



How will you mark Punctuation Day?

By AUTUMN GROOMS

Proper punctuation seems to have fallen by the wayside in a time when instant and text messaging reign supreme.

Commas are used seldom if at all in text messages, and capital letters only show up when it's convenient.

There is even what could be deemed as lack of respect for the colon, dash and parenthesis, as the three key strokes are often used to make a :-) when talking in abbreviated codes.

But accurate punctuation — and knowing its purpose — still serves a function in a text-and instant-messaging society, according to former newspaper journalist Jeff Rubin of Pinole, Calif.

“Successful people have good communication skills, and that includes knowing how to write properly,” Rubin writes on his National Punctuation Day Web site. “Punctuation counts. A misplaced comma can alter the meaning of a message.”

To draw attention to the importance of accurate punctuation, Rubin founded National Punctuation Day in 2004. It celebrates its fourth anniversary Monday.

Rubin also developed Punctuation Playtime, a school-assembly program that features a variety of interactive games and activities that make learning punctuation fun for elementary school children.

Rubin also wrote that school-age kids aren't the only ones who misuse punctuation.

“Poor punctuation knows no sociological boundaries — everyone from high school dropouts to college graduates needs help with punctuation,” Rubin wrote on his Web site.

At State Road Elementary School in La Crosse, fifth-grade students study punctuation daily, said teacher Judy Swift.

Her class regularly critiques sentences with punctuation and spelling errors, and Swift says some mistakes are easier to catch than others.

“They know a sentence has to have an ending and begin with a capital letter,” she said. “They always catch that.”

To the students, Swift said, sentence fluency isn't as important as a question mark or exclamation point.

I wish I could say the same.