

LOOKING at LIFE:

Hooray for a day that celebrates punctuation

By Gary Brown

Repository Living section editor

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I didn't get any greeting cards with dancing hyphens or semicolons on them last week, so I'm assuming most of you missed one of a writer's favorite holidays.

Monday was National Punctuation Day (www.nationalpunctuationday.com).

It's a holiday that we all should be excited about. When you send a card that says "Happy Punctuation Day!" the exclamation point takes on added meaning.

Chase's Calendar of Events calls it "a celebration of the lowly comma, correctly used quotes, and other proper uses of periods, semicolons and the ever-mysterious ellipsis."

Jeff Rubin, owner of The Newsletter Guy (www.thenewsletterguy.com), a newsletter-publishing firm in California created the holiday to draw attention to the importance of proper punctuation, his Web site says.

"Successful people have good communications skills, and that includes knowing how to write properly," he explained in a message posted at the site. "Punctuation counts. A misplaced comma can alter the meaning of a message."

Let's set aside for a moment the possibility that if Rubin is dwelling on misplaced commas and incorrectly used apostrophes he may need to get a life. We probably should forget for a moment that we live in a world in which diseases need to be cured, peaceful solutions need to be found for wars, and millions of starving people need to be fed. Rubin most likely couldn't do any more than the rest of us in solving those problems.

So, if the bad punctuation that seems to permeate his world irks him, more power to him for taking a figurative red pen to it.

"I'm stunned at how many executives and CEOs send me articles and correspondence that are poorly written and punctuated," he said on his Web site. "Did they miss a year of school? I read ad copy and see billboards that scream to be corrected."

That puts a little more pressure on the proper punctuation of this commentary. People who write opinions on glass computer terminals shouldn't throw in brackets and parentheses.

Let me simply say I hope you had a happy and grammatically correct National Punctuation Day. Did any of you give family members grade-school grammar books or gift certificates to continuing education English classes?

As it turns out, Rubin had some pretty specific suggestions for how people could have spent the hours on National Punctuation Day. Among his ideas were: "Write an error-free letter to a friend." "Visit a bookstore and purchase a copy of Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style*." "Take a leisurely stroll, paying close attention to store signs with incorrectly punctuated words." "Read a newspaper and circle all of the punctuation errors you find with a red pen."

Next year about this time, I'm going to regret writing this.

According to an article by The Associated Press, Rubin wants the Chase people to move the new holiday to September next year. The initial celebration of it missed the school year by a matter of days. Rubin figures that if National Punctuation Day occurred at the beginning of students' studies, teachers could use it as a stepping-off point for a punctuation lesson.

In the months that will pass before next National Punctuation Day, if you run across anything incorrectly punctuated, you can e-mail photo proof to Rubin at:

Jeff@NationalPunctuationDay.com

I don't think columns count.