

00:00:00 John Hodgman Host Here is my very final word on why a hotdog is not a sandwich. And after this, we shall not speak of it again. Nor need you send me things about it. Rest assured, all of your questions, your counter-arguments, and your concerns shall be addressed. Bailiff Jesse Thorn—*[laughs]* you may want to go and get some booze from the Mongolian hot pot place. 'Cause this is gonna be a minute.

*[Jesse laughs quietly.]*

Okay, look. About hotdogs, I get it. I understand why you are upset. It looks like meat inside of bread! I mean it is meat inside of bread. It resembles a sandwich in so many ways, it seems profoundly counterintuitive to say that a hotdog is not a sandwich. So counterintuitive that it is obviously disruptive and infuriating to a lot of you, and I'm sorry.

And look, again, you have some heroes on your side. Stephen Colbert is out there every week pretty much, stumping for the hotdog being a sandwich. And he is very smart! He's a national treasure, and I wanna be on his show again! So I take my career in my hands when I say that it is not a sandwich.

And Stephen also put this question to no less than Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg! Another national treasure! And she concluded that a hotdog is a sandwich, too, albeit somewhat reluctantly. I think she was put on the spot. I mean they're both my heroes, but I would argue that distracting Ruth Bader Ginsburg in any way from her primary mission right now, which is to be alive—that is an act of treason. Sorry, Stephen.

00:01:41 John Hodgman Host The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, as I mentioned before, my personal standby—and even our old friend of the podcast Emily Brewster, from that same dictionary!—maintain that a hotdog is a sandwich. And I would like to think that they are doing this specifically and only to troll me, John Hodgman. As that would mean I am the center of the universe!

But one thing that I have learned from doing this podcast, *[stifles laughter]* is that if every white man thinks he is the center of the universe, it might mean that none of us is. And I honestly have no doubt that Emily and Merriam-Webster—which I call Mer-Web—they truly believe what they are saying. They believe their conclusions.

So, yes. You could argue that the dictionary definition of a sandwich includes a hotdog. But then you would be the kind of person who starts an argument with "The dictionary definition of a sandwich, blah blah blah blah," and you don't wanna be that person. Dictionaries offer terrible evidence for any argument that you wanna propose.

And yet for all of the support that you might feel you have in your mistaken belief, you're still wrong. A hotdog is not a sandwich.

"But—but—but—! Meat in bread!" Yeah, I get it! It really does look a lot like a sandwich. *[Stifles laughter.]* But just because a thing resembles a thing, or even shares similar cultural or literal genetic DNA, that does not make the two things the same thing. You wouldn't say it about identical twins! You wouldn't say it about

monkeys and apes! And you don't need to say it about sandwiches, which are a kind of convenient hand food involving meat and bread, or hotdogs, which are a different kind OF THAT.

00:03:20 John

Host

"But, but, but, meat in bread." Yeah, I get it. Sometimes the correct answer is more than what you see with your eyes. What I'm saying may seem counterintuitive, but in fact my journey to the ruling that a hotdog is not a sandwich began intuitively! When the question was first put to me in the pages of the *New York Times* magazine.

I did not know at the time that that question had been roiling around in sports Twitter and on ESPN for years. I didn't know about that, for obvious reasons. It was all new to me. But I understood in that moment—intuitively—no, a hotdog is not a sandwich! And you know it, too. The stronger you defend the sandwich-ness of the hotdog, I think the more clearly you feel in your heart there's something wrong here. It just feels different.

The reason we have this conversation is 'cause it's hard to call it a sandwich. And that is why, as is often brought up in this debate, if you were told that sandwiches were being served at a party, and you went to that party, and the host opened the door and showed you a silver platter of hotdogs, you would hate that person. You would think that that person is some weird dude who made up a whole new system just to be contrarian, and is using you to make a dumb show-off-y point, and you'd be right.

