

The Washington Post



John Kelly's Washington

Live Discussion with Post Metro columnist John Kelly

Excerpts from an on-line chat with the readers of the Washington Post September 25, 2009

John Kelly
Washington Post Metro Columnist
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Post Metro columnist John Kelly was online Friday, Sept. 25, at Noon ET to chat about the people and stories that don't make the front pages, plus his latest columns.

Join John as he talks commas, apostrophes and semi-colons with the subject of today's column, founder of National Punctuation Day, Jeff Rubin

John Kelly: Greeting's folks. Its great to see you here today.

Sorry, that was just to irritate my guest: Jeff Rubin, founder of National Punctuation Day. I hope you guys aren't too hung over from yesterday's NPD festivities.

You can read about how Jeff came to start the holiday in my column yesterday. Today you can share your grammar peeves and ask Jeff to share his punctuation pointers.

We can talk about other stuff, too. I wrote this week about dropping my daughter off at college and about George Washington University's cricket team. I blogged about my trip last week to the Oxford Social Media Convention and, as usual on Fridays, pull together the weirdest stories from the U.K.

So, on this dreary (at least in Washington) Friday afternoon, share your thoughts, comments and questions. Or, for those of you who prefer the serial comma: thoughts, comments, and questions.

Laurel, Md.: Thanks for having Jeff as a guest. I'm an ardent disciple of the serial comma, and I don't understand the fuss. Not only does it make the sentence's meaning more clear, I was under the impression it was Americans who most strongly supported it. Why all the confusion?

Jeff Rubin: The serial comma has been around for many years. William Strunk Jr. included it in *The Elements of Style*, his widely read stylebook, first published in 1918. The Associated Press eliminated it in its stylebook, published in the late 1970s; I am told the reason was the save space on typeset lines of hot type. The problem is some school districts teach the serial comma, while others don't. I endorsed the serial comma last year because it adds clarity to some sentences that are unclear without it.

Southern Maryland: Jeff, I have two questions:

1. What do you think of the works of Lynne Truss? So far I have read only her children's books, but her adult bestseller looks fascinating.
2. What is your top pet peeve regarding punctuation mistakes? My top one would be "its" versus "it's." I might understand the mistake if possessive pronouns in general were inconsistent, but to my knowledge none of the (other) possessive pronouns use apostrophes.

Jeff Rubin: Lynne is a prolific writer. *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* brought punctuation to the forefront of literacy discussions. The book got some bad press in the United States because it had grammar and punctuation errors in it; the latter likely because the book was not edited for the American market. We got the British version, and the British punctuate differently than we do. For example, they occasionally place a comma or period (full stop) outside a closing quotation mark; we don't.

Nevertheless, the book got a lot of people thinking about punctuation. I'd like to add the National Punctuation Day was founded and celebrated before the publication of *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* in the United States.

My top pet peeve is the misuse of the apostrophe with plural words. The rule is simple: If it's plural, just add an "s." How hard is that?

The "its" "it's" thing is also frustrating. There's a sign on a tour bus at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida that uses the word "its'" That's right: its with an apostrophe after the "s." Very innovative.

It's comforting to know that the person who printed that sign will retire with a generous government-funded pension and medical benefits for him, his independents and their children, and several future generations of his family.

Washington, DC: I am so glad there is someone else out there fighting the good fight on using a comma before the last item in a list. In my long career, I have refused to succumb to the new style of dropping the last comma. My rule of thumb regarding good writing is that if you have to read a sentence twice to get its meaning, there's something wrong — even if the sentence is grammatically correct. How many times have you re-read or stopped to parse out a sentence that is missing that last comma? Here's an example: I made pies with apples and berries, pears and plums and strawberries and rhubarb. Let's start a movement to bring back that last comma!

John Kelly: I received a wonderful e-mail from a reader pointing out the importance of a well-placed comma in his life. He wrote:

“At one point in my career, I was deeply involved in transplantation and transplant tolerance. My title was: Head, Transplantation Laboratory.”

You can imagine what people would have thought if there wasn't a comma between “Head” and “Transplantation.”

Vienna, Va.: I, too, love semicolons, but I have noticed a problem with them on the Web. All the common proportional fonts seem to allow inadequate width and heft for a semicolon to be visible. Depending on the letter that precedes it, the semicolon can look like a comma; sometimes it is so close it can scarcely be seen at all. Am I the only person in the world who is bothered by this? Does anyone know of a font that allows the glorious semicolon to be seen and appreciated?

