

# PASADENA STAR-NEWS

## Punctuate, don't obfuscate

By Bill Bell

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Anyone who has read this column up to about a half dozen times should be quite aware of writer's block; mine, that is.

That's what I was having Friday as the minutes turned into hours and the day melted away toward a point at which it would be too late to complete a column, even if I was suddenly stricken with a Pulitzer-caliber idea.

Then the midday mail landed on my desk, And, there it was, a life-saving column idea peeking up at me from a pile of fairly uninteresting stuff.

In an instant, I learned of a national celebration, right up my alley, centered in California and containing information, potentially of great value to readers contributing to Your View letters that are printed on our Opinion page.

This one-page patriotic-looking flier announced a unique celebration coming up on Aug. 22.

It shall be called "National Punctuation Day ([www.nationalpunctuationday.com](http://www.nationalpunctuationday.com)) a celebration of the lowly comma, correctly used quotes, and other proper uses of periods, semicolons and the ever-mysterious ellipsis.'

The announcement also had clever little bits of information to tickle our funny bones, such as: "A semicolon is not a surgical procedure," and "... an ellipsis is not when the moon moves in front of the sun.'

The originator of this ingenious celebration is one Jeff Rubin located in Pinole, Calif., a community of about 17,000 on San Pablo Bay north of San Francisco.

Obviously, there's not a whole lot to do in Pinole.

The founder of Punctuation Day offers some tips on how to celebrate this unusual day:

Here are a few of the ways:

Sleep late.

Go out for coffee and a bagel.

Read a newspaper and correct all of the punctuation errors.

Take a stroll, paying attention to signs in stores with incorrect punctuation.

Write an error-free letter to a friend.

Take a nap.

While some of this is fairly silly, I believe no one completely masters punctuation and perfect English usage, but some writers to the newspaper fill their letters with extraneous matter that hinders both the meaning of their messages as well as bogging down the editing process.

Some involve punctuation and some don't.

Here are some tips to fight the no-no's for writers to Your View, which require severe

editing and multiply the chances of errors being edited into their letters:

Avoid inventing your own tricks for special emphasis such as using all capital letters, bold face type, quote marks around words and phrases purely for emphasis.

Although it doesn't pertain to punctuation. Letter-writers also need to take the time to know when words should be capitalized. The rules are fairly simple; capitalize proper names and, when in doubt, the dictionary is very helpful. Even better, most bookstores sell books that provide quick references to virtually all major style questions.

Anyway, happy National Punctuation Day and keep those letters coming, especially the well-punctuated ones.