Intuitively we know there's something different about a hotdog. And that's why the question is so compelling. But rather than just get into a fight on the Internet about it, I decided to try to figure out "What is it that is different?" If there is anything! I decided to apply the basics of deductive logic that I learned in seventh grade, and have never thought of again, and barely remember.

00:04:58 John

Host

I mean, by no means am I a logician. [*Stifles laughter.*] But I did do some quick Wikipedia research on Karl Popper's concept of falsifiability, and I appreciate it. That to get this right, I must conclude a priori that a hotdog is a sandwich, unless—unless—I could find some disqualifying condition. Some quality that hotdogs have that sandwiches, in all of their many varied forms, do not share. At all.

And it took me a while to find the distinction. Obviously, it's meat and bread. We got it. Obviously temperature is not the difference, 'cause there are plenty of hot sandwiches. Does the fact that the bread is a hinged roll make a difference? Not really. I'm not gonna risk the wrath of Philadelphia by saying a hoagie isn't a sandwich, and it's the same.

Does it matter that the hotdog is nestled in the bun, rather than sandwiched between two pieces of bread? No. Because there are definitely open-faced sandwiches. They're weird, and they pretty much defeat the purpose of sandwiches, [*stifles laughter*] but nonetheless we call them sandwiches.

And by the way, anyone who steps to me with the argument that sandwiches are sandwiches because things are sandwiched in them? Can immediately step away from me, in shame!

"Sandwiched," the adjective, follows the sandwich! It is derived from the sandwich! That's where we got the adjective from! You're using the premise to prove itself, which is the true meaning of begging the question. Maybe. Maybe it is. I'm not sure. Don't—don't write me letters.

00:06:25 John Host

Then finally I struck upon it. It is a small, almost meaningless, and not particularly exciting distinction. But nonetheless, after a lot of hypothetical stress-testing, I determined the distinction to be true: A hotdog is not a sandwich, because you would never. cut it. in. half.

Cut-in-half-ibility. Genial share-ibility! Eat some now and save some for later-ibility! Divide and serve with a cup of soup-ibility! Are all intrinsic to sandwiches. Even subs! Heroes. Hoagies. Grinders. Wedges.

Sure, you can physically cut a hotdog in half. And maybe you would do so under the tyranny of a child. But one would never routinely cut a hotdog in half, in a public setting, without expecting and deserving some looks.

To me, this satisfied that a hotdog is, literally and figuratively, a singular thing unto itself. Indivisible. Unique. It's part of why a hotdog is a hotdog, even when there is no bun at all.

And it's also why a hamburger is not a sandwich, by the way. It's a hamburger. The top of a whole separate genre of ground meat—and ground other stuff—burgers that it created, that you also do not cut in half; DO NOT @ ME.

00:07:54 John Host

Now, you may question my logic. You may say that I've applied Karl Popper's concept of falsifiability incorrectly, and I bet you're right. I bet I don't understand it correctly. But don't write me letters. 'Cause I'm still right.

I'm still right because tacos... are not hotdogs. And they are not sandwiches, either. They come down from a different culinary cultural and historical tradition. Just like sandwiches do! Sandwiches have a history! They were invented of course by the Earl of Sandwich, who called for—guess what?—meat between two slices of bread! So that he could eat with one hand while gambling, and not get his cards all greasy.

Now this all happened in 17-buh-buh-buh-buh-buh, who cares? I'm not looking it up, 'cause it's probably all apocryphal, anyway. But what we do know, and the point, is that the sandwich came to the United States in the 18th century, from England, just like the founding fathers... and the sandwich also owned slaves, and hated taxes. That last part isn't true.

The hotdog... did not make it here to the United States until the turn of the 19th, into the 20th century! And of course it did not come from England. It came from Germany. Frankfurt, specifically! Get it? The frankfurter was made from pork or beef, or a combination. The wiener was made from pork and beef, and was longer and skinnier, and it came from Vienna. They were sold by German immigrants in the expanding cities of the booming Midwest. They were not parlor

food! They were not aristocratic gambling food! They were not tea sandwiches! They were street food, in the burgeoning American city that was full of new ethnic immigrants to this country.

