 2% of Americans are Jews, but 35% of Ivy League students are Jews.

Universities (such as Vanderbilt) try to get more Jews to apply for admission, because Jews make universities smarter, funnier, and closer to the Ivy League. To get more Jews to apply, those universities advertise in Jewish hangouts.

"Irving Berlin" (whose real name was Israel Baline) was the American Jew who composed subversive songs secularizing Christian holidays:

Christmas is supposed to celebrate Christ's birth, but his song "I'm Dreaming of White Christmas" changed Christmas into a festival about snow.

Easter is supposed to celebrate Christ's resurrection, but his song "Easter Parade" changed Easter into a festival about spring fashions.

Adam Sandler wrote "**The Chanukah Song**," which starts by talking about a Jewish hat (**yarmulke**) and a Chanukah game (**dreidel**) as it drifts into a list of celebrities who are secretly Jewish. His thoughts continue in "**The Chanukah Song Part 2**" and "**The Chanukah Song Part 3**." Here are his main thoughts (as edited by Neil Diamond and me):

Put on your yarmulke: celebrate Chanukah!
Go tell Veronica, "Time now for Chanukah!"
Play your harmonica. Have a *fun* Chanukah!

Our Chanukah is called the festival of lights.
Not just one day of gifts, we get *eight* crazy nights!

Think you're the only kid without a Christmas tree?
Well, here's a list of Jews; they're just like you and me....

No need to deck the halls with jingle bells that rock,
'Cause you can spin your dreidel with Captain Kirk and Spock —
Both Jewish!

Winona Ryder drinks fine Manischewitz wine,
And then she dreidels Ralph Lauren and Calvin Klein!

So guess who eats together at Carnegie's fine deli:
The Bowzer guy from Sha Na Na and Arthur Fonzarelli!

We even got Ann Landers and sister called "Dear Abby."
Now Harr'son Ford is half a Jew, but that is not too shabby!

Paul Newman is half Jewish, and Goldie Hawn is too.
Just put those two together: a nice fine-looking Jew!

Len Kravitz is half Jewish and Courtney Love is too.
Just put those two together: a funky bad-ass Jew!

Some people really think that Ebenezer Scrooge is.
He's not, but guess who is: amazing — all Three Stooges!

Houdini and Dave Blaine escaped with such precision
But still could not avoid their painful circumcision.

Alas for O.J. Simpson, he still is not a Jew.
But we have got the guy who voices Scooby Doo!

So many Jews have come, to be on my long list.
Mel Gibson isn't there, but Jesus Christ sure is!

Adam Sandler's first version appeared on *Saturday Night Live*. Hear him (with Jewish photos added later by Jennifer Wagner) at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=xDV_reO930A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xDV_reO930A)

Hear Neil Diamond sing his own version — with cartoons — at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=BOegH4uYe-c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BOegH4uYe-c)

For a different view of Jewish desires at Christmastime, watch "All I want for Christmas is... Jews!" at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=z8LmMtScH3g](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z8LmMtScH3g)

It's a parody of Mariah Carey's "All I want for Christmas is... you!"

Old Testament

The **Old Testament** is the Jewish part of the Bible. It was written by Jews before Jesus came. It describes the history and thoughts of the Jews up through 432 B.C.

The Jews, Christians, and Muslims all base their religions on the Old Testament, though Christians and Muslims take its details less seriously than Jews do.

Traditional Jews consider the Old Testament to be a collection of 24 books.

The first book is called "Genesis" (creation). The next book is called "Exodus" (leaving Egypt).

Christians thought some books were too long and divided them into smaller books, so the Old Testament became 39 books:

"Samuel" got divided into 2 parts ("First Samuel" and "Second Samuel").
"Kings" got divided into 2 parts ("First Kings" and "Second Kings").
"Chronicles" got divided in 2 ("First Chronicles" and "Second Chronicles")
"Ezra" got divided in 2 ("Ezra" and "Nehemiah")
"The Twelve" got divided into 12 separate books (one for each prophet)

If you've read parts of the Old Testament just when you were a kid, look at it again: it looks different when viewed through the eyes of an adult!

The Old Testament was written mainly in Hebrew (though a few passages were in Aramaic). Here's how it begins. You'll be reading my own translation, which is based on translations by others but more reasonable (better English but not oversimplified). Each paragraph begins with the chapter number and verse number, so you can compare my translation with others....

Creating heaven & earth

^{1:1}The earth began as a formless, dark void, while God's spirit hovered over its waters. God said, "Let's have light," and there was light. The light pleased him, so he separated it from the darkness and called it "**daytime**." He called the darkness "**night**." There was evening then morning: the first day!

^{1:6}He said, "Let a dome appear in the waters and separate them," so a dome appeared and separated the waters under it from the waters above. He called the dome "**sky**". There was evening then morning: the second day!

^{1:9}He said, "Let's gather together the waters under the sky, so dry land will appear." It appeared! He called the dry land "**earth**" and the gathered waters "**seas**." He was pleased. He said, "Let the earth sprout plants (such as fruit trees) having seeds." They sprouted, and he was pleased. There was evening then morning: the third day!

^{1:14}He said, "Let the sky have lights to distinguish day from night and shine on earth." He made a big light (the **sun**) to rule the day, a smaller light (the **moon**) to rule the night, and tiny lights (the **stars**). He was pleased. There was evening then morning: the fourth day!

^{1:20}He said, "Let the waters have swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly across the sky." So he created huge sea creatures, every other living creature that moves in the seas, and every bird. He was pleased. He told them all, "Go multiply: fill the seas and sky." There was evening then morning: the fifth day!

^{1:24}He said, "Let the earth have all kinds of creatures: cattle, creeping things, and wild animals." It happened, and he was pleased. He created, in his image, a man and woman, blessed them, and told them:

Multiply, go all over the earth, and subdue it. Rule over the fish, birds, and every living thing that moves on the earth. I've given you (and all other animals) plants and fruits to eat, and seeds to regenerate.

It happened, and he was pleased. There was evening then morning: the sixth day!

^{2:1}So the heavens and earth and their contents were all finished.

^{2:2}On the seventh day, he rested. He blessed that day and honored it!

^{2:4}That's how the heavens and earth were created!

First man

^{2:5}When God created the plants, he also created a mist to water them, but there wasn't yet any farmer to help the plants grow (by tilling the soil), so God made a man (**Adam**). God formed Adam from the ground's dust and breathed into Adam's nostrils the breath of life, so Adam became a living being.

^{2:8}God planted a **garden in Eden** (which is in the east) and put Adam there.

^{2:9}In that **garden of Eden**, God put every tree that looks pleasant and is good for food. He also put there the **Tree of Life** and the **Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil**. A river flows through that garden then divides into 4 branches:

The first branch (**Pishon**) flows around the land of Havilah, where there's good gold (and bdellium and onyx stones).

The second branch (**Gihon**) flows around the land of Cush.

The third branch (**Tigris**) flows east of Assyria.

The fourth branch is **Euphrates**.

^{2:15}God put Adam in the garden to till the soil. God told Adam:

You may eat from every tree in the garden except the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. If you eat from *that* tree, you'll die the same day!

First woman

^{2:18}God thought, "Adam shouldn't be alone. I'll make a helper to be his partner." God made all the animals and birds, brought them all to Adam, and let Adam name them; but none was appropriate to be Adam's partner. God put Adam into a deep sleep, took out one of Adam's ribs, filled the hole with flesh, and turned that rib into a woman, whom God brought to Adam.

^{2:23}Adam said:

This came from my bones and flesh, so I'll call her "**woman**" (which means "from man").

So a man should leave his parents, cling to his wife, and become one flesh with her.

^{2:25}Adam and his wife were both naked and unashamed.

Snake

^{3:1}Of all the wild animals, the snake was the craftiest. He asked the woman, "Did God prohibit you from eating from any fruit?"

^{3:2}She replied:

God said not to eat fruit from the Tree of Knowledge. He said if I eat that fruit or even touch it, I'll die.

^{3:4}The snake retorted:

You won't die! God knows that when you eat it, your eyes will open and you'll be like him, knowing good and evil.

^{3:6}So she ate the fruit and gave some to Adam, who also ate. Then their eyes opened: they discovered they were naked. They sewed fig leaves together, to make loincloths for themselves.

^{3:8}They heard God walking through the garden during the evening breeze. They hid themselves in the bushes. God called out to Adam, "Where are you?"

^{3:10}Adam replied, "I heard you, and I was scared because I was naked, so I hid myself."

^{3:11}God retorted, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from that forbidden tree?"

^{3:12}Adam replied, "The woman you created for me gave me that tree's fruit, and I ate it."

^{3:13}God asked the woman, "What have you done?"

^{3:13}She replied, "The snake tricked me, and I ate."

^{3:14}God told the snake:

Because you've done this, you're cursed! You'll have to crawl on your belly and eat dust all your life. I'll make you and the woman hate each other. Your offspring and her offspring will hate each other. People will strike your head, and you'll strike their heels.

^{3:16}God told the woman:

I'll greatly increase your pangs in childbearing, but you'll still want your husband, who'll rule over you.

^{3:17}God told Adam:

Because you listened to your wife and ate the forbidden fruit, your ground is cursed. You must work hard to farm it, the rest of your life. It will give you thorns and thistles. You'll have to sweat to make bread, until you die and return to the ground, because out of it you were taken. You're dust, and to dust you'll return.

^{3:20}Adam named his wife "**Eve**" (which means "life"), because she was the mother of all living.

^{3:21}God made clothes from animal skins and put the clothes onto Adam & Eve. Then God said:

See, Adam's become like one of us, knowing good & evil. He might grab fruit from the Tree of Life, eat it, and live forever.

So God banished Adam from the garden of Eden, to till the ground Adam was made from. At the garden of Eden's east side, God placed angels and a flaming, rotating sword, to block the way to the Tree of Life....

10 commandments (from "Exodus")

^{20:1}God said, "I'm the Lord, your God, who brought you out of Egypt and slavery." He gave these **10 commandments**:

1. **Don't put other gods before me.**

2. **Don't make an idol.** Don't make an idol of anything in heaven or on earth or in the water. Don't bow down to an idol or worship it, since I'm your God and a jealous God, punishing children for the wrongdoings of their parents, to the third and fourth generation of those who reject me. But I show steadfast love, to the thousandth generation, of those who love me and keep my commandments.

3. **Don't misuse God's name,** since I won't acquit anyone who misuses my name.

4. **Keep the Sabbath day holy.** For 6 days you'll labor and do all your work. But on the 7th day, which is a Sabbath to God, you must not do any work, and neither must your children, servants, livestock, or visitors. In 6 days, I made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that's in them; but I rested on the 7th day, so I blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

5. **Honor your parents,** so your own days may be long in the land the Lord is giving you.

6. **Don't murder.**

7. **Don't commit adultery.**

8. **Don't steal.**

9. **Don't give false testimony** against your neighbor.

10. **Don't be jealous** of your neighbor's house, wife, servants, ox, donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor.

^{20:18}When all the people saw the thunder & lightning, heard the trumpet, and saw the mountain smoking, they were scared, trembled, stood at a distance, and told Moses, "You speak to us, and we'll listen; but don't let God speak to us, or we'll die." Moses replied, "Don't be scared. God's come just to test you and make you fear him, so you don't sin..."

New Testament

The **New Testament** was written by Christians. It tells the history and thoughts of Jesus and his early followers. It was

finished in 95 A.D. and includes 27 books.

The first book, called “Matthew,” was written by Matthew and explains Jesus’s life. The next 3 books, written by Mark, Luke, and John, give their own versions of Jesus’s life.