John Kelly: I've noticed that typography often goes crazy on the Web, even when my own column makes the leap from the newspaper to online. It's not as bad as it once was, where quotation marks would end up as question marks, but it's not always great. Things in bold in the paper end up in italics online.

I guess some of it depends on the browser. And it's hard for programmers to make their pages look good — or the same — in every browser, a problem you don't have when you're typesetting something once.

I wonder if design, typography and punctuation will suffer as we move online more, the way things like spelling have.

And are there any Web designers out there who can help this chatter save the semicolon?

Punctuation Guy: I love the serial comma, and I love the semicolon as well! I spend most of my work day wondering why people overuse the comma. Frankly, it baffles me. John, what punctuation errors irritate you the most? Mr. Special Guest Punctuation Guy, what punctuation errors irritate you the most?

Jeff Rubin: You must be a government employee. Or, you're retired. Either way, congratulations!

Interesting that you brought up the semicolon; it's my favorite punctuation mark because most people avoid using it because they don't know how to use it. It's really very simple: The semicolon connects two independent clauses. What's an independent clause? Aha!

I have a customer who puts commas in her messages in the oddest places. I'll ask her why she put a comma in a particular place and she'll reply, “Well, it's been a while since I used a comma so I thought I should put one in.” It's scary to think that it's possible that some teachers are teaching this method.

John Kelly: Since Jeff hates misused apostrophes (as I do) I'll choose something else: the misplaced period. I can't stand it when I see it outside a quotation, as in, The clown said, “Step away from my mini car”.

Or when it's put inside a parenthesis: Everyone loves Raymond (except the milkman.)

Arlington, Va.: You may “...wonder if design, typography and punctuation will suffer as we move online more, the way things like spelling have.” but I wonder if design, typography, and punctuation will suffer as we move online more, the way things like spelling have.

John Kelly: I’m just following Post style, which doesn’t use the serial comma. (I realize I should probably have typed “the way things SUCH AS spelling have.” That’s preferred, I believe.)

My favorite example of Post style? The only newspaper for which we capitalize the “the” is The Post. Thus we write: “According to a story in the *New York Times* yesterday.” But also: “According to a story in *The Washington Post*.”

We are THE Post!

Car free: What we need is a “take your car to work day.” A lot of drivers do not want to support the public transportation system because they don’t use it. If one day everybody who uses public transportation gets in their car it would be a nightmare. I bet the city of DC would close down in gridlock. It would be a great reminder of why the Metro should be supported.

Jeff Rubin: You can submit “Take Your Car to Work Day” to *Chase’s Calendar of Events*. If it’s accepted into this directory, you can market the holiday and make a fortune!

You’re lucky to live in a city that has a transit system that takes you where, or close to where, you want to go. I live in the San Francisco Bay Area, and we have BART (Bay Area Rapid Transit). It was built as a commuter train system and goes nowhere you want to go — not to any of the ballparks, not to Chinatown, not to Fisherman’s Wharf, not to Golden Gate Park, not to the Pacific Ocean. The transit officials here have been trying to get people out of their cars for years, and can’t understand why folks won’t.

San Francisco, Calif.: Jeff — What’s your recommendation re: hyphenating ages? Examples: He’s a precocious 3 year old. This precocious 3 year old little boy helped me with my iPhone.

Jeff Rubin: The correct punctuation would be 3-year-old.

John Kelly: That’s how it is in our stylebook, too. It’s easy to remember it when it’s used as an adjective: the 3-year-old boy. But it’s also the style when it’s a noun: Here comes the 3-year-old.

Petworth: My favorite example of why we NEED the serial comma is, “I’d like to thank my parents, God, and Ayn Rand.”

Just imagine!

John Kelly: It may have been on Jeff’s Web site where I saw the best example of that: “I’d like to thank my parents, Pope John Paul II and Mother Theresa.”

The serial comma is growing on me. Then again, even though we're no longer in the days of hot type, we do still use ink to print the newspaper. Multiply all those additional commas by all that extra ink.

Chinatown: Submitting early because I'll be out during the chat. We need some adult punctuation initiatives as well. I am really sick and tired of getting emails that begin with:

Hi Sally,
instead of
Hi, Sally.

Jeff Rubin: Let's try this salutation: Dear, Sally.

Grammar dork: Jeff, you're my hero.
P.S. I, too, am an ardent supporter of the serial comma.

