



# Holiday plays up punctuation

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Sunday, September 24, 2006

Believe it or not, punctuation can improve your love life.

If you're having extra marital affairs, you're doing pretty well.

But if you have extra-marital affairs, then you may be in the doghouse.

"That hyphen makes all the difference," joked Pinole, Calif., businessman Jeff Rubin.

After Rogers Communications Inc.'s comma debacle last month, it's apparent that misplaced punctuation can do more than warrant a silly joke or make an English teacher cringe — it may cost millions. The Canadian company stands to lose more than \$2 million after an extra comma changed the meaning of a contract.

In an effort to clean up the nation's grammar — and maybe save someone some money, Rubin founded National Punctuation Day, which is celebrated today.

"I am well aware of the degradation of writing skills in this country," Rubin said in a telephone interview from his home.

An ex-journalist, Rubin used to sit with a red pen, reading the morning paper and cursing. Tired of his negative energy, Rubin's wife encouraged him to channel his punctiliousness to punctuation into something positive.

So three years ago, he founded a holiday with *Chase's Calendar of Events*. Rubin started marketing the idea in the San Francisco Bay area and it "sort of took on a life of its own."

Now the holiday, which started with little fanfare, boasts its own Web site, T-shirts and other punctuation paraphernalia. There's even a catchy "Punctuation Rap" with verses like, "I am a comma, so take pause. Hey, get back Jack, and think of what was."

Eventually, Rubin hopes to have the celebration spread to teachers and students throughout the country.

Even though the holiday is a great gimmick, punctuation really is important, Rubin said.

South Walton High School teacher Ginny Cranford wholeheartedly agrees.

"I think (punctuation) is getting worse," the 11th-grade English instructor said, attributing some of the decline to text messaging and e-mail.

Cranford said punctuation has been ignored in classrooms in recent years, but has been receiving more attention since it's been added to the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test.

Eighth-grade language arts teacher Angila Walker tries to impart to her Baker School students the importance of grammar, with or without the FCAT.

“A comma in the wrong place can completely distort your ideas,” she said.

Rubin recommends that everyone take some time today and reflect on their attention to apostrophes and consideration of colons.

“I think it’s a good time to just sit back and think about how we communicate with one another. Take a little more care in our written communication and try to learn something new,” he said.

Although National Punctuation Day falls on a weekend this year, some local school classes will observe the holiday on Monday and throughout the week.

Katherine Sand, a third-grade teacher at Bob Sikes Elementary School in Crestview, will give her students punctuation poems.

“We’re trying to emphasize a fun way to make something that’s like a drill more appealing,” she said.

With the enthusiasm of a true grammar buff, Cranford exclaimed, “We’ll have a celebration!”