

# National Punctuation Day Raises a Mighty Bracket



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Cupcakes celebrating punctuation marks - National Punctuation Day

*National Punctuation Day trumpets proper usage every September 24. Other language pundits also use the day to promote pet language projects.*

Following up on its past success with a punctuation-oriented baking contest, 2010's National Punctuation Day is gearing up with a haiku-writing competition. Celebrated each September 24 since 2004, NPD seeks to educate people on how to correctly use the thirteen major punctuation marks in the English language. The day is also used by champions of more obscure punctuation and usage rules to advance their own agendas, such as returning the interrobang to favor.

## Thirteen Punctuation Marks

**National Punctuation Day**, "a celebration of the lowly comma, correctly used quotation marks, and other proper uses of periods, semicolons, and the ever-mysterious ellipsis," is focused on the thirteen punctuations which most often make their mark in English. Organized by area of confusion, these are the:

- [Apostrophe](#)
- Brackets and parentheses
- Colon, semicolon, and comma
- Dash and hyphen
- Ellipsis and period
- Exclamation point and question mark
- Quotation mark

The NPD site provides basic instructional information on all of these marks. For example, it guides readers through the differences between a dash and a hyphen, and when each of these visually similar marks should be used. Computer users sometimes refer to these by the names "em dash" and "en dash," which only serves to make the differences less clear; the official NPD haiku on the subject memorializes the problem:

Em dash or en dash.

On typewriters it's easy,

On keyboards, less so.

### Haiku and baking contests for punctuation

National Punctuation Day promotions typically involve a punctuation-oriented competition. Pictures of entries in the baking competition are available throughout the site, showing mouth-watering punctuation pizzas, cupcakes, cookies, and other treats. Visitors are also invited to download the recipe for NPD's official meat loaf.

Perhaps to make the games more internet-friendly, this year punctuation haiku are being accepted until September 30, 2010. Although the original Japanese rules are slightly more complex, haiku in English are poems which have three lines and seventeen syllables; the first and third lines have five each and the middle has the remaining seven. The example above was provided by writer Craig Harrison to inspire participants in this contest, to which this writer submitted three for consideration. One of them pursues a similar theme to the one reprinted:

Hyphen versus dash:

so when do I use the short-

er, over line breaks?

### Advancing a Punctuation Agenda

The idea of a National Punctuation Day is also used to promote other punctuation messages, both by the day's organizers and others.

- Founder Jeff Rubin, in his guise as "Punctuation Man," has announced on the NPD site that he has broken with the Associated Press by endorsing the serial comma (which is used to separate the last item of a list for clarity, the need for which can be seen in the example, "Dedicated to my parents, Rush Limbaugh and God.")
- Blogger and font expert Ivan Gettner recommended using the day to [revitalize the Interrobang](#) in 2008
- In 2010, Boston Globe writer Jan Freeman used it as a platform to argue against a [complex comma usage rule](#)

Although not all of the ideas tossed about fit neatly into National Punctuation Day's desire to educate on the proper application of the thirteen major punctuation marks, undoubtedly these debates raise the awareness of the day as a whole, and perhaps even help sell some of the coffee mugs and other doodads which fund the venture.

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