



By Fred Musante

Editor

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Next Monday Aug 22 is National Punctuation Day a national observance that Jeff Rubin its founder hopes will draw attention to a grave national problem slow sales of National Punctuation Day T-shirts

I did it because Im sick and tired of seeing punctuation errors and spelling mistakes and grammar mistakes he said when I called him at his home astride the Hayward geological fault in sunny California

Somebodys got to put his foot down and raise the bar he said and then apologized for using up a months worth of cliches

Although it might not be advisable for someone living on an active earthquake fault to put his foot down too heavily Rubin does want to shake things up

There seems to be a general decline in punctuation skills which leads to a general decline in writing skills he said

When called on the carpet for their sins punctuation malefactors shrug and say You know what I mean

But Rubin replies No I dont know what you mean

Incorrect punctuation can drastically change the meaning of a sentence

We may know what they intended or think we know what they intended but we cant know for sure Rubin said

Maybe youre thinking that this is just another of those crazy things that always seem to come out of California like vampires always seem to come out of Transylvania but Rubin grew up in Norwalk Arnold Schwarzenegger is probably blaming us

Rubin said the problem is that nobody seems to care about punctuation any more The sad truth is hes right

There are teachers of English who are sticklers for punctuation grammar and spelling but they are growing fewer and farther between There is a good chance that a child entering kindergarten this year will in due course graduate from high school having never been properly introduced to a semi colon

It wasn't always this way. In fact, I recall that the columnist Jimmy Breslin was amazed when he received a letter from the serial killer calling himself the Son of Sam and noticed that the psychopath knew how to use a semi colon.

You'd think semi colons have retired and gone to live with Roman numerals in Lost Sock Land. They are facing extinction from lack of use. Don't count on that degree of punctuation proficiency from a serial killer today.

Some punctuation mistakes are so simpleminded that you would think people would be embarrassed to make them. Rubin mentioned that the improper use of its and it's drives him crazy. Same with your and you're for the same reason. In both cases, the first is a possessive pronoun and the latter is a pronoun verb contraction. How hard is it to figure out which should be used?

An idea has been circulating for decades, promoted by professors in university education departments, that insisting on good spelling, grammar, and punctuation is bad for children. It lowers their self-esteem.

What about graduating from high school unable to write a sentence? Shouldn't that lower their self-esteem?

As you should expect, Rubin has a web site. Surf to www.nationalpunctuationday.com where you will find a trove of valuable punctuation advice.

And next year, he will move National Punctuation Day to Sept 24 so that it coincides with the school year. The web site will be revised to include interactive punctuation games. It's Rubin's new strategy. My goal is to get these kids when they're young, he said.

But leave no adult behind. There's no excuse for rotten punctuation.

You know what I mean?