



Canton, Ohio

Gary Brown: Happy! National!! Punctuation?? Day!

By Gary Brown

Sept. 24 is National Punctuation Day! I'm excited about it.

Or, maybe, Sept. 24 is National Punctuation Day? Some of you might be surprised.



I might want to write more directly. Wednesday: National Punctuation Day.

I think I've used the colon, the question mark and all my periods properly.

National Punctuation Day really puts the pressure on. One ill-placed comma and a columnist can look like a grammatical dunce.

Started in 2004

The chief of the punctuation police is Jeff Rubin, a former journalist who moved on to writing corporate newsletters. As "The Newsletter Guy," Rubin saw his share of grammatical mistakes. He started the holiday as a way of reminding business types of the importance of using proper punctuation in their letters and on their signs.

Now celebrating its fifth anniversary, National Punctuation Day is listed in Chase's Calendar of Events as "a celebration of the lowly comma, correctly used quotes, and other proper uses of periods, semicolons, and the ever-mysterious ellipsis."

That's the kind of grammatical hype that ought to make proofreading this column just a tad bit stressful.

The home page of Rubin's Web site provides photographic evidence of people celebrating National Punctuation Day in the past. I write that confident that a columnist cannot be cited for excessive alliteration on National Punctuation Day.

One picture shows pupils dressed in costumes identifying them as periods, question marks or exclamation points. Another photo shows a woman displaying a plate filled

with food prepared in the shape of a question mark — the “Official Meat Loaf of National Punctuation Day.” A third photograph shows Rubin appearing as “Punctuation Man” at a school assembly, dressed in a caped superhero costume — a large exclamation point on his chest — preaching the gospel of proper punctuation.

“Punctuation has been devalued by a generation of computer wizards who ask, ‘What’s the point? Nobody writes in complete sentences anymore,’ “ Rubin says. “But the rules of proper punctuation haven’t changed just because of computers.”

Ways to celebrate

Rubin offers lighthearted suggestions for celebrating what started as a “funky calendar event” and has grown into an educational cause.

“Read a newspaper and circle all of the punctuation errors.” Ouch.

“Take a leisurely stroll, paying close attention to store signs with incorrectly punctuated words.”

“Write an error-free letter to a friend.”

The Web site also provides illustrations of punctuation marks, allowing visitors to click on the symbols and learn a little about the proper use of each one.

I have to admit that, without words around them, it’s tough to tell the apostrophe and the comma apart.

But I don’t mean that as a criticism. Far be it from me to be anything but supportive of the observance of National Punctuation Day.

People who write glass columns shouldn’t throw grammatical stones.