Even if you’re Jewish or Muslim, you’ll enjoy reading the New Testament, since it includes great ideas, which have become famous quotes! If you’ve read parts of the New Testament just when you were a kid, look at it again: it looks different when viewed through the eyes of an adult!

The New Testament was written mainly in Greek (though a few passages were in Hebrew and Aramaic). Here’s how it begins. You’ll be reading my own translation, which is based on translations by others....

Jesus’s ancestors

^{1:1}Here’s the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, who descended from King David, who descended from Abraham:

Abraham fathered Isaac, who fathered Jacob, who fathered Judah, who fathered Perez, who fathered Hezron, who fathered Aram, who fathered Aminadab, who fathered Nahshon, who fathered Salmon, who fathered Boaz, who fathered Obed, who fathered Jesse, who fathered King David.

David fathered Solomon, who fathered Rehoboam, who fathered Abijah, who fathered Asaph, who fathered Jehosphat, who fathered Joram, who fathered Uzziah, who fathered Jothan, who fathered Ahaz, who fathered Hezekiah, who fathered Manasseh, who fathered Amos, who fathered Josiah, who fathered Jechoniah while the people of Israel were deported to Babylon.

After the deportation, Jechoniah fathered Salathiel, who fathered Zerubbabel, who fathered Abiud, who fathered Eliakim, who fathered Azor, who fathered Zadok, who fathered Achim, who fathered Eliud, who fathered Eleazar, who fathered Matthan, who fathered Jacob, who fathered Joseph, who married Mary (the mother of Jesus the Messiah).

So there were 14 generations from Abraham to King David, 14 generations from King David to the deportation, and 14 generations from Babylon to the Messiah.

How Jesus was born

^{1:18}When Mary (Jesus’s mother) was engaged to Joseph but not yet living with him, she got pregnant from the Holy Spirit. Since Joseph was a righteous man who didn’t want to expose her to public disgrace, he planned to leave Mary, quietly; but just after he decided to do that, an angel told him in a dream:

Joseph, don’t be afraid to marry Mary, for the child in her is from the Holy Spirit. She’ll have a son, and you’re to name him “**Jesus**,” because he’ll save his people from their sins.

That fulfilled what God had said through his prophet Isaiah (in Isaiah 7:14):

Look, the virgin shall have a son, and they’ll name him Emmanuel (which means “God is with us”).

When Joseph awoke from that dream, he did what the angel commanded: he married Mary but had no sex with her until she had a son, whom he named “**Jesus**” (which means “God saves”).

Wise men

^{2:1}After Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, **wise men** from the East came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where’s the child who’s been born King of the Jews? We saw his star, in the sky, rising, and we’ve come to praise him.”

^{2:3}When King Herod heard of that, he was scared, and so was all Jerusalem. Herod called together all the chief priests and scribes and asked them where the Messiah would be born. They said Bethlehem, because the prophet Micah had written (in Micah 5:2):

You, Bethlehem, in the land of Judea, are by no means the least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who’ll shepherd my people Israel.

^{2:7}Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them exactly when the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said:

Search diligently for the child. When you’ve found him, tell me so I can go also to visit him and praise him.

^{2:9}So the wise men set out, following the star they’d seen rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star stop, they were overwhelmed with joy. They entered the house, they saw the child with his mother (Mary), so they knelt down to honor him. Then they opened their treasure chests: they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

^{2:12}A dream had warned them not to return to Herod, so they left for their own country by a different road.

^{2:13}After they left, an angel told Joseph in a dream, “Flee to Egypt, with the child and Mary, and stay there until I tell you, because Herod wants to find the child and destroy him.” So Joseph got up, took the child and Mary that night to Egypt and stayed there until Herod’s death. That was to fulfill what God said through the prophet Hosea (in Hosea 11:1):

Out of Egypt I’ve called my son.

Killing children

^{2:16}When Herod discovered that the wise men tricked him, he was furious. He killed all Bethlehem-area children who were under age 3. That fulfilled Jeremiah’s prophesy (in Jeremiah 31:15):

In the town of Ramah, a voice was heard wailing loudly. It was Rachel weeping for her children. She refused to be consoled, because they are gone.

Return from Egypt

^{2:19}When Herod died, an angel told Joseph in a dream, “Take Jesus & Mary back to Israel, because those who wanted to kill him are dead.” So Joseph took Jesus & Mary back to Israel. But when he heard that Herod’s son (Archelaus) had become Judea’s king, he got scared and went away to **Galilee** (a district in a different part of Israel), where he settled in a town called **Nazareth**, as instructed by another angel in a dream. That fulfilled what prophets had said about Jesus:

He’ll be called a Nazarene.

John the Baptist

^{3:1}John the Baptist appeared in Judea’s wilderness and proclaimed, “Repent, because heaven’s kingdom is coming near.” He’s the one about whom the prophet Isaiah had said (in Isaiah 40:3):

A voice cries out in the wilderness, “Prepare God’s way, clear a straight path for him.”

^{3:4}John’s clothes were made of camel’s hair. He wore a leather belt. He ate **locusts** (nasty grasshoppers) and honey.

^{3:5}People from Jerusalem (and all Judea and all along the Jordan River) were going out to him. He baptized them in the Jordan River, as they confessed their sins.

^{3:7}But when he saw many Pharisees and Sadducees come for baptism, he told them:

You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Do acts showing you’re repenting. Don’t try to excuse yourselves by saying you’re Abraham’s descendants, for God can make more of Abraham’s descendants even from stones. Already the ax lies at the trees’ roots; every tree that doesn’t bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. I baptize you with water for repentance, but one who’s more powerful than I is coming after me. I’m not worthy to carry his sandals. He’ll baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. His winnowing shovel is in his hand: he’ll clear his threshing floor and gather his wheat into the barn but burn the chaff with unquenchable fire.

^{3:13}Jesus came to John and asked John to baptize him. John objected, “I need to be baptized by *you*, not you by me!” But Jesus insisted, so John consented.

^{3:16}When Jesus was baptized and came up from the water, suddenly the heavens opened to Jesus and he saw God's Spirit descend like a dove and land on him. A voice from heaven said:

This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I'm well pleased.

Temptation

^{4:1}Then the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil.

^{4:2}Jesus fasted 40 days and 40 nights. Then he was hungry.

^{4:3}The devil tempted him by saying, "If you're God's Son, command these stones to become loaves of bread." But Jesus replied:

The Bible says (in Deuteronomy 8:3), "A person doesn't live just on bread but on every word from God's mouth."

^{4:5}Then the devil took him to the holy city, put him on the temple's **pinnacle** (prong atop the roof), and said:

If you're God's Son, throw yourself down, because the Bible says (in Psalms 91:11) "God will command his angels to care for you" and "On their hands they'll bear you up, so you won't even hurt your foot against a stone."

Jesus replied:

The Bible says (in Deuteronomy 6:16), "Don't test God."

^{4:8}The devil took him to a very tall mountain, showed him all the world's kingdoms and their splendor, and said:

I'll give you all these if you fall down and worship me.

Jesus replied:

Away with you, Satan! For the Bible says (in Deuteronomy 6:13), "Worship God and serve just him."

^{4:11}Then the devil left him. Suddenly, angels came and waited on Jesus.

Jesus begins preaching

^{4:12}Jesus heard John had been arrested, so Jesus fled back to the district of Galilee. He moved from the town of Nazareth to the town of **Capernaum** (which is by the Sea of Galilee, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali), to fulfill Isaiah's prophesy (in Isaiah 9:1):

In the land of Zebulun and Naphtali,
the people who'd sat in darkness saw a great light.
Yes, for the people who'd sat there in death's shadow, light dawned.

^{4:17}Like John the Baptist, Jesus started proclaiming, "Repent, because heaven's kingdom is coming near."

^{4:18}While Jesus was walking by the Sea of Galilee, he saw a pair of fishermen: **Simon** (nicknamed "Peter") and Simon's brother (**Andrew**). Those fishermen were casting their net into the sea, to catch fish. Jesus said, "Follow me! I'll teach you to catch people!" The fishermen immediately left their nets and followed Jesus.

^{4:21}Then Jesus saw two more fishermen (**James & John**) who were mending nets in a boat with their dad (Zebedee). Jesus called them. James & John left their boat & dad and followed Jesus.

^{4:23}Jesus traveled throughout Galilee. He taught in the people's synagogues and proclaimed the good news of God's coming kingdom. He cured every disease among the people. His fame spread throughout all Syria. People brought him all the sick (those afflicted with disease, pain, demons, epilepsy, and paralysis), and he cured them. He was followed by great crowds, who flocked to him from Galilee, the **Decapolis** (a group of 10 cities having Greek & Roman culture), Jerusalem, Judea, and beyond the Jordan River.

^{5:1}When he saw those crowds, he went up the mountain. After he sat down, his disciples came to him. He began teaching them, by giving the **Sermon on the Mount**.

^{5:2}He began the sermon by saying these **beatitudes** (expressions of being blessedly happy):

Blessed are the dispirited, for they'll have heaven's kingdom.

Blessed are the mourners, for they'll be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they'll inherit the earth.

Blessed are those hungry & thirsting for righteousness, for they'll be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they'll receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they'll see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they'll be called God's children.

Blessed are those persecuted for being righteous: they'll have heaven's kingdom.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, though you've been persecuted like the prophets before you.

^{5:13}Then he said the disciples should try to stay **effective**. He warned them to **avoid becoming tasteless salt**:

You're the earth's salt; but if salt has lost its taste, how can its saltiness be restored? The salt's no longer good for anything: it's thrown out and trampled under foot.

He told them to **light up the world**:

You're the world's light, a hilltop city that can't be hid. After lighting a lamp, nobody hides it under a bushel basket but instead puts it on the lamp stand, so it lights everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so they can see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.

^{5:17}He said to **build on existing law**, not destroy it:

Don't think I've come to abolish the laws of Moses & prophets; I've come not to abolish but to fulfill. As long as heaven and earth last, not one iota will pass from the law until all is accomplished. So whoever breaks a commandment and teaches others to do likewise will be called the "lowest" in heaven's kingdom; but whoever obeys & teaches the commandments will be called "great" in heaven's kingdom. Unless you're more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees, you'll never enter heaven's kingdom.

^{5:21}He said to **control anger**:

In ancient times, people were told (in Exodus 20:13 and Deuteronomy 5:17) "You shall not murder" and "Whoever murders shall be subject to judgment." But I say, you'll be subject to judgment even if you're just *angry* with a person or insult him or say "You fool." So when you're offering your gift at the altar, if you remember a person has something against you, leave your gift off the altar, go reconcile with that person, then return to the altar to offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser while you're on the way to court with him, to avoid having the accuser pass you to the judge, who'll pass you to the guard, who'll throw you in prison until you've paid the last penny.

^{5:27}He said to **control lust**:

People were told (in Exodus 20:14 and Deuteronomy 5:18) "Don't commit adultery." But I say, each man who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart. If your right eye makes you sin, tear it out and throw it away; it's better for you to lose one of your body parts than for your whole body to be thrown in hell. Similarly, if your right hand makes you sin, cut it off and throw it away.

^{5:31}He said to **avoid divorce**:

Men were told (in Deuteronomy 24:1), "If your divorce your wife, give her a divorce certificate." But I say, if a man divorces a wife who's been chaste, he makes her commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery.

