



Spend a day with a nice apostrophe

By David Vest
Newsfeatures Editor
August 21, 2005

If you're one of those well-meaning writers who just isn't clear on commas, take heart.

Monday is National Punctuation Day. It's a perfect chance to brush up on pesky little flyspecks that make communication clear.

The founder, Jeff Rubin of Pinole, Calif., wasn't quite as crisp as a well-placed semicolon when his phone rang Friday morning. The call from Panama City on his toll-free punctuation hot line came in before 8 a.m., California time. What you get when you call that early, he said, "is a sometimes-bleary punctuation guru."

He started National Punctuation Day, he said, "as a little bit of silliness that grew out of my experience as a newspaperman." He worked with papers on the east and west coasts, including the New York Post.

For 25 years, he has run a newsletter service in the San Francisco Bay area. "I'm stunned at how many executives and CEOs send me articles and correspondence that are poorly written and punctuated," he says on his Web site. "Did they miss a year of school?" Rubin gives guidance at www.nationalpunctuationday.com and through his newsletter service, The Newsletter Guy, www.thenewsletterguy.com. The toll free number for both is (877) 588-1212.

He launched National Punctuation Day in 2004. For 2006, he persuaded *Chase's Calendar of Events* — the semiofficial national guide to commemorations — to move the date from August 22 to September 24. That's about the time that schoolkids settle into writing assignments and meet their first ellipsis.

Next year, he says, he intends to put together a multimedia guide to punctuation for third- and fourth-grade classrooms.

It should be noted that Rubin sell T-shirts (\$25, including postage and handling). They're eye-catching, and they bear witticisms such as, "A semicolon is not a surgical procedure" and "An ellipsis is not when the moon moves in front of the sun."

But he also offers resources for teachers and writers. So if you're puzzling over why the previous paragraph required a comma after "eye-catching," you can find the answer.

The *Columbia Guide to Standard English* says, "A comma separates independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions such as and."

If you'd rather not wrestle with coordinating conjunctions, Rubin offers other ideas for National Punctuation Day. They include:

Read a newspaper and circle all of the punctuation errors you find (or think you find but aren't sure) with a red pen.

Take a leisurely stroll, paying close attention to store signs with incorrectly punctuated words.

Stop in those stores to correct the owners.

If the owners are not there, leave notes.

Visit a bookstore and purchase a copy of Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style*.

Write an error-free letter to a friend.

Take a nap. It's been a long day.