



# **The Final Word: Good punctuation brings periods of happiness**

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Today is National Punctuation Day, a day set aside to reflect on the fact a semicolon is not a medical problem. At least that's what NPD founder Jeff Rubin, a former newspaperman, wants to impart.

I hesitate to write about punctuation since it has never been my strong suit. Commas especially. Or is it commas, especially?

I have long held the belief that I must have been sick the day commas were taught. Where to put them. When to use them. When not to use them. Do you put one before the conjunction in a simple series of three or more items? (The answer is yes. I just looked it up on Rubin's website, [nationalpunctuationday.com](http://nationalpunctuationday.com))

Because of my comma condition, I have driven more than a few editors crazy, which is not necessarily a bad thing.

"Weren't you ever taught about commas?" one editor barked at me early in my newspaper career.

"No," I answered. "I was sick that day."

"Obviously," he said.

And so he would insert commas where commas belonged, and we went to press. After that, I would put commas most everywhere. Like, after, every, word. Just for good measure.

Then another editor would bark at me.

“Was there a sale on commas somewhere?” she would ask.

“I guess there was,” I would reply.

And then she would go back, remove most of them, and we went to press. I would then go back to never putting a comma in any sentence no matter how long laborious lovely or lively.

Correct punctuation, like good conversation, has become a lost art. That’s why Rubin began NPD a few years ago.

E-mail has not helped any, mainly because it’s often communication through sentence fragments. Dashes and ellipses galore. Maybe that’s why I use lots of exclamation points in my e-mail. It’s not that my sentence fragments are exciting. I’m just trying to make them so. Like this!

My journalism professor, who loathed exclamation points, is rolling in his grave, and if he’s not there yet, I’m sure an e-mail from me could send him there.

His rule: Never use an exclamation point unless the sentence is about the end of the world, and the end of the world is tomorrow. Example: The end is near!

F. Scott Fitzgerald understood the exclamation point. He said, “An exclamation mark is like laughing at your own jokes.”

I’ll try to remember that. I’ll also try to remember the rule about semicolons. I’ve used them on occasion, but once an editor removed one from a story. He called it pretentious. He said a period worked just as well.

He was right, of course. We hate nothing more (please insert exclamation point).