^{5:33}He said to **avoid swearing**:

People were told (in Numbers 30:2), "Don't swear falsely; carry out the vows you made to God." But I say, don't swear *at all*! Don't swear by heaven (since it's God's throne); don't swear by the earth (since it's his footstool); don't swear by Jerusalem (for it's the great King's city); don't swear by your head (since you can't make one hair white or black). Say just "Yes, yes" or "No, no"; anything more than that comes from the evil one.

^{5:38}He said to **avoid revenge**:

People were told (in Exodus 21:24, Leviticus 24:20, and Deuteronomy 19:21), "An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth." But I say, don't resist an evildoer. If anyone strikes your right cheek, turn the other cheek also. If anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak also. If anyone forces you to go a mile, go the second mile also. Give to everyone who begs from you, and don't refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.

^{5:43}He said to **love the enemies**:

People were told (in Deuteronomy 19:18), “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I say, *love* your enemies and pray for people who persecute you, so you can be children of your Father in heaven. He lovingly makes his sun rise above both the evildoers & the good; he sends rain to both the righteous & the unrighteous. If you love just those who love you, you deserve no reward: you’re no better than a tax collector. If you greet just friends, you deserve no reward, since even pagans do that. So be perfect, like your heavenly Father.

^{6:1}He said to **act quietly**:

When you’re being pious, are you doing so publicly just to show off? Then you’ll get no reward from your Father in heaven. Whenever you donate to the poor, don’t sound a trumpet about it to get praise from others, as hypocrites do in the synagogues and streets. When you donate, don’t let your left hand know what your right hand is doing: donate secretly. Your Father, who’s watching secretly, will reward you.

Similarly, when you pray, don’t be like the hypocrites: they pray in synagogues and at street corners, just to be seen by others. Whenever you pray, go into your room: shut the door and pray to your Father secretly; he’ll reward you.

When you pray, don’t heap up empty phrases, like the pagans do. They think they’ll be heard because of their many words. Don’t imitate them! Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

^{6:9}He said to **give this prayer**:

Our Father in heaven, may your name be kept holy.
May your kingdom come. May your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread and forgive what we owe,
as we’ve forgiven what people owe us.
Don’t bring us to temptation, but rescue us from evil,
because the kingdom, power, and glory are yours forever.
Amen.

He explained why that prayer says to forgive:

If you forgive others for the wrongs they’ve done you, your heavenly Father will forgive *you* also. If you *don’t* forgive other people, your Father won’t forgive *you!*

^{6:16}He said to **fast secretly**:

When you fast, don’t look dismal, like the hypocrites who disfigure their faces to show others they’re fasting. When you fast, still shampoo your hair and wash your face, so you’ll normal and other people won’t know you’re fasting. Your Father will notice you secretly and reward you.

^{6:19}He said to **avoid materialism**:

Don’t save treasures here on earth, where moths and rust consume, and where thieves break in and steal. Instead, save treasures in heaven. Heavenly treasures are permanent. Your heart will be where your treasures are.

^{6:22}He said that to be wise, **observe carefully**:

The eye is the body’s lamp. If your eye is healthy, your whole body fills with light. If your eye is unhealthy, your whole body fills with great darkness.

^{6:24}He said to **serve God instead of wealth**:

Nobody can serve two masters. Such a slave would either hate the first master and love the second or be devoted to the second and despise the first. You can’t serve both God and wealth.

Don’t worry so much about your body and what you’ll eat, drink, and wear. Isn’t life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds: they don’t farm or store food, but God feeds them; and doesn’t he consider you more valuable than they? Will worrying add a single hour to your lifespan? Consider how wild lilies grow: they don’t spin cloth, but they’re clothed even more beautifully than King Solomon’s glory. If God clothes wild grasses, which are alive today but are thrown in the oven tomorrow, won’t he clothe you even better?

So don’t worry about what to eat, drink, or wear. Pagans strive for those things. God knows you need them, but strive first for God’s kingdom and righteousness; then he’ll give you the other things also.

Don’t worry about tomorrow, since tomorrow will bring worries of its own. Today’s trouble is enough for today.

^{7:1}He said to **speak kindly to others**:

Don’t judge other people harshly, lest you be judged harshly also. God will judge you by how you judge others; the measure you give will be the measure you get.

Why do you notice the speck in your neighbor’s eye but ignore the log in *your* eye? Why do you tell your neighbor “I want to remove the speck from

your eye” when the log is in *your* eye?

You hypocrite! First remove the log from *your* eye, then you’ll see clearly enough to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.

^{7:6}He said to **avoid cheapening God’s message**:

Don’t give the holy to dogs; and don’t throw your pearls before pigs, who’ll trample them and turn and maul you.

^{7:7}He said to **keep trying to do good deeds**:

If you ask, you’ll receive. If you search, you’ll find. If you knock, the door will open.

If your child asks for bread, would you give just a stone? If the child asks for a fish, would you give a snake? Just as you know how to give good gifts to your children, so does God give good things to those who ask.

Obey the **Golden Rule**, which says: do for other people what you’d want them to do for *you*. That’s the rule of the *Five Books of Moses* and the prophets.

Enter through the *narrow* gate. The wider gate and easy road lead to destruction, and many people take it; the narrow gate and hard road lead to life, and few find it.

^{7:15}He said to **beware of false prophets**:

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are hungry wolves. You’ll know them by their fruits.

Do grapes come from thorns, or figs from thistles? No! Every good tree bears just good fruit; every bad tree bears just bad fruit. Every tree that doesn’t bear good fruit is cut down and thrown in the fire, so you’ll know the false prophets by the fruits of their acts.

^{7:21}He said to **produce good deeds, not just words**:

To enter heaven, calling me “Lord” is not enough; you must do the will of my Father in heaven.

On the day of reckoning, many will beg me, “Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?”

I’ll reply, “I never knew you. Go away, you evildoers!”

^{7:24}He finished with this warning:

Everyone who’s heard my words and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; but it didn’t fall, because it had been founded on rock.

Everyone who’s heard my words and does *not* act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house, and the house fell, dramatically!

^{7:28}The crowds were astounded at Jesus’ sermon, because he taught as one having authority, unlike their scribes.

^{8:1}When Jesus came down from the mountain, great crowds followed him.

Miraculous healing

^{8:2}A **leper** knelt before Jesus and said, “Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.”

Jesus touched the leper and replied, “I do choose. Be made clean!” Instantly his leprosy disappeared. Jesus told him, “Don’t mention my actions to anyone. Instead, do what Moses commanded (in Leviticus 14:2): get examined by a priest then give an offering, so people will know you’re clean.”

^{8:5}When Jesus entered Capernaum, a **centurion** (leader of 100 Roman soldiers) told him, “Lord, my servant is bedridden, paralyzed, and in terrible distress.”

Jesus replied, “I’ll come cure him.” The centurion replied, “Lord, I’m not worthy to have you come under my roof; heal my servant by just giving a command. Like you, I have an authority over me, with soldiers under me who obey my commands.” That reply amazed Jesus, who told followers, “I’ve never seen such a faithful person in Israel! Many foreigners will eat with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in heaven, while Israelis will be thrown into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.” He told the centurion, “Go; let it be done for you according to your faith,” and the servant was healed within an hour.

^{8:14}In **Peter’s house**, Jesus saw Peter’s mother-in-law was bedridden with a fever.

Jesus touched her hand. The fever left her. She got up and began to serve him. That evening, people brought him many people possessed by demons; he cast out the spirits with a word and cured all the sick.

That fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy (in Isaiah 53:4):

He took our infirmities and bore our diseases.

^{9:1}Jesus performed more miracles, gave more sermons, collected more disciples, and did many things that upset Jewish leaders. He expected he’d be crucified....

Judas agrees to betray Jesus

^{26:14}One of Jesus’s 12 disciples — the one named Judas Iscariot — went to the chief Jewish rabbis and asked, “What will you pay me to betray Jesus?” They gave him 30 silver coins. He began seeking an opportunity to betray Jesus.

Passover

^{26:17}On Passover’s first day, the disciples asked Jesus, “Where do you want to have Passover dinner?” Jesus told them to go into Jerusalem and tell a certain man that Jesus and the disciples would dine at that man’s house. The disciples did so and prepared the dinner at the man’s house.

^{26:20}That evening, Jesus joined the disciples for what would turn out to be his **last supper**. While they were all eating, Jesus said, “One of you will betray me.” That comment distressed the disciples. One after another, the disciples began asking him, “Surely not I, Lord?” He replied:

The one who’s dipped his hand into the bowl with me will betray me. I’ll go as the Bible says I will, but woe to the person who betrays me! It would have been better for that person to not have been born.

^{26:25}Judas, who betrayed him, asked, “Surely not I, Rabbi?” Jesus replied, “So you say.”

^{26:26}While they were eating, Jesus grabbed a bread loaf, blessed it, split it, gave the pieces to his disciples, and said:

Eat it: it’s my body.

He grabbed a cup of wine, gave thanks, passed that cup of wine to his disciples, and said:

You all drink from it: it’s my covenant’s blood, poured out for the many, to forgive sins. I won’t drink more wine until the day I drink with you in heaven.

^{26:30}The group chanted a Passover hymn then went to the **Mount of Olives** (a mountain ridge on Jerusalem’s east side), where Jesus told the disciples:

You’ll all desert me tonight, because the Bible says (in Zechariah 13:7) “I’ll kill the shepherd, then all his sheep will run away.” But after I’m raised up, I’ll lead you to Galilee.

^{26:33}Peter said, “Though the others will desert you, I’ll never desert you.” Jesus told Peter:

Tonight, before the cock crows, you’ll deny me 3 times.

^{26:35}Peter replied, “I won’t deny you, even if I must die with you.” The other disciples said the same words.

^{26:36}Jesus led the disciples to **Gethsemane** (a garden at the bottom of the Mount of Olives), where he told them, “Sit here while I go over there to pray.”

^{26:37}He took along 3 disciples (Peter and Zebedee’s two sons) and told them:

I’m deeply grieved, even to death. Stay here, awake with me.

He went a little farther, threw himself on the ground, and prayed:

Dear Father, if possible, let this cup of responsibility pass from me; but I’ll do whatever you want.

^{26:40}He returned to the 3 disciples but found they’d nodded off.

He woke Peter by saying:

So you couldn’t stay awake with me an hour? Stay away, and pray you don’t get tempted. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.

^{26:42}Jesus went away again and prayed:

Dear Father, if this cup can’t pass unless I drink it, your will be done.

When Jesus returned, he found the 3 disciples sleeping again. He

left them, repeated his prayer, returned to them, and asked them:

Are you still sleeping? The hour is at hand. I’ve been betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up! Let’s go! See, my betrayer is at hand.

^{26:47}While he was saying that, Judas arrived, along with a big mob sent by the Jewish leaders and carrying swords and clubs. Judas had told the mob he’d signal them which man to arrest by kissing him; so he came up to Jesus, said “Greetings, Rabbi,” and kissed him. Jesus replied:

Friend, do what you’re here to do.

The mob laid hands on Jesus and arrested him.

^{26:51}Suddenly, Peter drew his sword and cut an ear off Caiaphas’s slave. But Jesus told Peter:

Put your sword back into its place, because all who rely on the sword will die by the sword. If I ask my Father, he’d immediately send me over 12 legions of angels to protect me; but then the Biblical prophecy wouldn’t be fulfilled.

^{26:55}Jesus asked the mob:

Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day, I sat in the temple teaching, and you didn’t arrest me. But this has happened so the Biblical prophecy may be fulfilled.

Then all the disciples deserted him and fled.

^{26:57}The mob took him to Caiaphas. Peter followed him, at a distance, and sat with the guards in Caiaphas’s courtyard.

