



National Punctuation Day

DAN BERNSTEIN

Today's column is dedicated to National Punctuation Day — “a celebration of the lowly comma, correctly used quotes ... and the ever-mysterious ellipsis.” (So saith the NPD Web site.)

National Punctuation Day, observed Monday, would have gotten much more ink if Iranian President Ahmadinejad hadn't dropped a bombshell (figuratively, thank goodness) at Columbia University.

“We don't have homosexuals,” he told the audience.

Right-wing evangelicals had to be burning up the White House phone lines. “Don't invade Iran! Do Not Invade Iran!” (As you can see, dropping the apostrophe can sometimes have a dramatic effect.)

I find it hard to believe that punctuation matters that much anymore.

If William Shakespeare were alive today, do you think he would write: “Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow, that I shall say good night till it be morrow.”?

No. Romeo would instant message Juliet: C U L8 R :(

Herman Melville would open “Moby Dick” with, “Text me, Ishmael.”

George Bush would tell Bulgarians: “These are big achievements for this country, and the people of Bulgaria ought to be proud of the achievements that they have achieved.” (OK, he really said that.)

But maybe I'm wrong. Maybe punctuation does matter. To commemorate National Punctuation Day and honor the memory of Helen Jackson — the beloved and legendary editor/grammarian who spent more than 50 years at the P-E and died Sunday — let us review our major symbols.

Apostrophe. A luxury tax on postros. She paid apostrophe of \$30 for each pair of shoe's.

Brackets. Commonly used when referring to collegiate basketball. Example: [March Madness].

Colon. Angels pitcher who won the Cy Young award in 2005.

Semi-Colon. Angels pitcher injured in 2006 and 2007.

Comma. Condition resulting from over-exposure to presidential debates.

Exclamation point. A retired clamation point.

Ellipsis. Risky, brazen speech that has been known to backfire: “Read my ellipsis. No new taxes.”

Period. Placed at the end of a sentence. (DA may seek to remove it if he believes the sentence is too short. But a revoked period could result in an escape clause.)

Parentheses. An exhaustive list of parental proclamations:

No TV or gaming until homework is completed. Studs and rings must be removed from all pierced body parts after school. Mandatory bi-weekly showers. Read my ellipsis: Money doesn't grow on trees.

Dash. Customarily employed by writers whose fingers outpace their brains.

Quotation Mark. Named for the oft-quoted Samuel Clemens who said, among other things, "Advertisements contain the only truths to be relied on in a newspaper." And (some years before "Mission Accomplished"), "It is easier to stay out than get out."

Question Mark. Originally employed by skeptics of slugger Mark McGwire, but lately used to challenge the parentheses of presidents, discredited defense secretaries, Scooters, attorneys general and campaign strategists. May soon be renamed the "Question Ahmadinejad" after the petty dictator who claimed (among other things) that his country has no homosexuals.