

**National Punctuation Day:**

## **Pity the poor apostrophe: misused and misunderstood**

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For years they labored without compensation. They stood at the ready, happily directing readers when to stop, pause, or yell. They worked tirelessly and never once asked for a day off.

Then, neglected by the general public and nearly cast out from today's world of instant and text messaging, they were forced to the sidelines, waiting for anyone — an editor, teacher or Faulkner scholar — to restore order in a chaotic world where participles dangled, and run-on sentences collided mightily with reading comprehension.

Who knows how long they might have languished, the parentheses, eventually exhausting themselves and toppling over on their sides like rockers, had Jeff Rubin not come along? For he (and he alone) has championed the lowly comma, the colon, that tireless workhorse of an apostrophe, and created at long last: National Punctuation Day.

No longer will they toil in vain, these ironmen of grammar, for Aug. 22 is theirs. English majors, rejoice!

But this holiday isn't just for liberal arts majors. Oh no. Ever the ecumenical, National Punctuation Day is for engineers and managers, and stay-at-home moms, too. It's for everyone, and that includes you. (The holiday actually began last year, but apparently nobody noticed, judging from the veritable plethora of punctuation errors that still abound, and are displayed so prominently, too.)

For the longest time, Naples librarian Harriet Protos had to look at that sign as she drove to and from work when she lived on Marco Island.

"It used to drive me nuts," says Protos, who has since moved (but not because of the sign). She offers the following suggestion for understanding the much-maligned punctuation mark: "When you see an apostrophe, you know it's either a contraction or possessive. Ask yourself, 'Which is it?'"

But worry not, Naples. Punctuation errors are not limited to Collier County. "All areas are equally ignorant," says National Punctuation Day founder Rubin, who lives in California but spots mistakes all over. Because California is another state with inflated real estate prices, Rubin is used to seeing billboards like we see around here:

Lots from the 600's to the 800's

Which is not only wrong, but at those prices, simply adds insult to injury.

"It should just be 600s and 800s," he said, remarking on the mispunctuation (not the inflated housing prices).

Rubin, who owns a newsletter writing and design firm called "The Newsletter Guy" ([www.thenewsletterguy.com](http://www.thenewsletterguy.com)), says he felt called to create a day to celebrate punctuation.

That, and to save his marriage.

"I would sit down with a red pen and mark up the daily paper. I'd get so angry and frustrated and start cussing," he said, which didn't make his wife very happy. "I thought, 'How can I channel this anger, this aggression into something useful?'"

It worked. He has his holiday. And he still has the wife. But he still receives hordes of business correspondences with blatant errors, which is a fatal mistake, he says. "If they can't write a business letter, that tells me they can't communicate with a customer. It's carelessness," he says.

It may be that people have seen so many errors on signs, menus and billboards, that they've forgotten how to properly use punctuation. If that's the case, the only way to end this epidemic is to stamp it out by coercing offenders to correct their signs. Rubin suggests subtle techniques: "Something less than physically accosting people," he says. "I'm not advocating violence."

So, make today count, Southwest Florida. Gently remind that produce manager that the sign shouldn't read "Egg's \$1.59." It should say "Eggs \$1.59."

And if you just can't bring yourself to do that, you could always visit Rubin's Web site at [www.nationalpunctuationday.com](http://www.nationalpunctuationday.com) and buy a really cool T-shirt that says, "A semicolon is not a surgical procedure," or "An ellipsis is not when the moon moves in front of the sun." That would be doing your part, too.

*AUTHOR'S NOTE: Melanie Peeples would like to point out that if, by chance, you should find any errors in this article, you should blame her editor. Really.*

*EDITOR'S NOTE: We know readers like to find errors in the newspaper and then call them to our attention. So we intentionally include some in every edition of Neapolitan. There's no extra charge for this services. As for Melanie Peeples, she's still on punctuation probation.*