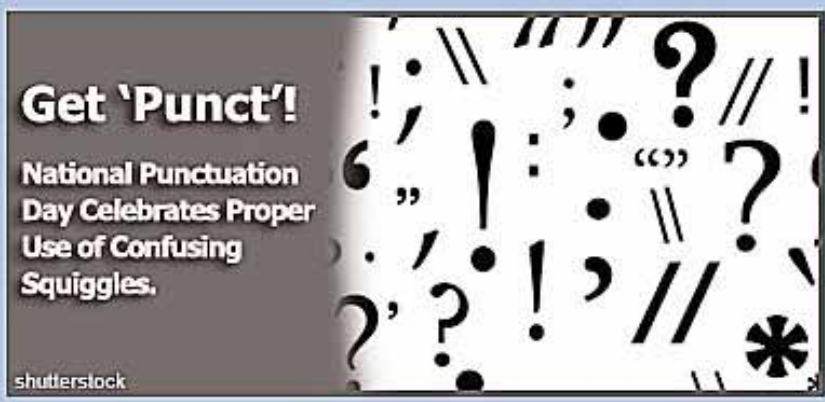


- Games & Activities**
- Games and Puzzles
- Contests
- Weekly Writer

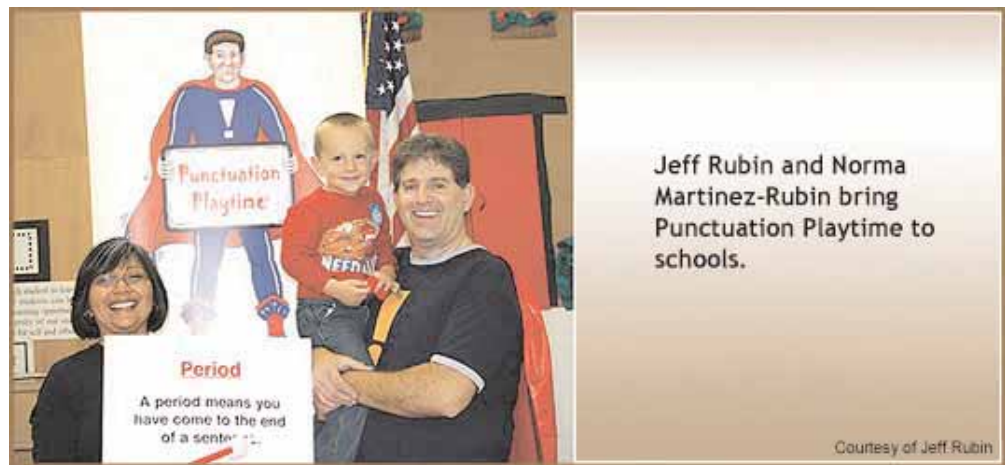


Get 'Punct'!

National Punctuation Day Celebrates Proper Use of Confusing Squiggles. Happy Punctuation Day!

Thursday, September 24, is the sixth annual National Punctuation Day (NPD), and comma enthusiasts nationwide are celebrating with meat loaf and baked goods.

National Punctuation Day is the invention of Jeff Rubin, a writer, editor, and public speaker. He created the day in 2004 because he was distressed by Americans' sloppy use of punctuation. For instance, he saw examples of apostrophe abuse everywhere he looked. Signs at the grocery store—"Melon's \$1.79"—or at the mall—"Kid's Shoes on Sale"—made him cringe.*



Jeff Rubin and Norma Martinez-Rubin bring Punctuation Playtime to schools.

Courtesy of Jeff Rubin

The NPD Web site, www.nationalpunctuationday.com, declares the made-up holiday to be a "celebration of the lowly comma, correctly used quotes, and other proper uses of periods, semicolons, and the ever-mysterious ellipsis."

Pop a Question Mark in the Oven

This year, the Web site is sponsoring the National Punctuation Day Baking Contest. Contestants bake treats in the shape of a punctuation mark and submit photos and samples for judging. You can also find a recipe for the "official" NPD meat loaf on the site.

If all that seems a bit tongue in cheek, it's Rubin's way of trying to show that punctuation can be fun. "Not only can it be fun, it can be funny!" Rubin says.