Jeff Rubin: Dear Grammar dork,

Thank you. And thanks for using "you're" correctly. Every Friday I have correspondence with an administrative assistant at a government agency. She sends me a weekly report via e-mail, and I reply, "Thank you." She sends back her reply, "Your welcome." Yikes!

I am pleased to hear you support the serial comma.

John Kelly: So, so far in this chat we're AGAINST serial killers (such as John Wayne Gacy) but FOR serial commas.

Austin, Tex.: Okay, it's not exactly punctuation, but here is something that irritates me to no end: people who throw random foreign words and phrases into English writing. But what's even worse is when they do so and use the foreign language incorrectly. In particular, people who write "cajones" and think they're using a naughty Spanish word. In fact, "cajones" means "drawers" (as in desk).

John Kelly: What's the Spanish word we mean to use?

Washington, DC: Oh my, this is terrific. I love (the correct use of) punctuation! And thank you for endorsing the serial comma. It is something about which I have strong feelings. In my profession (law), the serial comma seems to have fallen into disfavor some years ago, and I'm forever battling with colleagues about it.

One punctuation mark that I feel is underused is the semicolon; on the other hand, I sometimes fear that I overuse it. What should be my guiding principle as to its use?

Thanks!

Jeff Rubin: Here's how my wife and I teach the semicolon of elementary school children in our assembly, Punctuation Playtime:

When you have two sentences (independent clauses, each containing a subject and a predicate) that are so closely related to one another that they're like brother and sister, you can show the reader this relationship by separating them with a semicolon, rather than a period.

Sunny Arizona: Hello, please help yourself to some Arizona sunshine!
Can you enlighten us on when it's appropriate to use single quotes vs. double-quotes?

John Kelly: Allow me: Double quotes are the default option when you are quoting speech. So: "Howdy, folks," said the meter reader.

You use single quotes when you have speech within speech, that is when you're quoting someone who is quoting someone. So: The meter reader said: "Wasn't it Shakespeare who said, 'What's in a name? A rose by any other name would smell as sweet.'"

Now, that's in America. In Britain they seem to do the opposite.

Tea and Punctuation: My friend and I were having a little debate on whether I was drinking "iced tea" or "ice tea." What was I drinking? Also, should I have typed 'iced tea' or 'iced tea?' Help!

Jeff Rubin: Hmm. What WERE you drinking? I much prefer iced coffee. Ice coffee is good, too.

Washington, DC: In Spanish, they start a question with an inverted question mark, then end with a standard question mark. Is there any reason why they do this?

John Kelly: They have the cajones for it?

Actually, I don't know. Anyone? Por favor?

Charlottesville, Va: its "cojones." um, testicular fortitude...

John Kelly: Ah. What a difference an "A" makes. Imagine saying, "I'd like a cat to sleep on" when you meant a "cot."

Bethesda, Md.: Jeff, do you manage to go through your daily life without getting really riled up when you see these terrible mistakes? Maybe you can provide some advice to those of us detail-oriented people who easily get their ire up when we see crazy grammar and punctuation.

Two of my pet peeves: random capitalization (e.g., The Emergency exits are Located at

the ends of the Train.) and quotation marks used for emphasis (e.g., “Attention” Please place your “forms” here.).

Jeff Rubin: I take blood-pressure medication and a pill that slows down my heartbeat. Then there’s the pill for acid reflux. There’s a fourth pill, but I forget what it’s for. Three weeks ago I was diagnosed with gout.

My therapist says I need to let things go. So, I let him go. I’m much happier now.

My advice to you is: Laugh out loud when you see these terrible mistakes! Make fun of these people. Shun these people. You are better than these people. And try to avoid gout; it’s very painful.

Capitalization is another perplexing issue. When did schools begin teaching capitalization and random quotation marks for emphasis? Did you know there’s a society for folks who get angina when they see too many quotation marks? It’s called The “Blog” of “Unnecessary” Quotation Marks. There’s a link to it on the Resources page of www.NationalPunctuationDay.com.

Atlanta: John Kelly: Since Jeff hates misused apostrophes (as I do) I’ll choose something else: the misplaced period. I can’t stand it when I see it outside a quotation, as in, The clown said, “Step away from my mini car”.

Or when it’s put inside a parenthesis: Everyone loves Raymond (except the milkman.)

