

## The Best Darn Manufactured Holiday, Period.

By Philip Morgan

TAMPA – Imagine life stripped of exclamation points and commas apostrophes and curious little question marks Its almost too horrible to contemplate

Our passionate love notes would be read in monotone Questions would be mistaken for demands leading to hurt feelings punched noses and yes even jail

Sound preposterous? Not to Jeff Rubin. He's very concerned about the state of punctuation today. And he did something about it.

Happy National Punctuation Day!!

Rubin, who publishes newsletters in Northern California ([www.thenewsletterguy.com](http://www.thenewsletterguy.com)), launched National Punctuation Day last year by convincing the editors of *Chase's Calendar of Events* that it deserved a spot in their publication.

The misuse of punctuation in advertisements, business letters and e-mails had finally gotten to him. Photo captions such as "the Smith's go mountain climbing" rankled. A contract referring to his "investors right" was downright irritating. (Those should be Smiths and investor's, by the way). "As the years go by, the writing gets worse, and the punctuation – I'm going to use a bad word here – gets ever worser. I just got sick of it," he says.

A day honoring proper punctuation suits Linda Flowers just fine.

"I'll celebrate it with a little exclamation point," she says.

Flowers, head of the English department at Tampa Catholic High School, says that when we speak, our voices separate our thoughts for the listener with stops, pauses, and intonation. Punctuation accomplishes that in writing.

A teacher for 33 years, 27 at Tampa Catholic, Flowers tells her students that punctuation is "the road map to the clarity party. If you're going, you've got to know where to stop, where to pause."

In a world of flagging punctuation skills, there's still hope for the young, she says.

"If you motivate them correctly, they're going to want to lean it because it's a power."

It astounds Rubin how many CEOs and other top executives send e-mails filled with punctuation and spelling errors.

He sees misplaced commas, confusion over "it's" versus "its," use of "your" for "you're," problems with possessives – a mess.

"One mistake is fine. We all make mistakes. But when they're rampant, it indicates to me that the business person is just not paying attention."

And who want to do business with a business person who doesn't pay attention to details?

Particularly annoying to Rubin is the contagious modern tendency to drop the final s from possessive proper nouns ending in s. (Errrrrg!)

Myers's Rum is about the only one doing it right, he says.

We are forced to admit that *The Tampa Tribune*, following the letter of AP Stylebook law, is as scrofulous as the rest. We endure a scolding from Rubin.

To get everyone celebrating National Punctuation Day, Rubin sent out hundreds of postcards to media outlets.

“A semicolon is not a surgical procedure,” they declare. “An ellipsis is not when the moon moves in front of the sun.”

They also direct people to Rubin’s Web site, [www.nationalpunctuationday.com](http://www.nationalpunctuationday.com).

Next year, he plans to move the party to Sept. 24, when more schools across the country are in session. He wants to launch a multimedia program for elementary school children featuring actors posing as punctuation marks.

For today’s celebration, Rubin offers a few suggestions.

“What I think they should do is they should sleep late; they should take a long shower; go out for coffee and a bagel, read a newspaper and circle all punctuation errors they find.”

Then take a stroll and stop in stores and inform the owners of the mistakes on their signs.

Drop into a bookstore and grab a copy of *The Elements of Style* by Strunk and White.

“Write an error-free letter to a friend, than take a nap.”