To get kids interested in proper punctuating, he and his wife Norma Martinez-Rubin travel to schools to present a program called Punctuation Playtime.

Appropriate Apostrophes

Rubin is quite serious about proper usage of these confusing little squiggles: commas, apostrophes, quotation marks, exclamation points, question marks, semicolons, dashes, hyphens, parentheses, brackets, and ellipses. (This is an ellipsis ...) Oh, and of course, periods.

“There’s an epidemic of poor punctuation in the United States, much like the swine flu. It’s too bad there’s no vaccine to prevent it,” Rubin says. The punctuation usage that Americans mess up the most, he says, is the confusion of its and it’s. “This is the most frustrating, and most common, mistake I see. Apostrophe misuse is rampant, but the its—it’s error is most prevalent. It’s a basic ignorance of plural and possessive rules.”

Ahem ... to clarify,

It’s = it is (or it has)

It’s easy to remember the rule. **It’s** a no-brainer. The apostrophe stands in for the missing letters. **It’s** a shame that some people can’t seem to remember that.

Its = belonging to it

That book has some of **its** pages missing. **Its** entire chapter on punctuation usage has been ripped out.

It’s Just Comma Sense!

People can get very passionate about punctuation use. But many others—you, perhaps?—think it’s a bore. If you think apostrophes and semicolons are useless symbols invented so teachers could torment you with quizzes, tests, and red corrections on your papers, take a look at the punctuation-free version of this article.

Punctuation marks are guideposts to meaning. Sometimes, comma placement can alter the meaning of a sentence.

Let’s eat Justin.

Let’s eat, Justin.

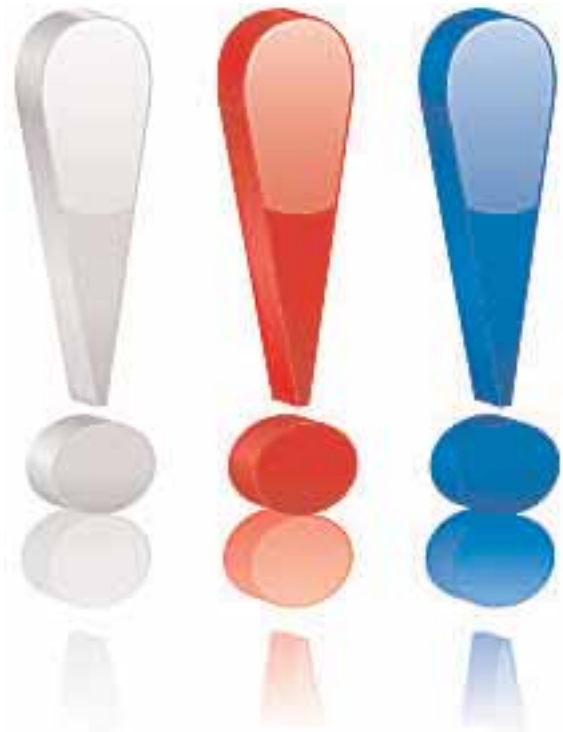
Tyler said Amber stole the money.

“Tyler,” said Amber, “stole the money.”

Tyler said, “Amber stole the money.”

In other cases, punctuation can make long sentences much easier to read.

Jordans favorite things are his catchers mitt which used to belong to his father his grandfather’s collection of The Hardy Boys mysteries his guitar given to him by his Uncle Jim and his new digital camera.



Jordan's favorite things are his catcher's mitt, which used to belong to his father; his grandfather's collection of The Hardy Boys mysteries; his guitar, given to him by his Uncle Jim; and his new digital camera.

There are endless examples of the ways in which punctuation makes reading easier. So open your heart to the comma. Embrace the apostrophe. Learn to love the semicolon. As Rubin says, "English is our language; speak it and write it with pride."

And after all, if it weren't for the colon, the semicolon, and the parenthesis, how would we ever be able to express our feelings in print?

:) ;) :)

*Those should read "Melons \$1.79," unless the \$1.79 belongs to the melons, and "Kids Shoes on Sale," unless only one child's shoes are on sale.