John — these are two of my very most annoying pet peeves! I CAN’T STAND BOTH OF THEM. THEY ARE CRINGE INDUCING. I just wanted the emphasis to be there. thank you for helping me in my endeavors to have people punctuate properly!!! I thought I was the only one left who remembered these two rules. -sigh-

John Kelly: There are a few of us out there, fighting the good fight. The thing about the parenthesis is so easy to understand. A parenthetical phrase is something you could chop out and still have a complete sentence. But if your period is inside the parentheses your sentence would run into the next one. Now, that only applies if the parenthetical isn’t a complete sentence. So this is okay: I love cheese. (But not too much cheese.)

But this isn’t: I love cheese (but not too much cheese.)

Arlington, Va.: While we’re on the subject of punctuation, how about the dolts who use quotation marks for emphasis — as in “I ‘really’ want to...”

Gack!

John Kelly: Right. In reality it doesn’t convey emphasis. It conveys irony or sarcasm. I “love” you. Um, not really.

Austin, Tex.: “Cojones.” With two o’s. (Is that apostrophe right?)

And you shouldn’t be using that word at all in any context where you wouldn’t feel

comfortable using the word "balls" in its anatomical sense in English.

Jeff Rubin: Yes, two o's. The rule on this is you use an apostrophe and an "s" when making a single letter plural: A's, B's, c's, etc.

It's also spelled "cajones." I like this better than "balls." It's classier; it gives the anatomy an international flair.

Barcelona: En español, they start a question with an inverted question mark, then end with a standard question mark to make it easy on those who read the sentence out loud to provide proper vocal inflection when re-asking the question. As in, "¿Dónde está la biblioteca?"

John Kelly: Gracias. In America teenage girls recite every sentence as if it was a question: "So, me and Tiffany went to the Mall? And, like, there was this cool top at Forever 21? And you know Jason? Well he was there with Madison?"

Arlington, Va.: So this is okay: I love cheese. (But not too much cheese.)

Ummm ... no, it isn't. The thing inside the parentheses isn't a full sentence. (The preceding sentence, however, is.)

John Kelly: You're right. Although we get away with murder here in newspaperland. Short "sentences." No verbs. You name it.

Falls Church, Va: I don't know why people have such a hard time with years: it's 1970s or '70s, not 1970's.

John Kelly: Right. That's another thing that bugs me. I guess this would be the worst: '70's.

John Kelly: Hey Jeff. Tell me what yesterday was like for you. How did you spend National Punctuation Day?

Jeff Rubin: I was up at 5:30 a.m. Well, "up" meaning my body was moving around, but I wasn't really awake. My first radio show was at 6:15 a.m. with a station in Lincoln, Nebraska. Then we drove 75 minutes to Sacramento (and 75 minutes back, plus a 40-minute wait in the studio) to do a two-minute cooking segment on a TV station (it's on my website). We taught people how to make oatmeal-raisin cookies in the shape of a question mark. Yum!

I did three more radio interviews in the afternoon, then answered some of the 400-plus e-mails I received Thursday. Before I knew it, it was 9 p.m. and time for the season premiere of "CSI."

The serial comma is the only way.: I despair over ever changing the trend away from correct usage in situations I note below. People don't know, don't care, and never will because no one reads anything anymore. (And please hire back copywriters, Washington Post!)

1. **WRONG:** The building being opened was delayed by the fire alarm. **RIGHT:** The building's being opened...

use the possessive before a gerundial.

2. **WRONG:** I am bored of this class. **RIGHT:** I am bored with this class.

I see these two constantly, incorrectly, in newspapers, magazine, blogs. It is pathetic.

Plus, I adore semicolons. My favorite is a compound sentence with a comma in one half. That merits the use of the semicolon. So elegant.

John Kelly: First "cajones." Now "gerundial." Is there no depths to which our potty-mouth readers won't sink

Washington, DC: What about semicolons in a list of items? My view is that the items should be separated by semicolons only if they were introduced by a colon. If the list is not introduced by a colon, one should use commas to separate the items.

E.g.: Here is a list of my favorite colors: red; black; and brown.

or

My favorite colors are red, black, and brown.

Am I right?

Jeff Rubin: "My favorite colors are red, black, and brown" is correct.

Here's the rule: When punctuating a list or series of elements in which one or more of the elements contains an internal comma, you should use semicolons instead of commas to separate the elements from one another.

For example: The people were from Alexandria, VA; Bethesda, MD; and Washington, D.C.

