



# National Punctuation Day on the mark for a good ‘clause’

**By Michelle Miller**  
Journal Staff Writer  
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There’s a “clause” for celebration today — a day for teachers, proofreaders and others who wield red pens all over the United States.

It’s National Punctuation Day!

Newsletter publisher Jeff Rubin ([www.thenewsletterguy.com](http://www.thenewsletterguy.com)), created the holiday in 2004 after years of being frustrated with poor punctuation and grammar in newspapers, magazines and correspondence with his clients.

The holiday celebrates the lowly marks that are often used and abused in everyday writing; however, Auburn residents are still a bit confused on just how to use them.

Many about town were unsure Friday on the definition of an ellipsis.

“I don’t know. ... A flower?” said Linda Funk, 54, of Sacramento.

After learning that an ellipsis is a series of three periods indicating omitted information, Funk knew what it represented: The dreaded high school English class.

“Back in school, I hated English. I didn’t do very well,” she said. “I used to have to do those sentence diagrams and I hated it.”

Funk wishes her teachers had taught in a more engaging way.

She and husband, Randy Funk, 57, agree that National Punctuation Day ([www.nationalpunctuationday.com](http://www.nationalpunctuationday.com)) may bring awareness to the plight of the poor writing.

“I don’t see anything wrong with it,” he said. “These days computers do all the work for us so people don’t understand grammar like they should.”

Manuel Varela, 47, of Auburn, said he learned everything he needed to know about grammar from a college professor.

“I got a couple Ds, but now I know the appropriate place to put hyphens – at least I think,” he said. “But I’ve had supervisors who don’t know how to spell, ‘ladder.’ You think, man, how’d you get your job?”

The next generation of punctuators seem to be comma confident already.

English teacher Marsha Dolkas’s students had a handle on punctuation in only their second day of eighth grade at E.V. Cain Middle School.

They could pontificate on the possessive apostrophe, distinguish between it’s and its, and explain how periods could come to the rescue of a run-on sentence. They were also quite friendly with those conjunctive FANBOYS (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) that separate two independent clauses.

Speaking of independent clauses, Dylan Moon, 13, knew just how to handle two of them.

“I like apples, and I like yogurt,” he said.

But the eighth-graders admitted they weren’t always punctuation paragons. While anxiously typing away instant messages to friends over the Internet, commas and periods are often nowhere to be found.

“I don’t even capitalize,” admits Alex Brigham, 13.

The students did offer some creative ways to celebrate National Punctuation Day.

“I think I’d decorate cupcakes with semi-colons and periods and commas,” said Melanie Westin, 13.

Dolkas is a self-proclaimed stickler for punctuation and even distributes the “Ten Commandments of Dolkas,” which begins with: “Thou shalt always put a comma before the word ‘too’ when it comes at the end of a sentence.”

“I started doing it because I would read my yearbook at the end of the year, and the students would write, ‘Your the greatest teacher,’” she said.

Dolkas was glad someone created National Punctuation Day and plans on playing “Punctuation BINGO” today in class.

National Punctuation Day creator Rubin, of Pinole, Calif., said grammar is something many adults miss out on in school.

“I didn’t learn until I got to college and took my journalism courses,” he said. “My instructor was an ex-UPI (United Press International) bureau chief and an absolute stickler for spelling and punctuation and getting it right. So he drilled us.”

The former reporter said all professions depend on good writing skills. When you’re talking on the telephone, people form their opinion of you by your voice. In person, it’s your appearance. Likewise, people form their opinion of you based on your writing skills.

E-mailing and instant messaging represent the “dumbing down of correspondence,” he said, and are some of the culprits leading to bad grammar.

But no one is beyond salvation, he said.

“Poor punctuation is not a genetic defect,” he said. “You’re not born with it and your parents don’t pass it on to you.”

Rubin is particularly distressed about errors that are way too common in advertising and suggests there are probably many errors lurking around Auburn.

“On the plus side, the people at Meyers’s Rum got it right,” he said. “Somebody at that company is educated.” (*The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White suggests you always add ‘s to proper names that end in s.)

But for the rest of us, there will always be grammar check. And if a mistake slips through, just take a cue from 12-year-old Cullen Brown from Mrs. Dolkas’s class.

“Nobody’s perfect,” he said.