^{26:59}Caiaphas and the **Sanhedrin** (Jewish council) put Jesus on trial. They wanted to hear **testimony against Jesus** that would justify putting Jesus to death but heard none, though many false witnesses came forward. Finally two witnesses claimed Jesus said “I can destroy God’s temple and rebuild it in 3 days.” Caiaphas asked Jesus to reply to that charge, but Jesus remained silent. Then Caiaphas told him, “I put you under oath to tell us if you’re the Messiah, the Son of God.” Jesus replied:

So you say; but from now on you’ll see me seated at God’s right hand and coming on heaven’s clouds.

^{26:65}Caiaphas exclaimed, “He’s blasphemed! Why do we need more witnesses? You’ve heard his blasphemy now. What’s your verdict?”

^{26:66}The Sanhedrin members replied, “He deserves death.” They spat in his face and struck him. Some slapped him and taunted him by saying, “Prophecy to us, you Messiah! Who struck you?”

Peter’s denial

^{26:69}While Peter was sitting in the courtyard, a servant girl came to him and said, “You too were with Jesus,” but he denied it to the group and said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

^{26:71}He went out to the porch, where another servant girl saw him and told bystanders, “This man was with Jesus.” Again he denied it with an oath and said, “I don’t know the man.”

^{26:73}The bystanders replied, “Certainly you’re also one of them, because your accent betrays you.” Then he began cursing, swore an oath, and said, “I don’t know the man!”

^{26:74}At that moment, the cock crowed. He remembered what Jesus had said:

Before the cock crows, you’ll deny me 3 times.

He went out and wept bitterly.

Pontius Pilate

^{27:1}During the morning, the Sanhedrin voted to execute Jesus, so he was bound and taken to **Pontius Pilate** (the Roman official who was Israel’s governor).

^{27:3}When Judas saw Jesus was condemned, Judas repented.

Judas brought the 30 silver coins back to the Jewish leaders and said, “I’ve sinned by betraying innocent blood.” But they replied, “What’s that to us? Take care of it yourself.” Judas threw the silver coins down onto the temple floor, departed, and hanged himself. The rabbis picked up the coins but decided “it’s unlawful to put them in the treasury, since they’re blood

money,” so the rabbis used them to buy the potter’s field as a place to bury foreigners. That’s why the field’s still called the Field of Blood. It fulfills the prophesy (from Jeremiah but mainly from Zechariah 11:12-13).

^{27:11}Pilate asked Jesus, “Are you the King of the Jews?” Jesus replied, “So you say.”

^{27:12}The Sanhedrin said a list of accusations against Jesus, but Jesus didn’t reply.

^{27:13}Pilate asked him, “Don’t you hear how many accusations they make against you?” But Jesus remained silent. Pilate was amazed.

^{27:15}Each Passover, Pilate customarily released one prisoner, whomever the crowd preferred. On that particular Passover, one of the prisoners was **Barabbas** (who’d led a heroic rebellion against Rome). Pilate asked the crowd, “Whom do you want me to release: Barabbas or Jesus-called-the-Christ?” He realized that the Jewish leaders had arrested Jesus Christ just because they envied Jesus.

^{27:19}While Pilate was waiting for the crowd to choose, his wife sent him this message: “Have nothing to do with that innocent man (Jesus Christ), since last night I dreamt he made me suffer a lot.”

^{27:20}The Jewish leaders persuaded the crowd to ask for Barabbas and let Jesus be killed.

^{27:21}Pilate asked the crowd again, “Which of the two do you want me to release?” The crowd replied, ‘Barabbas!’

^{27:22}Pilate asked the crowd, “Then what should I do with Jesus-called-the-Christ?” The crowd all said, “Crucify him!”

^{27:23}Pilate asked, “Why, what evil has he done?” But the crowd just shouted even louder, “Crucify him!”

^{27:24}When Pilate saw the crowd was starting to riot and couldn’t have its mind changed, he poured water on his hands, washed them in front of the crowd, and said, “I’m innocent of this man’s blood; take care of it yourselves.” The crowd replied, “His blood be on us and on our children!” Pilate released Barabbas, flogged Jesus, and handed Jesus to soldiers, who took Jesus into Pilate’s headquarters, gathered a group around Jesus, stripped him, put a scarlet robe on him, and, after twisting some thorns to make a crown, put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand, knelt before him, and mocked him by saying, “Hail, King of the Jews!” They spat on him, took the reed, and struck him on the head. They stripped the robe off him, put his own clothes back on him, and led him away to be crucified. They forced a passer-by (Simon from Cyrene) to carry Jesus’s cross.

^{27:33}When they came to a place called **Golgotha** (which means “Place of a Skull”), they offered Jesus wine mixed with **gall** (a pain-killing narcotic). He tasted it but didn’t drink it.

Crucifixion

^{27:35}They stripped him, **crucified** him (nailed him to the cross), and divided his clothes among themselves by casting lots. Then they sat and kept watch over him. Above his head, they posted a board announcing his offense: “This is Jesus, King of the Jews.” Along with him, they crucified two bandits (one on his right, the other on his left).

^{27:39}Passers-by derided him by shaking their heads and saying:

You said you’d destroy the temple and rebuild it in 3 days. Save *yourself!* If you’re God’s Son, come down from the cross.

The chief priests, scribes, and elders mocked him by saying:

He “saved” others but can’t save himself. If he’s Israel’s king, let him come down from the cross now. Then we’ll believe in him. He trusts in God; let God rescue him now if God wishes, since he said “I’m God’s Son.”

The crucified bandits taunted him in the same way.

^{27:45}From noon until 3PM, the sky was dark. At 3PM, Jesus cried loudly, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” That mix of Hebrew and Aramaic means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”; but some of the bystanders misunderstood him and said, “He’s calling for Elijah.” Immediately one of them ran, got a sponge,

filled it with vinegar, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink. But the others said, “What, let’s see whether Elijah will come save him.” Then Jesus cried loudly again and breathed his last....

Quran

The **Quran** (which is the Arabic word for “recitation”) is the Bible of the Muslim religion.

It was created by the prophet Muhammad, beginning in 610 A.D. (when he was 40 years old) until his death in 632 A.D. He said God dictated it to him.

Muhammad was a great speaker but didn’t know how to write: he was illiterate. He created the Quran orally in Arabic and dictated it to his followers, who memorized it. After his death, they transcribed it onto paper. They decided on a final reorganized version in 650 A.D.

It includes 114 chapters. Each chapter is called a **sura**.

The first sura is called “Al-Fatiha” (the opening). It’s very short.

The second sura, which is very long, is called “Al-Baqara” (the cow), because it eventually includes a discussion of the Old Testament’s story of the Golden Calf.

Though the Muslim world includes a few terrorists, the Quran itself is quite reasonable. Even if you’re a Christian or Jew, you’ll agree with most of what the Quran says!

Here’s how the Quran begins. You’re reading my own translation (which is based on translations by others)....

The opening

¹This is in the name of God, who’s compassionate and merciful.

²Praise God, lord of everything, compassionate and merciful, master of Judgment Day. We worship just you. We pray just to you for help.

⁷Keep us on the path that’s correct and straight, the path of those whom you’ve blessed, not the path of those you’re angry at, not the path of those who’ve gone astray.

The cow

¹Here are the ABC’s.

²This is the scripture. No doubt about its truth! It guides the God-fearing (who believe in him, pray, use what we’ve taught, believe what God showed you & your predecessors, and have faith in the hereafter). They’re on the right course from God and will prosper.

⁶As for the disbelievers, they don’t care that you warned them, they simply don’t believe. God has sealed their hearts and hearing. Their eyes are covered. They’ll be punished greatly.

⁸Some people who say they believe in God & the Judgment Day don’t really believe. They try to deceive God & believers but deceive just themselves. Their hearts are diseased. God’s increased their disease so they’ll have a painful doom because of their lies.

¹¹When they’re told “Don’t be corrupt,” they reply “We just want to make things right.” They’re corrupt but unaware.

¹³When they’re told “Believe, as others do,” they retort “Shall we believe like fools?” They themselves are the foolish ones but don’t realize it.

¹⁴When they meet believers, they say they believe; but when they go privately to their Satans, they say “We’re with *you*; we were just mocking the believers.” God will mock *them* and make them wander blindly in their disrespect.

¹⁶They’ve given up guidance, swapping it for a life of errors instead. That swap was a bad bargain. They’ve lost the right direction....

Sex

Here's the most dangerous topic: sex! (If you're conservative, you may skip to the next topic, which is immersed in computers and where a boring person like you belongs!)

Search for pleasure

According to God, the purpose of sex is to get pregnant, so you have children and propagate your religious sect. According to men, the purpose of sex is just to have fun.

The Internet has answered pregnancy questions. Questions from women:

Should I have a baby after 35?
No, 35 kids is enough.

I'm 2 months pregnant. When will my baby move?
After he finishes college.

What's the most reliable way to determine a baby's sex?
Childbirth.

Must I have a baby shower?
Not if you change the baby's diaper fast.

Questions from men

Must I be in the delivery room while my wife's in labor?
Not unless the word "alimony" means something to you.

Our baby was born last week. When will my wife feel & act normal again?
When the kids are in college.

Seek and ye shall find — if you get lucky.

Field of love

How I hope I'll find the field
Where love runs deep and hearts grow strong,
A stream becomes an ocean song,
Your twinkling eyes and their surprise
Become a universe of joy!

Take me to that fertile field
Where pounding hearts beat always true,
We keep the love we always knew
And grow it gently. I love you.
I believe.

Obama's 3 questions

President Barack Obama said:

A man should ask himself 3 questions before marrying a woman.

Do you find her interesting? You'll spend more time with her than anyone else for the rest of your life. Nothing's more important than always wanting to hear what has to say about things.

Does she make you laugh?

If you want kids, **will she be a good mom?**

He said that in 2015 to the White House communication director, Dan Pfeiffer, according to Dan's 2018 book, titled "Yes, We (Still) Can." (I abridged Obama's comment.)

Reply to love

If somebody says "I love you," you can reply by chanting:

I love you, too.
I love you 3.
I love you 4ever!

How love looks

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry said:

Love doesn't consist in gazing at each other, but in looking outward together in the same direction.

Dancing

George Bernard Shaw said:

Dancing is a perpendicular expression of a horizontal desire.

George Balanchine said:

Someone said dancers work just as hard as policemen, always alert, always tense. But I disagree, because policemen don't have to look beautiful at the same time.

Taking 8 women to bed

If you're a typical man, here's how you deal with taking a woman to bed if she's slightly younger than you, according to the Internet:

Her age Your role How you go to bed

8	parent	At bedtime, you take her to bed and tell her a story.
18	seducer	You tell her a story to take her to bed.
28	pal	You don't need to tell her a story to take her to bed.
38	seduced	She tells <i>you</i> a story to take you to bed.
48	unwanted	She tells you a story to <i>avoid</i> going to bed.
58	tired	You stay in bed alone, to avoid her story.
68	laughing	If you take her to bed, that'll be a story!
78	demented	What story? What bed? Who the hell is she?

Male orgasm

If you feel good about yourself, so you're not depressed, you get sexually aroused more easily. That's why Xaviera Hollander, the "Happy Hooker" who ran a bordello in New York City, made this comment about servicing her customers who were stockbrokers:

When the stocks go up, the cocks go up.

Viagra Since Viagra's generic name, **sildenafil citrate**, is hard to remember, consumers have invented these alternative names for it: **mycoxafloppin**, **mycoxafailin**, **mydixadrupin**, **mydixarisin**, **dixafix**, and **ibepokin**.

