

Eugene Register Guard

? ; — { } ! Appreciate the apostrophe? Then happy Punctuation Day!

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help im being held captive by texters ;-)

- signed comma apostrophe and exclamation mark

Monday won't seem like much of a holiday to the text message generation, who, after all, see the semicolon as a wink rather than a nod to deft sentence structure.

But for those who cheer the precision of the properly placed parentheses, the diversion of a dash or just the utilitarian commonness of the comma, give up an exclamation point: August 22 is National Punctuation Day.

Jeff Rubin, a California newsletter publisher (www.thenewsletterguy.com) and self-described recovering Type A personality, founded the holiday to remind people that punctuation wasn't invented solely to put sideways smiley faces in e-mail. Those humble squiggles and dots, after all, are the only things standing between clear and accurate writing and a confusing babble of words.

A world without the apostrophe? Its unthinkable.

Would we have mystery without the question mark. Obviously not.

And how pray tell would we the aggrieved readers parse a long sentence eloquent though it may be without the aid succor and comfort of the familiar comma misused as it often is? Surely, a brave soul attempting Henry James would suffocate but for the comma.

Indeed, as Churchill must have meant, never in the field of human language was so much owed by so many to so few. So come Monday, try to talk about the colon without sniggering and remember, as Rubin reminds us on a T-shirt, that an ellipsis is not what happens when the moon passes in front of the sun.

In fact, raise a glass to the entire Gang of Eleven: apostrophe, brackets, colon, comma, dash, ellipsis, exclamation point, hyphen, parentheses, period, question mark, quotation mark and semicolon. They give us pause, bring us to a stop, divide our thoughts and take us aside; what more could you ask?

What else you do on National Punctuation Day is up to you. Rubin — check out his Web site at www.nationalpunctuationday.com — suggests circling all the punctuation errors in the newspaper, which is a fine idea. But aim high; finding a bit of misplaced punctuation in The New York Times will be so much more satisfying.

And if there's a particular punctuation mark you just don't get, consider the advice of noted American linguist Casey Stengel: "You could look it up."