



Don't procrastinate; learn to punctuate

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I've checked the Tupelo Public School District calendar twice. It's not listed as a holiday, but I still plan to celebrate National Punctuation Day on Sept. 24.

Jeff Rubin, owner of a newsletter publishing company in California, established National Punctuation Day a few years ago. According to his Web site, www.nation-alpunctuationday.com, Rubin started the holiday "to draw attention to the importance of proper punctuation." Successful people have good communication skills, he says, and that means knowing how to write properly.

From his Web site, Rubin sells T-shirts with punchy punctuation sayings: A semicolon is not a surgical procedure. A comma is not a state of being. My favorite is about the apostrophe: It's not possessive. How many times have I corrected a very good friend in corporate America who should know better?

Rubin gently pokes fun when he sees punctuation gaffes, and his Web site is full of photos proving the problem is prolific. There's the Baptist church in West Sussex, England, with the sign asking "whats new." There's the "Farmer's Market" in Pinole, Calif., which leaves Rubin wondering how one farmer can produce all that produce.

To help fight the good fight, Rubin this year is peddling Punctuation Playtime, "an interactive program for students in grades 1-3 that will teach them the basics of correct punctuation in a fun and engaging way." In 45 minutes, he promises a theater-like experience that includes fun activities like punctuation puzzles and a punctuation rap. Teachers who book Rubin's act also get punctuation posters for their classroom walls.

First-grade teacher Kim Fandel has never heard of National Punctuation Day, but she says it sure sounds like a good idea.

"Kids write really good sentences," she tells me, "but you've got to give the reader a place to stop."

In her class at Tupelo's Church Street School, "We introduce pretty much all of them. The exclamation point, the comma. We do the apostrophe because we talk about contractions, and of course the question mark and the period."

Yes, Mrs. Fandel, readers do need a place to stop.