



## National Punctuation Day

# Grammar expert wants to bring back literacy

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What the heck is an ellipsis, anyway? Should there be a comma between “ellipsis” and “anyway” in the previous sentence?

Just what is a semicolon designed to do?

If you’re facing these and other troubling punctuation questions, you’re in luck.

Today is National Punctuation Day, a promotion created by former journalist Jeff Rubin of Pinole, Calif. Rubin said his goal is to increase awareness about the downhill slide in grammatical accuracy and to motivate people to revive literacy.

“This is a way to do something with a silly holiday,” Rubin said this week in a telephone interview. “It’s a fun way to launch an effort to improve the reading and writing skills of little kids.”

With the current trends in text messaging and e-mailing, it may be too late for an older generation, said Rubin, who has developed a number of games to help children master basic punctuation skills.

“Punctuation Playtime” is an interactive program for students in grades 1-3 that will teach them the basics of correct punctuation in a fun and engaging way, according to the description published on Rubin’s Web site, [www.NationalPunctuationDay.com](http://www.NationalPunctuationDay.com).

“This 45-minute program includes activities for students and teaching tools for teachers and parents, including an activity book and punctuation posters for the classroom walls,” Rubin said.

“I’m tired of the fact that so many people accept themselves as bad spellers and grammarians and won’t work to improve themselves,” he added. “I’m embarrassed as a journalist when I watch the national news and hear so many grammatical errors.”

Rubin writes newsletters for various companies and welcomes the challenge to keep his own skills well honed.

He has developed a line of T-shirts, latte mugs, greeting cards and posters bearing slogans that highlight some of the most common errors in punctuation.

A large apostrophe above the caption, “It’s not possessive,” emphasizes one of Rubin’s major pet peeves.

An apostrophe is used in “it’s” only when the word is a contraction for the two words “it is.” Ironically, as many punctuation rules seem to be, the apostrophe is not used to make “its” possessive.

“It’s confusing,” Rubin said, “but I’m hoping by calling attention to it, people will stop and think about it and use it correctly.”

Some of the other slogans are:

- A comma is not a state of being.
- ... An ellipsis is not when the moon moves in front of the sun.
- A semicolon is not a surgical procedure.
- Is there a hyphen in anal-retentive?

Rubin's Web site lists each punctuation mark. Click on an icon, and you can find the correct usage for an ellipsis, apostrophe, brackets, colon, comma, dash, parentheses, semicolon, question mark, exclamation point and period.

Rubin has also listed some suggestions for celebrating National Punctuation Day.

- Sleep late.
  - Take a long shower or bath.
  - Go out for coffee and a bagel (or two).
  - 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."
  - Look up all the words you circled.
  - Congratulate yourself on becoming a better written communicator.
  - Go home.
  - Sit down.
  - Write an error-free letter to a friend.
  - Take a nap. It has been a long day.
- "My goal," Rubin said, "is to change the world — one apostrophe at a time."