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It's \$#!@ Punctuation Day already!?

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Grammarians, take out your red pens, break out a new copy of *The Elements of Style* or *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* and get ready to celebrate.

Thursday is your day, your day to honor those dots and dashes, which, configured in various ways, spice up and clarify writing.

Happy National Punctuation Day.

Happy National Punctuation Day?

Happy National Punctuation Day!

Four words, three sentences, three meanings. The difference? Punctuation.

Thursday “marks” the sixth annual National Punctuation Day. Though you shouldn’t expect to get time off for it, you can bet English teachers everywhere will be in a great mood.

Newsletter publisher Jeff Rubin founded National Punctuation Day in 2003 to highlight punctuation’s importance in clear writing and to draw attention to the misunderstood ellipsis, hyphen, dash and semicolon.

It’s a day to make the following vows:

“I will use the apostrophe to show possession, not to pluralize a word.”

“But I will not use the apostrophe to show possession in the word its.”

“I will use the exclamation point sparingly.”

It sounds like it will be a great day for Susan Andersen, assistant director of the Writing Center at Utah State University.

Andersen, who introduces USU students to college-level writing and teaches English courses, is the kind of person who reads grammar books for fun, and a day celebrating good writing is right up her alley.

In the Writing Center, her focus with students is mostly to help them communicate more clearly. But she also teaches proper punctuation, which she hopes will make writing fun for her students.

Because nothing works exactly like the colon.

“I love the colon,” Andersen said and then snickered. “It sounds so funny. I do. It’s so great.”

Punctuation, in general, seems to come under fire because of the prevalence of text messaging and Twitter, where some of the precious real estate of 140 characters can feel wasted with commas, periods and spelling.

So, to get your parentheses on this National Punctuation Day, here are some ways to celebrate:

Mock poor punctuation by visiting blogs, such as www.apostropheabuse.com and www.unnecessaryquotes.com.

Take pictures of poor punctuation on public signs and send them to Rubin at Jeff@NationalPunctuationDay.com. His Web site is hosting a contest to bake foods in the shape of punctuation marks. See www.nationalpunctuationday.com.

Buy a copy of Strunk and White’s *The Elements of Style*.

Mark the newspaper with every punctuation error you find and send it to our editor. (Please, please do this.)

Use air quotes in every other sentence.

Dash to all of your errands.

Get a colonoscopy. ;)