

Writing expert declares war on poor use of punctuation

Author sets aside day to encourage improvement

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Apostrophes are not something you win for your Italian cooing. A comma isn't what you fall into after a car accident.

And yes, a colon isn't just something you need to get checked regularly (ouch.)

All of these jots and tittles are punctuation marks, things that help our language be as expressive and meaningful as it can be.

Today is their day.

California writer Jeff Rubin created National Punctuation Day to encourage writers to punctuate properly. His company, The Newsletter Guy (www.thenewsletterguy.com), creates newsletters for corporations. He lamented that people don't care about proper punctuation.

"I've become increasingly appalled by the lack of writing skills displayed in newspapers, magazines and in the information I get from some of my customers," he said. "You have senior executives who can't write, can't spell and can't punctuate."

Rubin called National Punctuation Day (www.nationalpunctuationday.com), a way to "channel all my frustration and anger." With recognition of the day growing this year, he indicated he may develop a teaching program for grade school children.

Yolanda Garcia, an English teacher at Abilene High School, said improper punctuation can often adversely change the intent of one's message. She blames the Internet and e-mail for the rise in sloppy punctuation and spelling.

"We've gone away from being a formal society toward being informal," she said. "I blame instant messaging and text messaging especially."

Her students most frequently struggle with comma usage. "Too many, or not enough," she said.

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