



# Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us

*Joe Palca*

Download now

[Click here](#) if your download doesn't start automatically

# Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us

Joe Palca

**Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us** Joe Palca

**Two crackerjack science journalists from NPR look at why some things (and some people!) drive us crazy**

It happens everywhere?offices, schools, even your own backyard. Plus, seemingly anything can trigger it?cell phones, sirens, bad music, constant distractions, your boss, or even your spouse. We all know certain things get under our skin. Can science explain why? Palca and Lichtman take you on a scientific quest through psychology, evolutionary biology, anthropology, and other disciplines to uncover the truth about being annoyed. What is the recipe for annoyance? For starters, it should be temporary, unpleasant, and unpredictable, like a boring meeting or mosquito bites

- Gives fascinating, surprising explanations for why people react the way they do to everything from chili peppers to fingernails on a blackboard
- Explains why irrational behavior (like tearing your hair out in traffic) is connected to worthwhile behavior (like staying on task)
- Includes tips for identifying your own irritating habits!

How often can you say you're happily reading a really Annoying book? The insights are fascinating, the exploration is fun, and the knowledge you gain, if you act like you know everything, can be really annoying.

## **From the Authors: What Annoys You?**

Consider the following story, posted on the *Ghana News* website on February 11, 2011:

### ***Annoying 'alarm' was missing parrot***

*A woman who complained a 'fire alarm' had been sounding non-stop for seven days has discovered the noise was made by a missing parrot.*

*Shanna Sexton, 25, said she was "pushed to the edge" by the high-pitched tone and even called in workmen to try and locate the problem. But the mystery was solved when she finally spotted the African Grey Congo parrot perched on a water butt as she hung out washing in the garden. The noisy parrot, called Sammi, had escaped from neighbor Louise Ledger's house a week earlier and spent seven days in the garden mimicking a smoke alarm.*

*Miss Sexton, from Torquay, Devon, said: "I'd been hearing the noise for ages. I looked around the house checking everything. I even pulled out the washing machine. "In the end a workman said it sounded like it may be my smoke alarm. We had problems with our smoke alarm before and I thought 'here we go again'. It was driving me mad but I just could not find out where it was coming from."*

This could well be the quintessential story highlighting what science can tell about why things are annoying. It captures the three U's. Unpredictable, unpleasant and of uncertain duration.

Unpredictable: Ms. Sexton couldn't tell when the noise would occur. Every so often Sammi would let loose with the high-pitched squeal of a smoke alarm, but if his schedule for shrieking wasn't truly random, at least it was known only to him.

Unpleasant: A smoke alarm is designed to be unpleasant. If smoke detectors made a sound like tinkling chimes or chirping birds, we would simply ignore it. No, the idea is to get you up off the couch to shut off that annoying racket before you are engulfed in flames.

Uncertain duration: The reason Ms. Sexton was “pushed to the edge” was there was no way of knowing when the sound would stop. After each screech ended, she must sure have said to herself, “that’s got to be the last one,” only to find to her dismay it wasn’t.

With Ms. Sexton’s troubles in mind, we asked a few of our colleagues, at NPR and beyond, what annoys them.

**Christopher Joyce, NPR Science Correspondent**

My personal most annoying annoyance is worse than yours. It's worse than anybody's. You know why? Because it nails me when I'm asleep. You, you can be annoyed all day long but you can go to bed at night knowing that except for a noisy neighbor or his dog, or a mosquito in the air, or a lumpy bed, you've escaped the daily mine-field of annoyance. Not me.

No, when I go to bed, I enter the annoyed man's nightmare--the recurring dream. The details change but the theme is always the same. I'm trying to get somewhere important. I'm trying to catch a plane, and time is running out. Trying to get to a meeting or a class on time. Trying to find a bathroom, urgently, of course. Worst of all, trying to rendezvous with a beautiful woman. Oh, yes, that's when it's most annoying.

Because what happens, every time, is that something keeps me from getting there. I'm driving and I get lost. My cab driver stops to get lunch and disappears. There's an accident on the freeway. The public toilets are under repair and out of service. Once there was an earthquake and I had to get out of a car and walk (I think that was a woman-rendezvous dream).

At first, I struggle diligently to find an alternate route--after all, I'm a responsible person, at least in my dreams. I hail down another cab, book another flight. But soon enough it dawns on me that whatever I do is hopeless. I am foiled, again and again. Sorry, flights canceled due to bad weather. Road work ahead. Bridge down. Detour.

Now, I've traveled a lot in my life, all over the place, in war zones and Amazonian rainforests and Tibetan highlands and on rickshaws and in dugout canoes. I KNOW about washed out bridges and drunken bus drivers and chain-smoking customs agents who'll wait days until you come up with the bribe. My subconscious is LOADED with examples with which to impale a traveler like a butterfly pinned to a patch of felt.

Eventually, I reach a stage of weary acceptance. I'm not going to make it to my destination. I realize I'm in that dream again, I'm asleep, and that jerk who lives somewhere in my head is doing this on purpose, writing the script as I sleep, making sure that whatever clever solution I come up, he'll trump it. And there's nothing I can do because that jerk is me...the annoying me, annoying me. Gotta go now...got a plane to catch.

