

something for the semiconscious of the semicolon

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this is not an ee cummings poem or the last chapter of james joyce ulysses which is all one sentence although you will probably notice something a little different about this column something thats missing more than the normal insights and intelligence it usually lacks something more obvious and more egregious something that every child learns about from pre- school for today is national punctuation day a 24 hour period to celebrate the comma give a hip hooray for the hyphen and shower praise on the period this is probably cheating but i figure i can at least use paragraph indentations because other wise the long, grey block of type that will appear on the page could be mistaken for the front- page of the new york times

the idea for national punctuation day belongs to jeff rubin a clever former connecticut guy paranthesis would go here under normal circumstances who worked for the norwalk hour and now runs a company in california that assists clients with putting out newsletters and other printed information www.thenewsletterguy.com no doubt in perfect kings english he came up with the idea of national punctuation day a year ago because he thinks proper punctuation is important and because hes a stickler for it when i told him shyly that i agreed he responded quotation marks would go here under normal conditions don't be ashamed of it terese even if you're a little anal in her book, eats, shoots & leaves unlike others author lynn truss refuses to blame the united states for the total decimation of the english language but instead relates it to a disregard for the written word it's hard to quarrel with that when one considers the preponderance and imposition of the visual world on our daily lives someone i forget who once declared in america they haven't spoken english for years

a man after my own heart rubin knows he might be considered stuffy by the thru nite generation he is a man who believes that by misusing or ignoring punctuation one can these are my words reveal oneself as an idiot i try to tell my students that as well but the e mail text message mentality is hard to overwrite so that complete sentences much less accurate punctuation become impossible to convince them of the importance of now ive gone and ended a thought in a prepositional phrase so who knows what punishment awaits me in the ring of hell where those who violate grammatical rules are sent rubin even confesses to short circuiting grammar and punctuation in his own e mails the temptation to dash off a note being too great even for him

he says the three biggest punctuation problems are the its it's conundrum its is the possessive and it's is it is the misuse of plural possessives rubin used meyers rum as an example if its plural possessive its meyers if its one meyer its meyer's once he was asked to appear at a vendors night at a local mall and when he saw the sign with the

apostrophe after the r and before the s he thought am i the only one of course he wasn't the sign should have had the word vendors followed by the apostrophe to indicate more than one person would be there

another offender is that people too often incorrectly put punctuation marks outside of the quotation marks a real no- no and another is the misuse of the word however which can never act as a conjunction in a compound sentence however must always be preceded by a period or a semi- colon as if it starts a new sentence people are also constantly abusing semi colons rubin has a t- shirt which advises a semi colon is not a surgical procedure this form of punctuation acts in effect like a period although its acceptable to use it in place of a period especially if the thoughts of the two halves of the sentence are closely linked what you can't do is have a complete sentence followed by a semi colon and then a fragment both sides of the semi- colon must be complete sentences these issues and more are on his web site www.nationalpunctuationday.com

today is the second annual national punctuation day a year ago rubin received quite a bit of publicity on nationwide television shows for his idea this year its been quieter his own plans for the day include sleeping late then going to the bagel shop in the mall for two bagels and a cup of coffee and then in his words redlining the local newspaper once he's done that hell send his corrections to the editors and then he'll methodically go from store to store in the mall pointing out grammatical errors in their signs to store managers who i am sure will love to see coming through the door with sharpee in one hand a pad of legal paper in the other and a determined look on his face here's an idea go through the dribble that is written above to correct it for punctuation errors my guess is there will be so much redlining it will resemble a battle scene then if you have a mind to mail it to me at terese karmel the chronicle one chronicle road willimantic ct 06226 and remember rubins words be proud of the fact that youre anal compulsive