

SOMETHING FOR EVERY PUN

More (Mostly) Original Wordplay Deployed in Real-Life Situations

DON HAUPTMAN
New York, New York
donhauptman@nyc.rr.com

Growing up, like most kids, I enthusiastically read comic books. In one story I recall, a youngster is playing detective, snooping around with a magnifying glass. “Hmm,” he muses. “This has all the earmuffs of a crime!” I had to ask my parents to explain the joke. Maybe that was the origin of my lifelong obsession with puns.

Today, having written two books and more than 60 articles on the subject, I’ve discovered that most people appreciate and enjoy the genre. But a few, alas, do not. I sadly maintain a short list of half a dozen friends who insist they dislike puns and/or spoonerisms and/or wordplay and/or recreational linguistics. (An admission I make with “and/or candor.”) For this minority, it’s just not their cup of . . . *me!*

Below, as in past installments of this series, are puns adroitly used in everyday situations. As is my policy, I’ve endeavored to confirm originality via Google. Where I was anticipated, I culled those specimens. But it isn’t always easy to track down all possible variations. In some cases, even when my research turned up earlier sources, I reasoned that my execution was sufficiently new and creative to justify inclusion. And in a few instances, I found precisely one match (a phenomenon called a “Googlewhack,” though I’m liberally interpreting the term). In such cases, even when the setup and context differ substantially from mine, I supply credits via footnote.

First, however, are examples of the deleted witticisms I had thought I had coined, then found myself beaten to the punch by multiple clever people: *duffel kerfuffle*, *he knows on which side his bread is battered* (apparently an archaic form of the cliché), *holier-than-cow attitude*, *it puts the fear of cod into you*, *needless to sigh*, *quotidian meridian* (a website), *that dish is both spicy and pricey*, *the scammer and spammer in the slammer*, *you must be sidekick*.

Now here are the originals, more or less:

- At a campus-like tourist attraction in another city, my companion and I were about to enter a building, when we saw a sign warning that it was not yet open to the public. “Whew!” I exclaimed. “We were on the precipice of trespass.”
- I favor a certain style of corduroy pants that can be difficult to find. I sometimes tease salespeople by announcing that I’m launching a crusade with the slogan: “Save the wide wales!”

- In an e-mail message, a friend asked if he could expect to see me at a forthcoming party. I explained that I hadn't received an invitation. Diplomatically extricating myself from this awkward situation, I added, with a subtle pun: "At all events, I have other plans for Sunday."
- When another friend mentioned yet another celebratory invitation from someone we both know, I mischievously wrote back: "Speak of the revel!"
- Preceding a forwarded e-zine: "If you're overwhelmed and prefer not to receive these, just say 'avuncular'!"
- I confided to an acquaintance that I've been contemplating a major purchase. How much do I plan to spend? "The sky's the litmus."
- Asked to blurb a book, I procrastinated with this excuse: "Lately, many tasks have been regrettably delayed, unless I'm able to screw my courage to the clicking place."
- Attending a lunch seminar in casual clothes, I was discomfited to discover that most males were wearing jackets and ties. Fortunately, I encountered a stranger who was attired as informally as I was. Introducing myself, I quipped: "I thought I was in for a dressing down for dressing down."
- When I sent someone a reminder, I received a slightly irritated response, construing the gesture as critical. Attempting to make light of the matter, I remarked: "How prickly we forget!"
- In Manhattan, where I live, steakhouses are proliferating. My observation: "Nice trend if you can set it!"
- Periodic attempts are made to revive Detroit's pummeled auto industry. Despite some success, everyone acknowledges that it will never be what it once was. Hence the saying: "You can't go chrome again."
- Though now retired as an advertising copywriter, I recently mentioned to a business acquaintance a basic marketing principle I had learned early in my career. "These venerable rules are still valid and 'sticky' . . . so you might say that everything old is glue again."

Speaking of challenges to originality, one pun I Googled generated 11,000 matches: *You must be choking*. It would have been appropriate for a much-publicized incident earlier this year: Dr. Heimlich, witnessing an emergency, seized the moment and applied his eponymous lifesaving maneuver—with his own hands for the first time. Eleven thousand matches! Clearly, coming up with truly original material is no cakewalk—or pastry perambulation!

Googlewhack credits—where the pun generated exactly one match: Title of this article: tweet by @Allisomething. Litmus: Eric Darton. Chrome: Eric Brown, curator of—not making this up—a toaster museum. Glue: Post by poopnach on the site of YouTube celebrity Jenna Marbles.