



It's Nat'l punctuation day

By **GARY HERRON**

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Here's something you did not know: Today is being celebrated as National Punctuation Day.

I don't think Hallmark makes a card, one you can send to friends and relatives hoping they have a happy Punctuation Day, and there's no need to put up a tree or swap presents.

That's my kind of holiday.

Although I didn't receive a Hallmark type of card, I did receive an oversized postcard informing me of the big day and that "a semicolon is not a surgical procedure." (But a sentence is a jail term, I could add.)

When you think about it, punctuation is important in our lives.

At least, it's important in the lives of those of us who write for a living, and those of us who actually spend time reading.

I vaguely remember trying to understand one of my elementary school teachers showing us how to diagram sentences. It seemed so complicated back then; how would I ever learn the thing we call English?

Those of you who know me understand I'm still learning and probably always will be. Former Rio Rancho High School principal Gary Tripp used to use the phrase "lifelong learners," and I realized after hearing that that it made good sense.

Have you learned all you need to know about punctuation?

Be truthful; after all, this is a national holiday. I'll bet you're one of those people that puts out the cardboard signs on the corner of your block, advertising a "garage sale" that has lots of "cloth's" for sale. (Are those washcloths or dishcloths or did you mean to say clothes?)

I actually "invented," in a loose manner of speaking, some punctuation that was used at two newspapers where I worked. I was tired of seeing the double-quotation marks around a nickname, especially a short nickname, like Robert "Bob" Smith, so I came up with single-quotes for nicknames. I still believe Robert 'Bob' Smith looks a lot better, but something we call "A.P. style" tends to rule our world here. (We're not members, but we apparently like their rules.)

Here's a little test that was passed along to me many years ago. It needs to be punctuated. (Answer at bottom of the column.)

That that is is that that is not is not is that not it it is.

Are you someone that needs help with punctuation?

You might be, if you're the kind of person that adds an S whenever something is pluralized. There are a lot of those signs at the flea market in Albuquerque; hastily scrawled signs by vendors advertising "burrito's" or "book's."

I believe the biggest mistake is made with improper use of the word its.

The only time an apostrophe is needed is when it's is used to denote it is.

Possessives normally have an apostrophe, like Jim's pickup, or the dog's collar.

Not so for its and, thanks to our confusing language, her's and their's are wrong. And don't think for a moment that when something belongs to it, it is shown by it's.

The apostrophe can be your friend.

To tell you the truth, I'm not too bright when it comes to knowing "the rules" with punctuation. For the beloved comma, my general rule of thumb is if the comma slows the reader down without making something clearer, it's not needed.

We newspaper people have a more difficult time than you think, because if (and when, which is too frequent) we make a mistake, one of our astute readers catches it.

"Quiz" answer: That that is, is. That that is not, is not. Is that not it? It is.

GARY HERRON covers sports and education for The Observer and often applies the comma rule when he writes: When in doubt leave it out.