**Sandra Blakeslee, coauthor, *Sleight of Mind***

One of the things that truly irritates me is my local NPR station's broadcast of All Things Considered. The NPR content is excellent but the local "anchor" has the worst news delivery style I have ever heard. Her voice drives me crazy. I have to turn down the sound whenever she starts talking. Equally irritating is the fact that this station has been running the same "ads" (restaurant, physicians etc who pay to tout their support) for what feels like years. Another woman with a chipmunk voice (almost as bad as the news person) says the

same things over and over and over and over and over and over. I think one tunes in to the news programs for novelty. When the station never changes it's between NPR segment content, it makes me want to scream. Bottom line, I guess the annoying things are the bad radio voices and the repetition. I will try to think of more examples (I probably don't have to mention the torture of going to the US Post office to get anything accomplished.)

**Cornelia Dean, Science Reporter, the *New York Times***

What makes me crazy is people saying less when they mean fewer, loan when they mean lend, etc. Then I am annoyed at myself for objecting to what are, in effect, real life examples of some of the features that have made English the irresistible language of the world -- its mutability and immunity to the dictates of any "academy."

**Sarah Brookhart, Deputy Director, Association for Psychological Science**

For me, public transportation is teeming with annoyances. Like bacteria on the handrails, the loud one-sided phone conversations about what to have for dinner are part of the deal when you're in a subway car at rush hour. Put on headphones and tune it out. But I could probably ignore a colony of deadly microbes more easily than I can ignore the guy sitting next to me clipping his fingernails. Cranking up the iPod doesn't help. Time stands still. Agonizing suspense after each clip. Has he stopped? Or will there be another click of the teeny guillotine? Then, that unmistakable sound, and a half-moon sliver sails through the air in slow-motion. Worse, I can see it land on the arm of the woman across the aisle; she has no clue, but my skin is crawling with disgust. Sarah Brookhart

**R. Alta Charo, Warren P. Knowles Professor of Law and Bioethics, the University of Wisconsin at Madison**

"Thank you for choosing Company, Inc. Para la información en español, diga el español o marque el número 2." There is absolutely nothing annoying about the offer to handle my business in Spanish. What does make me crazy is the certain knowledge that everything after this, whether in English, Spanish or Esperanto, will also involve pressing keys to select from among inappropriate choices, with a less than even chance that after four or five or ten such selections I will actually get to a person. Come to think of it, even getting to a person is annoying, as almost every time they then ask me to recite all the information I've been punching in. ("Using your telephone keypad, please enter your ten digit telephone number, starting with the area code."). First, don't their computer screens already show them this information? Second, why ask for it when the odds are better than 3-1 that the live person finally talking on the phone doesn't have answers more individualized than the automated phone system or on-line FAQs? I know! Why not have every company simply send me the training manual for their customer (non)service representatives, and I can just select from the standardized answers and recite them to myself, without the bother of pressing all those keys? I can recite to myself "I apologize for the wait. My call is important to me. Please hold and I will be with me in a moment." What's really great about this solution is that I am indeed the representative. So not only do I know I am busy (probably doing email while on-hold) but I can choose precisely which moment I will choose to answer my own call! The maddening uncertainty of the waiting, the irritating not- knowing how many keys I'll be pressing, all this is magically erased.

 [Download Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us ...pdf](#)



## Download and Read Free Online Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us Joe Palca

---

### From reader reviews:

#### **Victoria Williams:**

What do you with regards to book? It is not important along? Or just adding material when you really need something to explain what yours problem? How about your extra time? Or are you busy person? If you don't have spare time to complete others business, it is give you a sense of feeling bored faster. And you have extra time? What did you do? All people has many questions above. They should answer that question simply because just their can do which. It said that about e-book. Book is familiar in each person. Yes, it is right. Because start from on pre-school until university need this kind of Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us to read.

#### **Michael Hill:**

Is it an individual who having spare time then spend it whole day simply by watching television programs or just laying on the bed? Do you need something totally new? This Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us can be the respond to, oh how comes? It's a book you know. You are therefore out of date, spending your extra time by reading in this completely new era is common not a nerd activity. So what these publications have than the others?

#### **Jose Tiernan:**

Within this era which is the greater man or woman or who has ability in doing something more are more important than other. Do you want to become among it? It is just simple method to have that. What you need to do is just spending your time little but quite enough to have a look at some books. On the list of books in the top collection in your reading list is usually Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us. This book that is qualified as The Hungry Hills can get you closer in turning into precious person. By looking way up and review this book you can get many advantages.

#### **Delores Saenz:**

Reading a guide make you to get more knowledge from it. You can take knowledge and information coming from a book. Book is prepared or printed or highlighted from each source this filled update of news. On this modern era like now, many ways to get information are available for you. From media social similar to newspaper, magazines, science book, encyclopedia, reference book, story and comic. You can add your knowledge by that book. Isn't it time to spend your spare time to spread out your book? Or just seeking the Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us when you necessary it?

**Download and Read Online Annoying: The Science of What Bugs  
Us Joe Palca #3SPZNQT6MGD**

## **Read Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us by Joe Palca for online ebook**

Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us by Joe Palca Free PDF d0wnl0ad, audio books, books to read, good books to read, cheap books, good books, online books, books online, book reviews epub, read books online, books to read online, online library, greatbooks to read, PDF best books to read, top books to read Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us by Joe Palca books to read online.

### **Online Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us by Joe Palca ebook PDF download**

**Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us by Joe Palca Doc**

**Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us by Joe Palca Mobipocket**

**Annoying: The Science of What Bugs Us by Joe Palca EPub**