Washington, DC: At last! How comforting to know that there are others out there to join me in my quest to eradicate the misuse of the apostrophe! I found out too late in the day that yesterday was a "holiday," but will mark it for next year and celebrate appropriately. Thank you Jeff for highlighting this important issue.

Jeff Rubin: You're welcome.

Don't despair: There's still time to send me an entry in the National Punctuation Day Baking Contest. Details are on www.NationalPunctuationDay.com.

South Riding, Va.: Jeff, you are my kind of superhero.

John, you asked about pet peeves. I have several that make otherwise intelligent people sound like complete buffoons:

“Hone in on” — No. You “home in,” like a homing pigeon or homing device. Yes, I know Webster’s smuggled “hone in” into a recent edition as a nod to current usage. That’s why I use American Heritage.

“Beg the question” does NOT mean “raise the question.” Cf. Gene Weingarten.

“Wax poetically” is illiterate. “Wax” does not mean “to speak”; it means “to grow.” Hence, “wax poetic.”

“I feel badly.” Gah. Do you feel happily as well? Or sadly? “Feel” here is a substitute for “am,” not for the transitive act of touching something.

And my favorite angina inducer: “Between you and I...” Uh-uh. It’s between US, therefore between YOU and ME. (My husband likes to use this one just to see my eye twitch.)

Keep fighting the good fight!

PS — Please forgive any typos; I’m working in a righteous froth here.

PPS — John, I used your Radical Civility approach on a teenaged girl texting at the movies recently, and it worked like a charm!

John Kelly: Hurray! I’m glad to hear of Radical Civility working in field conditions.

“Righteous Froth” would be a good band name.

Kingstowne, Va: I’m all for serial commas, but completely against periods inside quotes, leaving the main sentence without one. Exceptions are if the sentence started with a quote, then it can end with it’s end-quote, and in some cases where the ending punctuation is different for the quote and the main sentence.

Ex: Did the clown say “Get away from my mini car.”?

I’m sure this isn’t proper according to the “rules”, but if my point was made, I won’t lose any sleep over my error.

Jeff Rubin: Unfortunately, you don’t make the rules. Periods go inside closing quotation marks. Period.

By the way, In your second sentence you misused “its.” Remember: It’s not possessive.

Regarding your clown sentence: A period AND a question mark? That’s redundant. It’s incorrect, too.

I don’t think you would make it through remedial English in a junior college.

John Kelly: Whoa, Jeff! This is one of our readers. We can’t go insulting him (or her).

Washington, DC: Yea! on your endorsement of the serial comma “because it adds clarity to some sentences that are unclear without it.”

But Nay! (smiley) on your not including the important cue word “that” in the following sentence: “I’d like to add [that] the National Punctuation Day was founded and celebrated before the publication of *Eats, Shoots and Leaves* in the United States.”

This is not, strictly speaking, a punctuation issues, but it is a question of clarity, namely ensuring that the reader (or listener) understands the structure and meaning of a sentence the first time through. There is a deplorable trend in recent years to drop “that,” particularly in the electronic media. This leads to sentences such as “There were reports in several major news outlets the President plans to nominate John Smith” Not the most flagrant example perhaps (I have a file of outrageous examples at home), but it gets the point across. Eliminating “that,” except in clear instances of indirect discourse (He said he would come to the party.), momentarily disrupts the reader, forcing him to sort out the structure of the sentence to be certain of the meaning. Besides, it’s ear-jarring.

“Wait! Did I read that right? Let me read it again, and again — and maybe again. Now where was I?” Sorry, this is my pet usage peeve — not a punctuation issue but equally important in terms of ensuring clarity on first reading. Thanks. Keep up the good work.

John Kelly: I love “that.” I, too, notice when it’s gone. Another thing I like is “had,” when shifting from some present action to something that happened in the past.

I’m currently involved in a feud with a reader who can’t stand my overuse of “had.” Perhaps I do use it a bit much.

Arlington, VA: John Kelly: I could go for a nice Stilton right about now.

Hmmm ... a new hotel — the Stilton Hilton.

Jeff Rubin: I don’t know what a Stilton is but it sounds nice. Where do I get one?

DC: Hi Jeff and John Should the notation for mornings or afternoons always include periods? That is, is “9:00 AM” correct, or should it be “9:00 A.M.” ? Also, what is the correct punctuation for that above sentence? I didn’t know what to do with the question mark at the end.

Jeff Rubin: It should be 9 AM or 9 a.m. Eliminate the :00 when noting time on the hour.

