



Think a semicolon is a surgical procedure? National Punctuation Day will be Monday, Sept. 24. Period.

By Brian Cooper TH executive editor

Jeff Rubin might be a modern-day Don Quixote. He imagines that he can slay the dragon of poor punctuation.

The former newspaperman tilts at windmills and hopes that through his promotion of National Punctuation Day, people — from students to corporate executives — will be aware of, learn and practice proper punctuation.

Just in case you don't have the date marked on your calendar already, National Punctuation Day is each Sept. 24, meaning that the 2007 observance — the fourth annual — falls on Monday next week

On his Web site, Rubin explained that he created the observance out of his “frustration with the lack of proper punctuation, spelling, and grammar in newspapers, magazines, and books.”

The resident of Pinole, Calif., also stated, “Creating a cause on the calendar doesn't mean much unless you're willing to do something about it.”

What Rubin and his wife, Norma, are doing about it is generating publicity and promoting their educational video, “Punctuation Playtime,” which is designed to make punctuation easy and fun for elementary school students. The newsletter editor and consultant appears at school assemblies dressed as superhero Punctuation Man.

Rubin's firm also sells Punctuation Products, including posters, T-shirts and coffee mugs with such punctuation quips as:

“An ellipsis is not when the moon moves in front of the sun.”

“A comma is not a state of being.”

“A semicolon is not a surgical procedure.”

“Is there a hyphen in anal-retentive?”

What good is an American “holiday” if no one tries to make a buck off of it?

Anyway, I hope that Rubin is wildly successful in his noble effort. If he is, that means that more folks — especially the school kids — will have a better handle on punctuation. After all, punctuation marks are not interchangeable parts. And it's art, not science. Though there are occasions where the choice of a mark — the dash or the comma, for example — can be left to the author's style and discretion, there are lots of examples where the author flat out missed the call on which mark to use.

Rubin does offer some help in that regard. His Web site features summaries on each punctuation mark. Maybe it will help some people understand certain marks. They might realize why a sentence should end with a period instead of the mark favored by

many authors of letters to the editor, the comma.

What's the difference between the colon and semicolon? How about the semicolon and comma? Rubin's site could clear up the confusion.

Now, of course, I fully realize that by mentioning punctuation errors, I have invited tens of thousands of readers to comb through this column — and the rest of the TH, for that matter — intent upon spotting a punctuation error. Then, with great delight and an expression of indignation, they will call said error to my attention. People in glass houses throwing stones, or something like that.

If no one — and that includes people who work at newspapers — ever made punctuation errors, there would be no perceived “need” for National Punctuation Day.

Oh, one more thing: To properly observe National Punctuation Day, people are invited to send a greeting card — with check enclosed, of course — to their favorite newspaper editor.

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