



Anyone who reads, whether it's pricey best-seller books to newspapers, magazines or online blogs, knows that Americans are getting sloppy about punctuation.

Computer programs offering spell checks and punctuation/grammar programs also can add to the problem, with conflicting and contradictory "corrections" to our efforts.

So what's a society to do to avoid the eventual demise of proper English writing?

To the rescue is Jeff Rubin, a man with Mighty Mouse zeal and Lady Gaga energy. His goal, getting punctuation skills to our kids before they're ruined by tweets, texting and poor media role models.

He is the brains behind National Punctuation Day and one of its primary offshoots that could be a great addition to the curricula at schools right here in Marco and elsewhere.

His project is Punctuation Playtime, a user-friendly program for teachers to help their students avoid the perils of the apostrophe.

A DVD shows teachers how to do our 45-minute program step by step. It includes a punctuation rap song the kids love and more teaching aids. There's also a punctuation relay, with the kids and the teacher interacting. They get into it very quickly.

Grades two, three and four are the ideal grades for the program, because by the second grade the children probably have been introduced to a couple of punctuation marks, the period, the comma, the question mark, so they at least know the function of punctuation."

The entire package includes workbooks for the kids and the teachers, bookmarks, words and music to the rap song and more. Once purchased, the program can be used repeatedly, year after year at no extra charge

Jeff makes the program available for \$299. Info: www.PunctuationPlaytime.com, call 877-588-1212 or e-mail: Jeff@PunctuationPlaytime.com.

If you doubt that punctuation matters, purists offer evidence to bolster their campaign for doing it right.

One example is the plea that exclamation points be used sparingly and never more than one at a time. Appropriate use is shown in this example, a headline in the New York Times of Aug. 15, 1945: Japan surrenders, end of war!

“If you’re reporting the end of a world war, feel free to use an exclamation mark. Otherwise, resist the temptation.”

Also, look how punctuation can change the meaning of a short sentence, as in this oft-used example:

“A teacher asked students to punctuate this properly: ‘A woman without her man is nothing.’

“All the male students wrote: ‘A woman, without her man, is nothing.’

“All the females wrote: ‘A woman: without her, a man is nothing.’”

If you’re still not convinced, Jeff Rubin refers you to this comment from Ernest Hemingway in a letter he wrote in 1925:

“My attitude toward punctuation is that it ought to be as conventional as possible. The game of golf would lose a good deal if croquet mallets and billiard cues were allowed on the putting green.

“You ought to be able to show that you can do it a good deal better than anyone else with the regular tools before you have a license to bring in your own improvements.”

Now there’s a statement that almost deserves an exclamation point.