

## CONUNDRUMS: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

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Last fall, in my Sunday puzzle segment on NPR, I ran a two-week creative challenge involving conundrums. The object was to write an original conundrum starting "What is the difference between ...?," in which the answer involved a transposition of words. Change of spelling in the words was allowed.

More than 1,500 entries were submitted, many of them good and some of them brilliant. I judged them on sense, naturalness of wording, humor, elegance, and overall effect. Below, for the record, are my favorites.

The winner:

What is the difference between a priest and his dog? One wears pants and a collar while the other wears a collar and pants.

—Roxanne Abrams, Skokie, IL

Runners-up:

What's the difference between a plane taking off and an entomologist? One flies away while the other weighs a fly.

—Ellis Seiberling, New Orleans, LA

What is the difference between Sting and a retired E.P.A. official? One led the Police while the other policed the lead.

—Brett Hunkins, Okemos, MI

What's the difference between a twin and a nudist? One bears a likeness while the other likes a bareness.

—Mark Litten, Seminole, FL

What's the difference between a libertarian and a charitable pharmacist? One leaves you alone while the other loans you Aleve.

—Mark Mikula, Bristol, RI

What's the difference between a straight-A student and a car safety inspector? One breaks the curve on a test while the other tests the brakes on a curve.

—Amy Higgins, Ann Arbor, MI

Honorable mention:

What is the difference between a patient child at a Lionel store and one who teaches powerlifting? One waits to use the trains while the other trains to use the weights.

—Daniel Rosenblum, Teaneck, NJ

What is the difference between a mall security guard and a deli refrigerator? One locks the stores while the other stores the lox.

—Allan Richardson, Jacksonville, FL

What's the difference between a funny guy next door and a radius or ulna? One is humorous to a neighbor while the other is neighbor to a humerus.

—John Perri, Plano, TX

1) What's the difference between an unlucky hiker and a martyr? One crosses a bear while the other bears a cross.

2) What's the difference between a mountain climber and a dieter? One scales a face while the other faces a scale.

—Margie Shields, San Mateo, CA

What is the difference between a metal craftsman working for a funeral home and a laborer in England? One pounds urns while the other earns pounds.

—Judy Davis, Asheville, NC

What is the difference between a criminal and a guard? One fences watches while the other watches fences.

—Kerrie Serpa, Fort Walton Beach, FL

1) What is the difference between last week's quarterback and this week's kidney stone? One threw passes while the other passes through.

2) What is the difference between a sperm donor and a stockbroker? One shares cells while the other sells shares.

—Jim Serpa, Fort Walton Beach, FL

What's the difference between a coloratura soprano and an N.F.L. referee? One hits high notes while the other notes high hits.

—Anthony Gray, Closter, NJ

What's the difference between a pizzeria and John McEnroe? One serves slices while the other slices serves.

—Justin Rosales, Dumont, NJ

What is the difference between Charlie Brown and a shyster? One checks kites while the other kites checks.

—Dan Simmons, Salem, OR

What is the difference between a responsible drinker and an affectionate puppy? One handles his liquor while the other licks his handler.

—Loretta Srch, Iberia, MO

What's the difference between Prince Charles and rice at a wedding? One is heir to the throne while the other is thrown to the air.

—Darryl Nester, Bluffton, OH

1) What's the difference between a convict and an autograph? One is booked in a pen while the other is penned in a book.

2) What's the difference between a medical recruiter and a Photoshop expert? One picks the doctors while the other doctors the pics.

—Summer Beretsky Bukeavich, Williamsport, PA

What is the difference between a clothing store and a day trader? One stocks shorts while the other shorts stocks.

—Marshall Savitt, Albany, NY

What is the difference between a subprime loan crisis and a commemorative William and Kate wedding plate? One roils the markets while the other markets the royals.

—Leah Cole, Quincy, MA

What is the difference between a tangled ball of string and a brave knight? One is a frayed knot while the other is not afraid.

—Bryce Mayo, Gillette, WY

What is the difference between an era without war and a sprig of a certain herb? One is a time of peace while the other is a piece of thyme.

—Michael Boone, Agoura Hills, CA

What's the difference between a panicked driver and a radio deejay? One hits the brakes while the other breaks the hits.

—Alan Nyquist, Keego Harbor, MI

What's the difference between a drill instructor and a dog trainer? One barks a command while the other commands a bark.

—Manuel Bass, Fullerton, CA

What's the difference between a marathon race official and Arthur Ochs Sulzberger Jr.? One times the runs while the other runs the Times.

—Kevin Devine, Marlborough, MA

What is the difference between the I.R.S. and a flood? One levies taxes while the other taxes levees.

—Brian Dontchos, Seattle, WA

What is the difference between a successful student and a food safety inspector? One meets the grade while the other grades the meat.

—Janice Gargan, Southern Pines, NC

What is the difference between a choral director and a detective? One leads a choir while the other acquires a lead.

—Curtis Johnson, Denver, CO

What's the difference between a Vandal and a Manhattan shopper? One sacks Rome while the other roams Saks.

—Andy Calderwood, Santa Barbara, CA

What is the difference between a gas station and a gymnasium in Prague? One is a place to check a tire while the other is a place to tire a Czech.

—Bruce Weitzman, Sherman Oaks, CA

What's the difference between a bus driver and a tissue? One knows the stops while the other stops the nose.

—Miles Histan, Portland, OR

What is the difference between a renowned attorney and a storm drain? One is a great suer while other is a sewer grate.

—Ryan McNeill, Watkinsville, GA

What is the difference between a ship and the Rose Bowl Court? One floats on the waves while the other waves on the floats.

—Mike Strong, Mechanicsburg, PA

What's the difference between a power hitter and the operator of an outdoor movie theater? One drives in runs while the other runs drive-ins.

—Steve Feldman, Framingham, MA

What's the difference between a beach bum abroad and the lord of the manor? One surfs overseas while the other oversees serfs.

—John Byrne, Medford, MA

1) What is the difference between a traveler too sick to go and a husband with his feet in the way? One misses the trip while the other trips the Mrs.

2) What is the difference between a happily married working man and a man getting a divorce? One kisses his wife goodbye upon leaving his house while the other kisses his house goodbye upon leaving his wife.

—Patrick Berry, Jasper, AL

Several more entries I liked that were repeated:

- What is the difference between a jeweler and a jailer? One sells watches while the other watches cells.
- What is the difference between a break-dancer and a museum curator? One busts a move while the other moves a bust.
- What is the difference between a mariner and narcotics agents? One sails the seas while the others seize the sales.
- What is the difference between a politician and an Indian restaurant chef? One curries favor while the other favors curry.