Female orgasm

Here's how Anaïs Nin described her orgasm, in her 1937 diary:

Palpitations project a fiery and icy liqueur through the body. Electric flesh-arrows traverse the body. A rainbow of color strikes the eyelids. A foam of music falls over the ears. It's the gong of the orgasm.

Oh, so that's what it's like? Could we get the details straight, please? What flavor is the liqueur? In which direction do the flesh-arrows traverse the body? Which pitch is the gong bang? Can this multimedia video be remixed to improve the performance?

Faking If you're a woman who wants to stroke a man's ego by faking an orgasm, take this advice from actress Candice Bergen:

I may not be a great actress, but I've become the greatest at screen orgasms: 10 seconds of heavy breathing, roll your head from side to side, simulate a slight asthma attack, and die a little.

Sharon Stone said:

Women might be able to fake orgasms, but men can fake whole relationships.

The abridged version is more popular:

Women fake orgasms. Men fake relationships.

Dildo A **dildo** is a sex toy that's an artificial penis.

In the whole history of sex the 3 most important countries are France, Greece, and Canada. The French gave us "French kissing" (oral sex); the Greeks gave us "Greek style" (anal sex); and the Canadians gave us 2 versions of **The Dildo Song**. The first version is a parody of a 1950's ad for the Slinky toy and includes these pearls of wisdom:

It's long and a schlong, a marvelous dong.
It fits in a sock, feels better than cock.
It fits in your bum and sure makes you cum.
It vibrates a bit, feels great on your clit.

It fits in girls' cracks. Some even have sacks.
They're not just for gays. They use double A's.
Just rotate the knob: they buzz and they throb.

A girl on the go? No time for a beau?
Yes, this is your perfect fellow, you know.

You can see women sing it at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=r248DPAIavQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r248DPAIavQ)

The second version of The Dildo Song is about a Canadian town named Dildo. That's not a joke: there really is a Canadian town named Dildo! You can hear a man sing it at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=4i62RnsIQHM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4i62RnsIQHM)

Here are more details about that town & song:

Dildo is a fishing town (population 29,000) on Canada's Newfoundland Island. The water next to it is called Dildo Cove, which is part of the Atlantic Ocean, which also includes a Dildo Island (population 1200).

(Another Dildo Island, in the Florida Everglades, is named after its dildo cactus, which is shaped like a dildo.)

Canada's Dildo Island was recorded by Captain Cook (unrelated to Peter Pan's Captain Hook). He was a captain in the British navy and in 1763 was hired to make maps of the Newfoundland area. He gave each place a funny name, such as Tickle Bay, Witless Bay, Cuckolds Cove, Blow Me Down (when he encountered a storm), and Unfortunate Point (when he hurt his hand). When he started running out of food and got hungry, he named places Famish Gut and Pinchgut Point. But the names Dildo Island and Dildo town were invented before he arrived: Dildo Island got its name in 1711, probably because it's shaped like a dildo.

Recently, most those Canadian places have been renamed to be less offensive, except for Dildo Island and Dildo town, which kept their names despite a guy going door-to-door to encourage inhabitants to change the names. The Dildo names remain because they're funny and attract tourists.

Back in the 1700's, "dildo" meant "a penis-shaped sex toy" but also "a penis-shaped part of a boat, holding the oar." The word was originally spelled "dildo" and "dil doul" and probably came from the words "diddle" and the Italian word "deletto" (which means "delight").

In August 2019 on TV, Jimmy Kimmel talked about Canada's Dildo town every night. He jokingly said he was running to be Dildo's mayor (though Dildo is actually managed by a volunteer committee with no mayor), so Dildo made him *honorary* mayor. He declared Dildo to be Hollywood's sister city, and he created a huge mountainside DILDO sign (imitating the HOLLYWOOD sign).

Butt plugs & beyond

A **butt plug** is a dildo you put in your butt. Don't confuse it with a **but plug**, spelled with just one **t**. A **but plug** is an ad, like this:

You might think of buying from our competitor, but...

A **butter plug** is where you butter up your boss, to better your own situation, like this:

I think you're a great boss! And since you're so great, I'm sure you'll do the great thing and give me a raise!

Magic lamp

There's an old story of the poor black man who walked by a dumpster, saw a lamp, rubbed it, and met the genie, who offered 3 wishes. He said:

I want to be white, hard, and rub against a nice piece of ass every day!

So the genie turned him into a toilet seat.

He wasn't happy, so the genie let him try again and gave him 4 wishes this time. He said:

I want to be hot, white, outta sight! — and completely surrounded by pussy.

So the genie turned him into a tampon.

Moral: if you're trying to have a relationship, be careful — you might get what you requested but regret it.

Love laughs

Love can lead to disappointments and sorrow. Sometimes, you might even feel there's no such thing as true love.

At those moments, remember that the world would be a better place if "love" was changed to "laugh." Laughing often gives more pleasure than trying to love. In personals ads, women often say they seek a man with a good sense of humor. Instead of crying about a disappointing relationship, laugh at it.

Take bad advice about "love" and switch it to more accurate advice about "laughs": just change the word "love" to "laugh," then fix the grammar. Examples:

Meditations on "love"

Love makes the world go round.
Love is a many-splendored thing!

All you need is love, love!
Let's make love.

Make love, not war!
What the world needs now is love!
I love to be helpful.
I love to hear your voice.
You're the love of my life.

I'm lonely, looking for love.
Looking for love in wrong places?
It's beautiful when you fall in love.

Cruise on the Love Boat.
It was love at first sight.
Be my lover!
Feel my love.
I stared, lovingly.

I want love before sex.
Love can lead to marriage.

Children need unconditional love.

Ah, wouldn't it be lovely?
I miss your love.

I love holidays!
I love my job.
Love your family.
He swore he loved her madly.

Anybody love me? Anybody care?
She loves you! Yeah, yeah, yeah!
Your kids love you.
Your pet loves you.
God loves you.

Love, love me, do!
Love me tender, love me, do!
What does love got to do with it?

Courtney Love
I love to wear gloves.
"Love" is a 4-letter word.

Meditations on "laughs"

Laughs make the world go round.
Laughs are a many-splendored thing!

All you need is: laugh, laugh!
Let's make laughs.

Make laughs, not war.
What the world needs now is laughs!
I laugh, to be helpful.
I laugh to hear your voice.
You're the laugh of my life.

I'm lonely, looking for laughs.
Looking for laughs in wrong places?
It's beautiful when you fall in laughs.

Cruise on the Laugh Boat.
It was laugh at first sight.
Be my laughier!
Feel my laugh.
I stared, laughingly.

I want laughs before sex.
Laughs can lead to marriage.

Children need unconditional laughs.

Ah, wouldn't it be laughingly?
I miss your laughs.

I laugh at holidays!
I laugh at my job.
Laugh at your family.
He swore. He laughed at her madly.

Anybody laugh at me? Anybody care?
She laughs at you! Yeah, yeah, yeah!
Your kids laugh at you.
Your pet laughs at you.
God laughs at you.

Laugh, laugh at me, do!
Laugh at me tenderly, laugh at me, do!
What do laughs got to do with it?

Courtney, laugh!
I laugh to wear laughs.
"Laugh" isn't a 4-letter word. Take 5.

Dial soap

I'm waiting to see this ad for Dial soap:

Hey, girl, wanna be so BEAUTIFUL you'll get LAID?
Get DIAL, the only soap that's LAID spelled backwards!

Types of sexuality

The words “homosexual” and “heterosexual” are boring and vague. For example, “heterosexual” doesn’t zero in on the different types of heterosexuality.

Use these terms instead, which are more precise:

Partners	
unisexual	just masturbates
bisexual	attracted to both genders (men & women)
trisexual	wants sex with all 3: men, women, and objects
omnisexual	wants sex with all: self, other humans, objects, and animals
Intelligence	
cerebrosexual	attracted just to intellectuals
paleosexual	attracted to cave men, dates just hunks
Scary	
boosexual	attracted to ghosts, goths, and macabre Halloween costumes
gerisexual	attracted to older partners, helps the geriatric
Religious	
ecclesisexual	feels sexy just in church and when thinking of God
christosexual	wants sex with Christians
yehudisexual	wants sex with Jews
islamosexual	wants sex with Muslims (who obey Islam)
hindisexual	wants sex with Hindus (who speak Hindi)
Regional	
hispanosexual	wants sex with Hispanics
scandisexual	wants sex with Scandinavians
sinosexual	wants sex with Chinese
rainbowsexual	wants sex with all races
Financial	
midasexual	dates just the wealthy
paupersexual	dates just the downtrodden who can be taken advantage of
ficasexual	has sex just for pay
probonosexual	usually gets paid for sex but sometimes offers it free
Strength of desire	
nunsexual	like a nun, has none
phobisexual	afraid to have sex (has a phobia) but still considering it
ambisexual	ambivalent about whether to have sex
sensusexual	prefers sensuality instead of just sex
despersexual	desperate to have sex
Foreplay	
psychosexual	enjoys playing head games
alcosexual	feels sexy just when drunk, fueled by alcohol
satasexual	attracted to satanically naughty sex
Body parts	
oralsexual	uses mouth
mammosexual	attracted just to big-breasted women
francosexual	wants to French (use the tongue)
bootysexual	attracted just to fascinating rears
graecosexual	wants to do Greek (use the ass)
shlongosexual	attracted just to men who have long shlongs
dermasexual	prefers just to hold hands
Timing	
nocturnosexual	wants sex just at night, not during daylight
prestosexual	has sex that’s quick
largosexual	has sexual sessions that are long & slow-going
Style	
pseudosexual	good at faking it
canisexual	wants doggy style, like a canine
hyenasexual	laughs wildly when having sex
depressosexual	wants sex but gets depressed when having it
Aftermath	
somnisexual	after sex, immediately falls asleep
exeuntsexual	after sex, wants to exit from the relationship
vomisexual	after sex, wants to vomit
asssexual	after sex, acts like an ass

How many of those terms describe *you*? How many describe your partner?

After reading that list, English teachers should make kids invent more terms. That will inspire kids to learn Latin & Greek word roots. English analyst Lili Timmons said:

Yes, it will inspire students. It will inspire the most precocious to immediately become physicians specializing in cardiology, since parents will have heart attacks once this matter “comes” into play.

Boys wanting women

Young boys often fantasize about having sex with an adult woman, such as a teacher or celebrity. Here are fun videos about how that desire, if turned into a reality, would backfire.

Title	Author	Website
Stacy’s Mom	Fountains of Wayne	YouTube.com/watch?v=dZLfasMPOU4
The Librarian	Saturday Night Live	YouTube.com/watch?v=IrMTLV2cR2Q

The only one

The Internet has this tale:

I asked my wife, “Am I the only one you’ve been with?”
She replied, “Yes. All the others were nines or tens.”

AIDS

You can get AIDS in two popular ways. One way is to share needles with a drug addict. The other way is to have anal sex — because squeezing a penis into a rectum makes the rectum bleed — but American news media were afraid to say that, which is why AIDS spread and why Americans don’t realize you can’t easily get AIDS from vaginal sex.

But you can still get a **sexually transmitted disease (STD)** from vaginal sex, even **oral sex** (where you lick sex organs) and even just kissing. So be careful: use condoms when possible, and get STD checkups if you get sexy with different partners.

Surprising love song

The world’s most surprising love song was composed by 84-year-old Ray Jessel. Here are its lyrics:

What She’s Got

I met this girl. She’s just great.
This girl I just adore!
The problem is: she has much more
Than I had bargained for.

She’s got that style. She’s got that smile.
She’s got the walk. She’s got the talk.
She’s got that zing. There’s just one thing:
She’s got a penis.

