






The pause that annoys

When a comma makes life needlessly hard

September 12, 2010 | Jan Freeman

 Tweet   Share  E-mail  Print

Punctuation, quietly doing its job, rarely arouses the passions of the general public the way buzzwords and mispronunciations do. Yes, certain manly writers enjoy denouncing the wimpy semicolon, and spotting misused apostrophes is a popular pastime. But when you hear people arguing about the serial comma or the overuse of dashes, they're probably editors.

The folks behind National Punctuation Day, coming up Sept. 24, would like to change that (and sell a few T-shirts). Their previous ploys to raise punctuation awareness have included a baking contest and a recipe for the holiday's "official" meatloaf (in the all-too-appropriate shape of a question mark). This year's challenge is a great leap forward in literacy: Readers are invited to compose haiku about (and involving) punctuation. Among the samples at the website: