



## It's Punctuation Day! Give an editor a hug

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It doesn't look like much of a mark, but one missing comma really changes the message.

Consider these sentences:

Let's eat, Mommy.

Let's eat Mommy.

One missing piece of punctuation turns an innocent request into a line from a horror movie. This case of the missing comma is one of many featured on the Web site for National Punctuation Day, which is celebrated today.

Now in its fourth year, the day is meant to draw attention to the importance of knowing things such as the difference between a semicolon and a comma. It is, as the founder of the day puts it, "a celebration of the lowly comma, correctly used quotes and other proper uses of periods, semicolons and the ever-mysterious ellipsis."

Using poor punctuation can lead to missed job opportunities. Ellen Casey, Ph.D., a professor of English at the University of Scranton, tells her students it's like showing up at a job interview with "dirty fingernails and wearing blue jeans."

Dr. Casey, who has taught at the university for nearly four decades, said students tend to have worse punctuation skills now than in past years. She attributes it to fewer students reading.

"If you haven't read good prose, then you haven't seen good punctuation," Dr. Casey said.

What is the most common mistake Dr. Casey sees when out and about? Misused apostrophes on business signs. The apostrophe followed by the letter "s" seems to trip up many. Scoping out improperly punctuated signs is one of the suggested ways to celebrate punctuation day, according to the holiday's founder, Jeff Rubin, a former journalist who now owns a newsletter publishing firm in California. Some of Mr. Rubin's other ideas for observing the holiday include:

- Visit a bookstore and buy a copy of Strunk & White's *The Elements of Style*.
- Write an error-free letter to a friend.
- Read a newspaper and circle all of the punctuation errors you find (or think you find, but aren't sure) with a red pen.

For more tips on punctuation, visit [www.nationalpunctuationday.com](http://www.nationalpunctuationday.com).