And they didn't even have buns, until the Saint Louis World's Fair in 1904—maybe also apocryphal. But before that you ate them with special white gloves, which also feels apocryphal, but is definitely the way I'm gonna eat hotdogs from now on.

00:09:50 John Host

Oh, wait, Shaun from Australia! The gloves kept your fingers from getting greasy! Is a hotdog plus gloves a sandwich? No.

Now, Donald Trump and a bunch of other creeps tell a story. That white Europeans are the same. They're all the same group of people, aligned against... all of the other people they dislike.

But in fact at this time in history, his people—the Drumpfs, or whatever—the German-American ancestors of Donald Trump. They were the untrustworthy, sub-human "other" in this country. And along with all the other ethnic immigrants, right? Who were not from England or Ireland or Scotland. And even the Irish and Scot white people were considered to be lesser.

And especially leading up to and into the First World War, German Americans anglicized their names to avoid discrimination. Their neighborhoods were routinely subject to anti-German raids, and riots from nativist hordes.

00:10:47 John Host

Sandwich people and hotdog people were not the same people. Every early menu that you have sent me over the years that lists hotdog sandwiches, or hamburger, quote, "sandwiches"? You send that to me as though that's establishing historical precedent. But I am convinced—and I'm convinced I'm right—that those restaurants in early America added "sandwich" after "hotdog" or "hamburgers" to make them seem like sandwiches! To make them more familiar to their clientele! Because at that time, hotdogs and hamburgers were exotic! They were suspect! They were foreign food. If you can believe it.

To erase this fact is to perpetuate a myth of historic unified virtuous whiteness that is being used as a cudgel today against more recent immigrants and people of color.

Now, *[stifles laughter]* I'm not saying that calling a hotdog a sandwich is racist. But it erases important and interesting distinctions! Complexities! Histories. It's like calling a burrito a wrap. And you're doing it in service of what? So two dudes in a dorm or chatroom can show each other how clever they are? Is it worth it?

Every culture has a tradition of putting meat or filling in bread. Or, you know, cornmeal, or some other starch. There are lots of ways, using sophistry, to prove that the hotdog is a taco, is a burrito, is a pizza, is a dumpling, is a pupusa, is an arepa, is a kreplach, is a handful of wat stew and injera bread, is a samosa, is a sandwich.

00:12:29 John Host

And of course there are charts that go along with it that are constantly being sent to me and Jesse on Twitter. I love you all, but follow that path and you find your way at Laura's dump party. That

path leads to injustice. If a hotdog is a sandwich, then all is sandwich, and that's not fair.

We are all human. We all eat meat, or filling, in bread. It is wonderful to celebrate that universality. And we may, in fact, want to spend a little more time at recognizing each other's humanity in real ways, rather than fighting on the Internet about hotdogs and sandwiches, a thing that does not matter to anyone! And certainly does not matter to the many, many people who do not know where their next hotdog or sandwich is coming from! It is a luxury argument that does not matter.

And because it doesn't matter... go ahead! Do it! Call a hotdog a sandwich if you want to! I can't stop you, and doesn't matter, ultimately. But I won't stop saying that a hotdog is not a sandwich. Because this small, little bit does matter.

It is okay for things to be different things. It is okay for language to evolve. It is okay to accept changes in language, in custom, and in culture, and not resist them. It is okay to acknowledge something is different, and to appreciate it without giving it a name that we like better, or forcing it into a category that makes us more comfortable.

You are you. You are not me. A hotdog is a hotdog. It is not a sandwich. We are all in this together, but we're all in it separately, too. It can be both. I don't say a hotdog is not a sandwich only because it's true, but because everything is better that way.

*[Beat.]*

I shall never speak of this again.

00:14:35 Sound Effect Sound Effect *[Three gavel bangs.]*