She’s got that flair. Knows what to wear.
She’s got that face. That girl is grace.
She’s got pizzazz. Too bad she has
A penis.

There’s always some failure, always some flaw:
Ain’t that what they call “Murphy’s law”?
But little genitalia, that’s where I draw the line.
Besides, hers is bigger than mine.

My life’s a mess, ’cause under that dress
She’s got a pee ee en I ess.

Watch Ray go onstage, sing it, and surprise the judges:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=UHHRpQpa_48](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UHHRpQpa_48)

He died the next year.

Another of his surprising songs is *Short-Term Memory Loss Blues*, at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=MhsPYMdxM4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MhsPYMdxM4)

Rocky Horror Picture Show

“The Rocky Horror Picture Show” is a famous dramatic film about an innocent couple whose car gets a flat tire, in a rainy night, so the couple knocks on the door of the nearest house, to use a phone, but doesn’t realize the house is run by an extreme transvestite and filled with his followers. Here’s the main song, *Sweet Transvestite*:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=bc80tFjTuo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bc80tFjTuo)

Intersex

Most people are either male or female, but 1.7% of people are genetically in-between and called **intersex**. That’s the same percentage of people who have naturally red hair. Most people who are intersex either don’t know it or hide it.

For example, when Emily Quinn was a child, she thought she was female (because she looked, acted, and sounded like one); but when she was 10 years old, a gynecologist told her that hidden in her abdomen were testicles (male balls) instead of a uterus, and her chromosomes were XY (male) instead of XX, even though her body can’t process testosterone (male hormone). She can never have children. See her heartbreaking lecture about her difficulty as a child growing up, at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=28Ip-STEPKU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=28Ip-STEPKU)

Men versus women

The battle of the sexes never ends.

Battling Web sites

Is it better to be a man or a woman?

Here’s why it’s better to be a *guy*:

You can kill your own food.

You can open all your own jars.

You can “do” your nails with a pocketknife.

Car mechanics tell you the truth.

Same work, more pay.

The same hairstyle lasts years, maybe decades.

One wallet, one pair of shoes, one color, all seasons.

You’re allowed to know names of just 5 colors.

You don’t have to shave below your neck.

You never have strap problems in public.

If you’re 34 and single, nobody notices.

Gray hair and wrinkles just add character.

You can go to the bathroom without a support group.

You can visit a friend without having to bring a gift.

If someone forgets to invite you to an event, he or she can still be your friend.

If another guy at a party has the same outfit, you can still be lifelong friends.

Your pals never trap you with “So, notice anything different?”

You can watch games with a buddy for hours quietly, without thinking “He must be mad at me.”

You can do Christmas shopping for 25 relatives on December 24th in 45 minutes.

Those reasons were collected by James Gosling (who invented Java programming).

But women think men are *disgusting*:

How do you scare a man? Sneak up behind him and start throwing rice.

What’s the most insensitive part of the penis? The man.

Why do men prefer showers to baths? They know peeing in the bath is disgusting.

Why do men chase women they won’t marry?

The same reason dogs chase cars they won’t drive.

How many men does it take to screw in a light bulb?

One. Men will screw anything.

Why did God give males millions of sperm?

Males won’t stop and ask for directions.

Men are like parking spots: the good ones are taken; what’s left is handicapped.

Men are like cement: after getting laid, they take a long time to get hard.

Men are like chocolate bars: sweet, smooth, and head right for your hips.

Those reasons were collected by Akane and Rei Hino; read more of their collection at:

reihime.tripod.com/jokes.htm

Dogs Women say men resemble dogs:

Both are fascinated with women’s crotches, like dominance games, take up too much space on the bed, fart shamelessly, are suspicious of the mailman, and have irrational fears about vacuum cleaning.

Neither does any dishes, notices when you get your hair cut, or understands what you see in cats.

But women say dogs are slightly *better* than men, because dogs...

mean it when they kiss you, miss you when you’re gone, admit when they’re jealous, understand what “no” means, feel guilty when they’ve done something wrong, are very direct about wanting to go out, are easy to buy for, give you no worse social disease than fleas, don’t play games with you except fetch, don’t have problems expressing affection in public, and can be trained

Men say a dog is better than a woman, because a dog...

limits its time in the bathroom to a quick drink, has parents who’ll never visit you, is happier to see you when you’re late, doesn’t shop, doesn’t get mad if you pet another dog, doesn’t care about previous dogs in your life, doesn’t expect you to phone, doesn’t expect flowers on Valentine’s Day, and doesn’t expect you to remember its birthday

Guns Men say guns are better than a woman, because...

You can trade an old 44 for a new 22.

You can keep one gun at home and have another for when you’re on the road.

Your primary gun doesn’t mind if you keep another gun for backup.

If you admire a friend’s gun, he’ll probably let you try it out a few times.

Guns function normally every day of the month.

A gun doesn’t mind if you go to sleep after you use it.

Your gun will stay with you even if you run out of ammo.

A gun doesn’t take up lots of closet space.

A gun doesn’t ask, “Do these new grips make me look fat?”

You can buy a silencer for a gun.

Battling bathrooms

This advice is written in **women’s bathrooms**:

The best way to a man’s heart is to saw his breast plate open.

Make love, not war. Hell, do both, get married!

If it has tires or testicles, you’re going to have trouble with it.

You’re too good for him.

Please don’t throw toothpicks in the toilet. Remember: crabs can pole vault!

This advice is written in **men’s bathrooms**:

Don’t trust anything that bleeds for 5 days and doesn’t die.

Beauty is just a light switch away.

No matter how good she looks, some other guy is sick of taking her shit.

Many people say the **4 biggest lies** are:

“Black is beautiful.”

“The check is in the mail.”

“I’m from the government, and I’m here to help you.”

“Don’t worry, baby, I won’t cum in your mouth.”

Rejection one-liners

The Internet lists these clever ways for a woman to reject a man:

Male question

Haven't we met before? Yes, I'm the receptionist at the VD clinic.
 Haven't I seen you before? That's why I don't go there anymore.
 What do you do for a living? I'm a female impersonator.
 What sign were you born under? "Stop," "Do not enter," and "No parking."
 Is this seat empty? Yes, and mine will be too if you sit down.
 I know how to please a woman. Then please leave me alone.
 I can tell you want me. You're so right! I want you... to leave.
 Your place or mine? Both. You go to yours; I'll go to mine.
 May I see you pretty soon? Why? Don't you think I'm pretty now?
 Your body is like a temple. Sorry, there are no services today.
 I want to give myself to you. Sorry, I don't accept cheap gifts.
 I'd go to the world's end for you. Yes, but would you stay there?
 If I saw you naked, I'd die happy. If I saw *you* naked, I'd die laughing.

Female response

Longer chats:

He: I'd like to call you. What's your number?
 She: It's in the phone book.
 He: But I don't know your name.
 She: That's in the phone book too.
 He: How do you like your eggs in the morning?
 She: Unfertilized.

Feminists are proud to not need men. Feminists like to quote Irina Dunn, who wrote in 1970 at Sydney University in Australia:

A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.

A variant, printed on a political button, says:

A woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle.

Irina borrowed the phrase "like a fish needs a bicycle" from earlier authors. Details are at:

www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/414150.html

On the other hand, Joel Stein (*Time* magazine's comedian) wrote this confession:

Most guys don't enjoy this girly stuff: reading & talking.

University of Michigan study

This news report appeared on the Internet:

A 10-year study at the University of Michigan has concluded that men and women complement each other because each gender has unique traits.

Women have strengths that amaze men. They carry children, hardships, and burdens but hold happiness, love, and joy. They smile when they want to scream, sing when they want to cry, laugh when nervous. They're childcare workers, executives, stay-at-home moms, bikers, babes, and friendly neighbors. They fight for their beliefs, stand against injustice, and walk & talk the extra mile to get their kids good schools and get their families good healthcare. They'll accompany a frightened friend to the doctor. They're honest, loyal, and forgiving. Smart, they realize knowledge is power but can still use their softer side to make a point. They send letters and emails to show how much they care. They bring joy & hope, give compassion & ideals, and give moral support to their families & friends. All they want back is a hug and a smile.

Men are good at lifting heavy objects and killing bugs.

Medications for women

Doctors recommend women take these drugs:

Damnitol: take 2 tablets, and the rest of the world can go to hell for 8 hours.

Peptobimbo: when swallowed by a single woman before an evening out, this liquid silicone drink increases breast size, decreases intelligence, and prevents conception.

Dumberol: this add-on to Peptobimbo lowers IQ further, resulting in enjoying country music and pickup trucks.

Menicillin: this anti-boy-otic increases an older woman's resistance to lethal lines, such as "You make me want to be a better person — can we get naked now?"

Jackasspirin relieves headaches caused by a man who can't remember your birthday, anniversary, or phone number.

Saint Momma's Wort: this plant extract treats mom's depression, by rendering preschoolers unconscious for 2 days.

Emptynestrogen: this suppository eliminates melancholy and loneliness, by reminding mom how her children had been awful teenagers and she couldn't wait till they moved out.

Anti-talksident: spray this on irritating strangers too eager to share their life stories in elevators.

Nagament, when administered to a husband, provides the same irritation as nagging him all weekend, saving the wife the time and trouble of doing it herself.

Flipitor increases the life expectancy of commuters, by controlling road rage and the urge to flip off other drivers.

Sulfa-denial: this female contraceptive technique, 100% effective and approved by the Catholic Church, consists of holding an aspirin tablet between the knees.

Trycoxagain: anti-depressant for lesbians.

Medications for men

If you're a man whose penis isn't getting an erection, doctors recommend you take a combination of these pills:

mycoxafloppin, mycoxafailin, mydixadrupin, mydixarizin, dixafix, and ibepokin

Instead of taking those pills, you can take Pepsi's drink, called **Mount & Do**, which you can use as a mixer, to pour a **stiff drink**, called a **highball** and a **cock tale**.

Since more money's being spent on breast implants and erection medications than on Alzheimer's research, the Internet predicts that by 2025 the elderly will have perky boobs & erections but no memory of how to use them.

Fifi love

In 2004, San Francisco performed its first gay & lesbian marriages. Now same-sex marriages are offered in many states.

As a Democrat, I'm in favor of liberal causes and letting the gays & lesbians have their fun. But I wonder whether we'll soon receive many letters like this:

I'm Janet Hegenberger, and I'd like to marry my dog, Fifi.

Though you might laugh at me, I'm serious. Fifi's my life partner: we've been together constantly, ever since she first came into this world. We understand and *love* each other, more deeply than traditional couples. She understands me more than any man could. She's always been my loving, faithful companion.

I've no desire to hurt the sanctity of anybody else's marriage: I just want to express my love for Fifi. Aside from her, I'm a single old lady with no other friends. She means so much to me!

I'd like her to get full spousal benefits, as other spouses do. That's fair! For example, I'd like her to be covered for doctor's care (from her veterinarian); I'd like to file a joint tax return with her; and upon my death, I'd like her to inherit my estate automatically, without lots of paperwork.

Please stand up for animal rights! Fifi has feelings, too! A love between a woman and her poodle has no bounds! Let us marry, in peaceful, joyous harmony. Jesus would have wanted it that way.

This is not a sexual issue. I have no desire for sex with Fifi, and that's biologically impossible anyway. I just want to hug her, and let her hug me, knowing we truly belong to each other — and mean more to each other than any Hitler-style "dog tag" could ever express.

