



Gear up for National, Punctuation; Day-Friday:

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By Paul Campbell

Probably most of our readers have already made plans for this big event, but just in case, I'm reminding you that Friday, Sept. 24 is the annual celebration of National Punctuation Day.

To commemorate this festive occasion, I have placed some extra punctuation in the headline of this column, when in fact no punctuation is needed. Perhaps this makes up for the many bloggers out there who use no punctuation at all when indeed a few commas and periods are needed.

I'm amazed about some people who, commenting on a certain article in the Reflex, blog 75 words without using any punctuation. This is particularly alarming when one realizes that some of these are high school students who are supposed to be learning grammar.

Not surprisingly, National Punctuation Day was founded seven years ago by a former newspaper reporter, Jeff Rubin. According to a press release, schools, teachers, students, businesses and nonprofits have participated in the event with special activities, banners, punctuation mark-shaped cookies and "presentations that explain that a semi-colon is not a surgical procedure."

"Successful people have good communication skills, and that includes knowing how to write properly," Rubin says. "Punctuation counts. A misplaced comma can alter the meaning of a message."

Rubin urges people to participate in National Punctuation Day by:

- Becoming familiar with punctuation rules and issues;
- Organizing punctuation activities at your school, library or office;
- Sharing punctuation peeves with founder Jeff Rubin at Jeff@NationalPunctuation-Day.com;
- Sending photos of incorrectly punctuated signage to Rubin.

I particularly like those last two ideas. One of my pet peeves is the use of "its" versus "it's." In most cases the apostrophe is used in the possessive, such as "This is Paul's

cat.” However, when it comes to the word “it,” this is not the case. Its is possessive such as, “The dog chased its tail,” and it’s means “it is,” as in “it’s going to rain today.”

Even some journalists make this mistake. The English language is not always consistent, so it is understandable that many people get confused.

Various newspapers have different styles and often cut down on punctuation to save space or to move the reader along faster. For instance, while officially we should say, “Bill and his wife, Kate, live in Long Lane,” some newspapers now say “Bill and his wife Kate live in Long Lane.”

Unrelated to punctuation, I have been a devoted reader of The Wall Street Journal for decades, but the one style they have that drives me crazy is the use of Mr. in front of everybody’s name. After the first usage of, say, Bill Clinton’s name, we at the Reflex (and nearly all newspapers) just refer to him as Clinton. But the Journal uses Mr. Clinton, which in my opinion slows down the reader, aside from irritating me greatly. The WSJ will even say, when talking about Saddam Hussein, “Mr. Hussein.”

As far as signs are concerned, I’ve seen a couple of signs over stores that say, “Antique’s,” as if the antique possessed something; it should be simply “Antiques.” In any event, I urge all readers to have a good time on National Punctuation Day, but please don’t go on a punctuation binge; you could get arrested. Also, don’t drive and punctuate.