For example: 9:00 a.m. is incorrect, while 9 a.m. is correct. AM, A.M. or a.m. (upper or lower case) is strictly a style preference. Pick one and stick to it.

John Kelly: And don’t do “9 a.m. in the morning.”

Vienna, Va.: I mean this with no disrespect. But if misapplied punctuation makes you cringe, get a life.

John Kelly: Hey, it's my life. These are the tools of my trade. If you were a doctor wouldn't you cringe at dull scalpels and ratty stitches?

Columbia, Md.: Jeff,

Just wanted to thank you for fighting the good fight. As a former English teacher (who goes around correcting punctuation on public signs) I appreciate knowing there is someone out there waging battle alongside me.

I also wanted to share a particularly egregious error I saw on a truck on 495 one day within the last year. The truck was advertising Barefeet Shoes: "Men's, Children's, and Ladie's." I believe I actually screamed when I saw it. I couldn't find anything like that on their Website, thank goodness.

John Kelly: Wow. That's a candidate for some sort of Hall of Fame.

Washington, DC: John and Jeff. Really, is there any use for the semicolon? I mean other than in computer programming. The semicolon is the most pompous of the punctuation marks. The semicolon is a selfish, smug, and self important mark that would like nothing more than to have it's own key next to the "L" and kick the colon off to snivel in the numbers row. Every time someone feels like using the semicolon, they need to take one step back and consider whether they want to be regarded as a pompous ass that feeds the ego of this mark. Kurt Vonnegut was right.

John Kelly: Yeah, well look at Vonnegut now.

Washington, DC: I'm a little late to this forum due to work, but I had to write in. I loved the column yesterday, especially as I, too, am a big fan of both the semicolon and the serial comma. The semicolon is one of my favorite parts of punctuation, and I find that nothing jars me and pulls me out of the action of a book faster than a misused comma where there should be a semicolon. Do you ever have that reaction, Mr. Rubin?

I also thought you might be interested in something I learned in one of my linguistics classes. As you're probably aware, for a long time, grammar and all of its laws was being skipped over in classes from first thru twelfth grades. They just didn't think it was still relevant. However, in school districts around the country, that is apparently starting to swing back around, as administrations realize that they were actually failing their students in preparing them for the adult, working world.

Jeff Rubin: All kinds of mistakes jar me when I'm reading.

A few years ago my cousin in Annapolis sent me a book called *Praying for Gil Hodges*. There were numerous errors in the acknowledgments section, where the author heaped praise on his extraordinary editors at St. Martin's Press.

On page two of the book, Gil's first name was spelled "Gill." That was it. I sent it back to the author with a nasty note. Last year I found a paperback copy of the book at a library sale; the spelling of Gil's name had been corrected.

These errors ABSOLUTELY FRY ME!

You're talking about a method of teaching called Whole Language. It became fashionable in the 1970s, when self-esteem was very big. Let's have the kiddies express themselves and not worry about all that other stuff, such as spelling, grammar, and punctuation. Those things will come when the kiddies write and express themselves. Well, those things didn't come.

The Texas State Board of Education voted last year to scrap Whole Language and go back to the basics. I hope other states follow. Nationwide, 40 to 50 percent of incoming college freshman are taking remedial English. That's embarrassing. Our primary schools should be ashamed and should do something about this. RIGHT NOW!

Napa, Calif.: For Jeff: Traditionally, the possessive form of a name ending in S has been followed by both an apostrophe and a final S. I see a trend away from this, to merely an apostrophe. Examples: Chris' or Dallas' or Francis'. I recall reading somewhere that it is only Jesus whose possessive form does not take the final S after the apostrophe. Can we now in good conscience and good grammar drop the final S on proper-name possessives? What about "The class's enthusiasm...?"

Jeff Rubin: Hi Alyson,

The trend you speak of was begun by the Associated Press in its stylebook, published in the late 1970s.

Followers of Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* have been using the 's since the book was first published in 1918.

Both styles are correct. I prefer 's, but you are free to drop the final S. My advice is: Pick a style and stick to it.

I can't comment on the Jesus thing; I was told not to get into religion.

I heart Jeff: Thank you Jeff for being here today!

Jeff Rubin: I heart you, too.

John Kelly: Thanks for joining us today, Jeff, and for fighting the good fight.

And thanks to all the readers who stopped by. If we can teach just one person to put his or her apostrophe in the right place, we will have done a good thing.

Enjoy you're weekend.

Kidding!