

Express-News

There's no ? about it ... dots, squiggles important

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Express-News

2dy is natl punctu8tn dy lol yes thre is a dy 4 evrythng

Got that? If not, chances are you're not a tween or teen for whom "text" is a verb, spelled-out words a time-waster and punctuation, well, what the heck is that?

Laura Dow, an English teacher at Legacy Middle School, in the East Central Independent School District, has seen enough freewheeling text-speak to translate: "Today is National Punctuation Day. Laugh out loud. Yes, there is a day for everything."

Along with many of her teaching colleagues, Dow hopes to revive her students' memories of commas and periods and encourage them to stop mangling standard English.

"It's not because it's not being taught to them," said Dow, who sees the ubiquitous text-messaging shorthand in her eighth-graders' class work. "It's just because they have fallen into these bad habits. Their little thumbs are going all the time."

Today's observance is meant to drive home the importance of punctuation.

Or, as the day's founder, Jeff Rubin, describes on his Web site, it's "A celebration of the lowly comma, correctly used quotes and other proper uses of periods, semicolons and the ever-mysterious ellipsis."

National Punctuation Day is listed as a special day in *Chase's Calendar of Events* and *The Teacher's Calendar*, both published by McGraw-Hill.

Chase's Editor-in-Chief Holly McGuire said Rubin's proposal was worthy of a listing because he was actively promoting the use of punctuation with school visits and promotional T-shirts and mugs.

Rubin can make punctuation sound, well, passionate.

"Without these little dots and dashes and squiggles, our language would have no form," said Rubin, a professional speaker and a former sports writer. "There would be no emotion in our writing without punctuation. There would be no pausing. So punctuation gives our writing structure. It gives it meaning. It gives it life."

Punctuation has been getting more respect in recent years with the 2003 publication of *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: Why, Commas Really Do Make a Difference!*, by Lynne Truss, a British writer.

The book explores the history of the colon, among other scintillating topics, and was much discussed and reviewed.

Literary notoriety aside, a respect for proper punctuation also helps when filling out job applications or crafting resumes, Dow tells her students.

To drive the point home, Dow and other English teachers at Legacy display lists of grammar and punctuation mistakes in their classrooms. Mistakes cost students points.

“They won’t capitalize the first letter. They use the ‘wuz’ and ‘cuz,’” Dow said. “They will put the number two in place of ‘to’ or ‘too.’ I know that they know better than this.”

However, some local teachers say they don’t see much of a difference in the use — or misuse — of punctuation by students in this age of fast-paced, abbreviated communication.

“Let’s be honest,” Michael Slough, a seventh-grade English teacher at Kitty Hawk Middle School in the Judson Independent School District “Even before recent advancement of technology and communication, as kids, how many of us put much effort into learning about grammar and mechanics?”

Michael Sands, a special education teacher in the Southside Independent School District, didn’t know about National Punctuation Day, but, after finding out, crafted a lesson for his students.

“The buck stops with teachers,” he said. “If we do not insist on proper punctuation as we insist on correct grammar and spelling, then we are accomplices in the death of clarity.”