

Celebrate National Punctuation Day

By John Benson

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If Jeff Rubin were a superhero, he'd be Punctuation Man. Wearing an apostrophe on his chest and a smug smile on his face, the Bay Area resident would be able to spot typos and bad grammar from two pages away.

Rubin, the founder of National Punctuation Day, which takes place this year on Aug. 22, is the first to admit he is slightly anal about, well, punctuation.

As a former newspaperman and current newsletter entrepreneur (www.thenewsletter-guy.com), Rubin comes across his fair share of misplaced apostrophes and commas. However, the New York City native is up for the fight, challenging people around the world to unite for National Punctuation Day under the guise of proper usage of the elusive ellipsis, the problematic period and the confusing colon.

"Initially, the idea grew out of my anger and frustration out of the kinds of materials that were submitted to me by my clients, CEOs and senior managers of companies who can't spell and can't punctuate," said Rubin during a phone call to his California home, "and also with all of the mistakes I was seeing in newspapers. I could go through the local paper every day and red line all of the errors and it would look like I opened a vein."

So instead of stewing in the typos, Rubin established National Punctuation Day. The idea was to draw attention to the importance of proper punctuation. It's a day for librarians, educators and parents to promote and teach good writing skills to their students and their children. It's also a day to remind business people they are often judged by how they present themselves on paper.

"I think people who write well, spell well and punctuate well are more successful than others," Rubin said. "It's not an intelligence thing. It's a paying-attention-to-detail-thing. I bristle when I hear people say, 'Well, I just can't spell or punctuate.' And they're not even the least bit interested in putting a little effort into learning how to do it properly. And I think to myself, 'Well, if they have this attitude, does it carry over into their professional lives and their business careers?'" This general kind of lackadaisical attitude is a sign of sloppy living."

While far from perfect himself, Rubin said he's often the culprit of not uppercasing the letter "I" in email correspondence. This speaks to his theory that people just don't take the time to spell check or grammar check their work before sending it off to the intended party.

As for a few basic do's and don'ts, Rubin was quickly forthcoming.

"People who have problems with punctuation should visit my Web site (www.nationalpunctuationday.com) and buy a style book," Rubin said. "There are basic rules to remember. For example: 'It's' is not possessive and that's what I see the most. There are

a myriad of errors listed on my Web site.”

With so many errors and so little time, Rubin must be asked by friends and strangers if he is taking his punctuation crusade too seriously.

“Every day,” laughed Rubin. “But it’s important; at least I believe it’s important.”
Benson may be reached at ididhear@aol.com.