Please, let love abound: let Fifi and me enter into the state of marital bliss. God loves us all! We're *all* his creatures! Noah said *all* animals should enter God's ship, two by two, united in love for our whole planet. Together, *we shall overcome* prejudice! Let "Earth Day" be more than just two words.

Yours truly,
Sister Janet Hegenberger,
Order of the Woofing Cross

How to score

If you're a guy, here's how to score points in the romance game, according to the anonymous Internet:

You gain points if you make the woman happy, lose points if you make her unhappy, and get no points for doing what she expects. Examples:

You make the bed (+1) but throw the bedspread over rumpled sheets (-1) and forget to add the decorative pillows (-1).

When the toilet-paper roll runs out, you replace it (0) or resort to Kleenex (-1); and when the Kleenex runs out, you use the next bathroom (-2).

You take out the recyclables and stack them neatly by the curb (+1), but the truck's just pulled away (-1).

You go out to buy her tampons (+5) in the snow (+8) but return with beer (-5) and no tampons (-25).

At night, you check out a suspicious noise (0), which turns out to be something (+5), which you pummel with a six iron (+10) until it turns out to be her father (-25) or her cat (-40).

At a party, you stay by her side (0) until you leave to chat with an old drinking buddy (-2) named Tiffany (-4) who's a dancer (-10) with implants (-18).

When mingling with others, you hold her hand and gaze at her lovingly (+1) until you introduce her as "the ol' ball and chain" and pat her rump (-5).

When she asks whether a hot-looking woman nearby is attractive, you say "Nowhere near as attractive as you" (+1) — or "Don't worry, she's lousy in bed" (-6) when that woman is her sister (-90).

You remember her birthday (0) and buy a card (0) and flowers (0). Then you take her out to dinner (+1), but it's a sports bar (-3) with an all-you-can-eat night (-3), and your face is painted the colors of your favorite team (-10).

You forget her birthday (-10) and your anniversary (-20).

You forget to pick her up at the bus station (-25), which is in the worst part of town (-35), and the pouring rain dissolves her leg cast (-50).

You give her a gift (0) that's not a small appliance (+1) and not chocolate (+2). You'll be paying it off for months (+30) using her credit card (-30). What you bought is two sizes too big (-40).

You go to the mall with her (+3), kindly drop her off at the entrance and park the car (+4), then jog to the sports bar (-9).

You visit her parents (+1) but just stare vacantly at their TV (-3), which is turned off (-6).

You go out for an evening with a guy (-5) who's single (-7) and drives a Trans Am (-10) with a license plate saying GR8 NBED (-15). After some beers (-7), you drive home at 3AM (-20), smelling of booze and cheap cigars (-10) and not wearing any pants (-40). She asks, "Is that a tattoo?" (-200)

You take her to a movie she likes and you hate (+12) — or you take her to a movie you like (-2) called *Death Cop III* (-3), featuring cyborgs having sex (-9), after you said it would be a foreign film about orphans and sheepdogs (-15).

You develop a noticeable beer gut (-15); but instead of exercising, you wear loose jeans and baggy Hawaiian shirts (-30) and say "It doesn't matter, you have one too." (-800)

On a trip, you lose the directions (-4), finally get lost (-10) in a bad part of town (-15), meet the locals up close and personal (-25), and she discovers you lied about having a black belt (-60).

When she asks "Do I look fat?" (-5), you hesitate (-10) then ask "Where?" (-35)

When she wants to talk about a problem, you look concerned (0) and listen (0) for more than 30 minutes (+5) without glancing at the TV (+5), but your mind wanders to last weekend's game until you hear her ask, "Well, what do you think I should do?" (-100) or you fall asleep (-200).

When it's her time of the month, you can talk (-100) or don't talk (-150), spend time with her (-200) or don't spend time with her (-500), until she sees you're enjoying yourself (game over — you lose).

Male laments

Life isn't fair.

If a woman gets undressed in her room while leaving her shades open, and a man peeks at her, the man gets arrested for being a Peeping Tom.

If a man gets undressed in his room while leaving his shades open, and a woman peeks at him, the man gets arrested for being an exhibitionist.

Adam & Eve Here's the lost paragraph from the Bible's Book of Genesis, as reported on the Internet:

God asked Adam, "What's wrong?" Adam said he didn't have anyone to talk with. God said He'd make Adam a companion and it would be a woman.

God said, "This person will gather food for you. When you discover clothing, she'll wash it for you. She'll agree with all your decisions. She'll bear your babies and never ask you to get up in the middle of the night to care for them. She won't nag you. When you disagree with her, she'll always admit she was wrong. She'll never have a headache, and she'll freely give you love and passion whenever you need it."

Adam asked God, "What will a woman like that cost?" God replied, "An arm and a leg."

Adam asked, "What can I get for a rib?" And the rest is history.

Peach If a man likes a woman, he calls her a "peach." If a man dislikes a woman, he calls her the same thing but secretly pronounces the "p" as "b": a "biiiiititch!"

Happiest days of marriage According to the *Guy Q* book, couples fight the most on Wednesday (because it's in the middle of the week, far from weekends) and fight the least on Thursday (because on Thursday they look forward to Friday fun).

But some couples don't fit that schedule. One of my friends said:

I've been married 28 years. My wife's given me the happiest 20 years of my life.

We asked him:

Which were the unhappy times — the first 8 years, or the last 8?

He answered:

The weekends!

On weekdays, he's happily at work and doesn't have to face his wife; but "28 years of weekends" is as many torture days as 8 years of straight torture.

Rodney Dangerfield said:

My wife and I were happy for 20 years. Then we met.

Frank Sinatra expressed a similar thought in the 1957 movie "The Joker Is Wild," when he said:

A man doesn't know what happiness is until he's married. By then it's too late.

Probably that line was invented by the movie's screenwriter or Joe E. Lewis (the comedian the movie was about) or Henny Youngman (who had a similar sense of humor).

Quotes on marital difficulties

Joan Crawford said:

Love is a fire. But whether it's going to warm your heart or burn down your house, you can never tell.

Helen Rowland said:

In olden times, sacrifices were made at the altar, a practice that still continues. When a girl marries, she exchanges the attentions of many men for the inattention of one. Before marriage, a man declares he'd lay down his life to serve you; after marriage, he won't even lay down his newspaper to talk to you. A husband is what's left of the lover after the nerve's been removed.

Katharine Hepburn said:

Life is hard. After all, it kills you. Love has nothing to do with what you're expecting to get, just what you're expecting to give, which is everything.

If you want to give up the admiration of thousands of men for the disdain of one, go ahead, get married.

Sometimes I wonder whether men and women really suit each other. Perhaps they should live next door and just visit now and then.

Rita Rudner said:

I love being married: it's so great to find that one special person you want to annoy for the rest of your life. Before I met my husband, I'd never fallen in love, though I'd stepped in it a few times. Men would like monogamy better if it sounded less like monotony.

Actress Zsa Zsa Gabor had 9 husbands and said:

Marriage is too interesting to be experienced just once. I believe in large families. Every girl should have at least 3 husbands. I'm a marvelous housekeeper: every time I leave a man, I keep his house. A man is incomplete until he's married. After that, he's finished. I never hated a man enough to give him his diamonds back. I know nothing about sex, because I was always married. Husbands are like fires: they go out if unattended.

H.L. Mencken said:

Men have a better time than women, because men marry later and die earlier.

No matter how happily a woman is married, she's always pleased to discover a nice man who wishes she weren't.

Mignon McLaughlin summarized it all by saying:

A successful marriage requires falling in love many times, always with the same person.

Marriage can feel like a jail sentence. George Carlin said:

In English, the shortest sentence is "I am." The longest is "I do."

But Socrates recommended that men marry anyway. He said:

By all means, marry. If you get a good wife, you'll be happy. If you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher.

"Today's Chuckle" (by Tom & Harlan Collins) agrees:

Every man should get married. Then he won't have to blame everything on the government.

"Madame de Staël" (whose birth name was Anne Louise Germaine Necker and whose legal married name was Anne Louise Germaine de Staël-Holstein) was born in Paris in 1766 and dished out these comments about the men & women of her era:

The more I see of men, the more I like dogs. Love is the whole history of a woman's life. It's but an episode in a man's. The man's desire is for the woman, but the woman's desire is for the man's desire. Men err from selfishness; women because they're weak. A man must know how to fly in the face of opinion; a woman to submit to it. We cease loving ourselves if no one loves us. In life, one must choose between boredom and suffering.

Love is a symbol of eternity: it wipes out all sense of time, destroying all memory of a beginning and all fear of an end.

Dating is easy; marriage is hard. Dating is pleasant; marriage is stressful. When dating, if an evening gets tiring, you can just kiss each other goodnight and split up awhile; when married, you're obliged to stay there through good times & bad. When dating and it no longer works, you say goodbye; when married and it no longer works, you go to court. HuffPost & Yahoo collected these examples, submitted by various people as tweets:

He changes

Dating: To fart, he goes to the bathroom.

Married: He farts in bed.

Dating: He holds it in.

Married: He answers with a fart.

Dating: He texts her about sex & fun date ideas.

Married: He texts her about breakfast-cereal iron content.

Dating: His text says, "Send me a pic."

Married: His text says, "Send me a pic of the tile you like."

Dating: He texts her, "What are you wearing?"

Married: He texts her, "Did the dog poop?"

Dating: He provides dinner, compliments, attentive conversation, foreplay.

Married: He says, "When I'm out of the bathroom, let's get naked."

Dating: He says, "Take you to a high-end steakhouse, baby!"

Married: He takes you to Mickey D's and, if you're lucky, some Dairy Queen.

Dating: He asks, "Wanna go to the bar?"

Married: He asks, "Can I go to the bar?"

Dating: He says, "It's cute you don't eat all the chicken off a wing."

Married: He says, "There's like \$1.75 worth of chicken left on those bones!"

Dating: He says, "It's so cute you never know where your keys are!"

Married: He says, "The key hook is right *here*. Use it! You're killing me."

She changes

Dating: During sex, she's sensual, totally in the moment, likes it.

Married: During sex, she asks, "Did you remember to remove the laundry?"

Dating: During sex, she says "Oh!"

Married: During sex, she asks, "Almost done? I must work tomorrow."

Dating: When he buys her gifts & flowers, she loves it.

Married: When he buys her gifts & flowers, she asks what it costs.

Dating: She holds his hand.

Married: She walks 5 feet in front of him and yells he parked too far away.

Dating: She gets an "I love you" text and thinks it's endearing.

Married: She gets an "I love you" text and wonders why he feels guilty.

Dating: She says, "We finish each other's sentences!"

Married: She says, "Stop interrupting me."

Dating: She gives sensual massage with lotion, for an hour.

Married: 1 hand, mostly knuckles, during commercials, just on birthday.

Dating: She says, "A thousand lifetimes with you wouldn't be enough!"

Married: She says, "OMG, you're the loudest cereal chewer on earth!"

Dating: She says, "Can't wait to see you soon. I bought new panties."

Married: She says, "OMG, the kitchen smells like ass! Any idea why?"

Dating: She says, "I could never stay mad at you."

Married: Silent glares for 3 weeks, because of fight about laundry basket.

Dating: She hopes he notices her new dress.

Married: She asks, "Anyone else notice the hair all over the bathroom?"

Dating: She asks, "Wanna try and make a baby and not succeed?"

Married: She asks, "Why did we succeed in making babies?"

Here are more comments:

Comment

Love is a temporary insanity curable by marriage.
 Marriage is the only war where you sleep with the enemy.
 Some women get all excited about nothing, then marry him.
 Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards.
 Marriage is like a hot bath: once you get used to it, it's not so hot.
 Marriage is a great institution, but I'm not ready for an institution.
 Marriage is a master, a mistress, and two slaves, making in all, two.
 It destroys one's nerves to be amiable every day to the same human being.
 All tragedies are finished by a death. All comedies are ended by a marriage.
 Marriage is like a cage: birds outside it despair to enter, and birds within, to escape.
 I never knew what real happiness was until I got married. Then it was too late.
 All marriages are happy. It's the living together afterward that causes all the trouble.
 Marry in the morning, so if it doesn't work out you haven't wasted a whole day.

Author

Ambrose Bierce
 F. Rochefoucauld
 Cher
 Benjamin Franklin
 Justin Thyme
 Mae West
 Ambrose Bierce
 Benjamin Disraeli
 Lord Byron
 Michel de Montaigne
 Max Kauffman
 Raymond Hull
 Mickey Rooney

"A man will always be prideful of his son until the son acts up. Then it's the wife's fault." — Dolly Parton

"Why worry whom to marry? Choose whom you may, you'll find you've got somebody else." — John Hay

"Why does a woman work 10 years to change a man's habits then complain he's not the man she married?"
 — Barbra Streisand

"Fairy tales always end in marriage because nobody wants to see what comes after: plodding on, year after year, with that same old soul. Yawnsville." — Belinda Luscombe in *Time* magazine's 6/13/2016 issue

"Marriage is like a pair of scissors: joined so they can't be separated, and often moving in opposite directions, but always punishing anyone who comes between them." — Sydney Smith

Here's advice for men:

"Marry a woman whom you'd choose as a friend if she were a man." — Joseph Joubert

"By all means, marry. If you get a good wife, you'll be happy. If you get a bad one, you'll become a philosopher." — Socrates

"It's harder to be a husband than a lover because it's harder to be witty every day than produce the occasional bon mot." — Honoré de Balzac

"You need just 2 things to keep your wife happy. The first is to let her think she's having her own way. The other is let her have it." — Lyndon B. Johnson

The Internet provides these anonymous quotes:

Marriage is a 3-ring circus: engagement ring, wedding ring, and suffering.
 Marriage is a mutual relationship if both parties know when to be mute.
 Marriage is like a violin: after the music's over, you still have the strings.
 Marriage is a romantic story, where the hero dies in the first chapter.
 Marriage isn't a word: it's a sentence.
 The longest sentence in the English language is "I do."
 Marriage is the only sport where the trapped animals have to buy the license.
 Marriage is like a mousetrap: those outside are trying to get in; those inside are trying to get out.
 When a couple marries, she expects he'll change, but he won't; he expects she won't change, but she will.
 If your husband and a lawyer were drowning and you had to choose, would you go to lunch or a movie?

According to the Internet, times change:

In the first year of marriage, the man speaks and the woman listens.
 In the second year, the woman speaks and the man listens.
 In the third year, they both speak and the neighbors listen.
 Marriage is a card game.
 To begin, all you need is 2 hearts and a diamond.
 By the end, you wish you had a club and a spade.

Joel Stein (*Time* magazine's cynical columnist) said:

Marriage isn't about happiness. It's about winning.

That's true in more ways than Joel realizes. Here's my analysis:

First you find somebody to marry. That's a competition. When you finally win that special someone who says "yes," you throw a victory party, called a "wedding," where all your friends come to celebrate and cheer your team.

For the next several years, you fight your spouse and try to win each argument. Arguments gradually increase from "who takes out the garbage" to "whose advice is garbage" to "whose beliefs are garbage" to "whose morals are garbage" to "who is garbage," with increasing wins & losses.

Finally, you get divorced (and try to win alimony) or one of you dies (and the survivor wins the inheritance).

Here's my version of a similar thought, based on what was printed in the *Union Leader* newspaper, apparently copied from Harlan Collins' *Today's Chuckle*:

Falling in love is an educational experience, like high school.
 It starts as **sports practice** (a game where you run to the other person, then away, then back again).
 Then it becomes a **chemistry experiment** (where you "mix" with the other person to enjoy the reaction).
 Finally, you suffer through **home economics** (where you share a home and argue about its budget).
 Then you can **switch to a new school** (get "divorced" and start the whole cycle all over again).

Songs

The song *Marry A Woman Uglier Than You* has this message:

If you're a man trying to find a woman to marry, you could be appreciated more by an ugly woman than a pretty one, so the ugly woman could give you more happiness.

Here are the song's lyrics (cleaned up by me):

Want to be happy, live a king's life?
 Don't make a pretty woman your wife!
 Soon as she marries, then she will start
 Doing bad things that break up your heart.
 Just when you think, wow, she's just for you,
 She will call someone else her love true.

So from my personal point of view,
 Marry a woman more ugly than *you!*

Just make an *ugly* woman your wife:
 You will be happy, rest of your life!
 She wouldn't diss you. No, not at all,
 Not show her bod to Peter and Paul.
 She wouldn't act in such a strange way
 Just to give neighbors something to say.

So from a *logical* point of view,
 Marry a woman more ugly than *you!*

It was a calypso recorded in 1934 by the "Duke of Iron" (whose real name was Cecil Anderson, from Trinidad).

Relationships come and go. After they've gone, we still mull on their memories, as expressed in the 1908 song, *I Wonder Who's Kissing Her Now*, with lyrics by Will Hough & Frank Adams. Here's my revised version:

You loved lots of girls in the sweet long-ago,
 And each has meant heaven to you.
 You vowed your affection to each one in turn
 And sworn to them all: you'd be true!

You kissed 'neath the moon while the world seemed in tune,
 Then left her, to hunt a new game;
 But has it occurred to you later, my boy,
 She's probably doing the same?

I wonder who's kissing her now,
 Wonder who's teaching her how,
 Wonder who looks in her eyes,
 Breathing sighs, telling lies.

Loves of today soon pass away,
 Leave with a smile and a tear.
 No, you can't know who is kissing her now
 Or whom *you'll* be kissing next year.

Dream about kissing her now.
 Dream about teaching her how.
 Dream it and cry. Give one last sigh.
 Wonder who's kissing her now.

In 1969, Dionne Warwick sang *I'll Never Fall in Love Again* (with words by Hal David, music by Burt Bacharach). Here's my abridged version:

What do you get when you fall in love?
A guy with a pin to burst your bubble.
That's what you get for all your trouble.
I'll never fall in love again.

What do you get when you kiss a guy?
You get enough germs to catch pneumonia,
Then he'll never phone ya.
I'll never fall in love again.

Don't tell me what it's all about,
'Cause I've been there and glad I'm out,
Out of those chains that bind you!
I remind you:

What do you get when you fall in love?
Just a life of pain & sorrow.
So at least until tomorrow
I'll never fall in love again.

Hear the full original at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=FzQBOBoPg04](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FzQBOBoPg04)

Tim Hawkins wrote a song called *Things You Don't Say To Your Wife*. Here's my cleaned-up version:

"Hey, honey, have you gained
Some weight in your rear end?
That dress you wear reminds
Me of my old girlfriend.
And where'd you get those shoes?
I think they're pretty lame.
Would you stop talking? 'Cause
I want to watch the game."

If you're a man who wants
A long and happy life,
Those are things you don't say to your wife.

"I planned a hunting trip
Next week on your birthday.
I didn't ask you, 'cause
I knew it was okay.
Go make some dinner, while
I watch this fishing show.
I taped it over our
Old wedding video."

If you're a man who wants
A long and happy life,
Those are things you don't say to your wife.

"Your cooking is okay
But not like mom would make.
The diamond in the ring
I bought you is a fake.
Your eyes look puffy, dear.
Perhaps you're feeling ill?
Happy anniversary!
I bought you a treadmill."

If you're a man who doesn't want
To get killed with a knife,
Those are things you don't say to your wife.

See him sing the original at:

[YouTube.com/watch?v=XpFD-kgQxnl](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpFD-kgQxnl)

30 ways to talk

Julia Malacoff chatted with marriage therapists and compiled a list of 30 ways a man should talk to his wife (or girlfriend) to make her happy.

Here's my summary of that list; I've rearranged it into categories:

Praise her appearance & sexiness

You look amazing.
I love how you look without makeup.
You're so sexy.
Last night was incredible.
No, you don't look fat.
Wow, that guy was checking you out!

Praise the rest of who she is

You know what I love about you?...
One of your best qualities is...
Your work is so important.
Thanks for taking care of that.

Show empathy for her

I'm sorry that happened to you.
I respect you because...

Say she's enjoyable to be with

I love you.
I love spending time with you.
I made plans for us for Saturday night.
You're the only one for me.

Offer to help her

How can I support you?
What do you need from me?
We're in this together.
I've got this.

Be honest & open

The truth is...
I'm feeling...
I feel I can tell you anything.

Try to understand her viewpoint

I don't understand, but I'm going to try.
You're right.
Can I get your perspective on this?

Let her talk

Tell me about your day.
What's the most meaningful experience you've ever had?
If you want to talk, I'm here.
(And finally, #30: when she wishes, shut up!)

Nonsexist language

To avoid sexism, feminists insist "firemen" should be called "firefighters"; "policemen" should be called "police officers," and "mailmen" should be called "mail carriers." But to be consistent, change every "man" to "person," like this:

<u>Sexist</u>	<u>Non-sexist (no "man")</u>
man	person
salesman	salesperson
fireman	fireperson
mailman	mailperson
con man	con person
horseman	horseperson
caveman	caveperson
freshman	freshperson
garbage man	garbage person
con man	con person
mankind	personkind
manhole	personhole
mango	persongo
mandolin	persondolin
maniac	personiac
manure	personure
many	persony
manage	personage
manager	personager
manual	personual

manicure	personicure
mantle	persontle
manners	personners
Man, oh man!	Person, oh person!
Man of La Mancha	Person of La Personcha
Manhattan	Personhattan
Manitoba	Personitoba
Mandy	Persondy
Mangia!	Persongia!
Norman	Norperson
Samantha	Sapersontha
German	Gerpersion
Roman	Roperson
romantic	ropersonic
human	huperson
woman	woperson
salamander	salapersonder
demand	depersond
emancipate	epersoncipate

Change "men" to "people":

<u>Sexist</u>	<u>Non-sexist (no "men")</u>
men	people
women	wopeople
hymen	hyepeople
semen	sepeople
amen	apeople
congressmen	congresspeople
Carmen	Carpeople
mend	peopled
mental	peopletal
mentor	peopletor
memento	mepeopleto
menstrual	peoplestrual
menstruate	peoplestruate
menopause	peopleopause
Mentos	Peopletos
Mendel	Peopledel
Mendelssohn	Peopledelssohn
tremendous	trepeoplelous
cement	cepeoplelet
element	elepeoplelet
elementary	elepeopleletary
comment	compeoplelet
government	governpeoplelet
department	departpeoplelet
environment	environpeoplelet
excitement	excitepeoplelet
excrement	excrepeoplelet
management	personagepeoplelet
commandment	compersondpeoplelet
amendment	apeopledpeoplelet
commencement	compeoplecepeoplelet
engagement	engagepeoplelet

Change "he" to "that person":

<u>Sexist</u>	<u>Non-sexist (no "he")</u>
he	that person
hero	that personro
helicopter	that personlicopter
herring	that personrring
hear	that personar
heaven	that personaven
hell	that personll
he-man	that person-person

Change "his" to "that person's own":

<u>Sexist</u>	<u>Non-sexist (no "his")</u>
his	that person's own
history	that person's owntory

All those changes are recommended by our Human Resources Department. Sorry, I mean "Huperson Resources Departpeoplet."