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## National Punctuation Day: a great day to celebrate commas and apostrophes

By Colette Bancroft, Times Book Editor

Feeling uneasy about mystery quotation marks?  
*We have "fresh" sandwiches.*

Badgered by errant apostrophes?  
*Our employee's are at you're service.*

Confused by AWOL commas?  
*Smoking pets and bicycles prohibited.*

Stop worrying about whether your dog smokes and start worrying about punctuation. Friday would be a good day to start: It's National Punctuation Day.

Many of us are worried already. As a former English teacher and copy editor, I despair for humanity when I open an e-mail that bristles with so many exclamation points I can hardly make out the words in between them. And those are just the press releases about library events.

Just last week, Washington Post columnist Gene Weingarten declared the English language dead, the coup de grace delivered by an unnecessary apostrophe.

But don't bury English yet. People are fighting to revive its proper use. National Punctuation Day was the brainchild of Jeff Rubin, a California newsletter writer who founded it in 2004 as "a celebration of the lowly comma, correctly used quotation marks, and other proper uses of periods, semicolons, and the ever-mysterious ellipsis."

Rubin and his wife, Norma, maintain a website, nationalpunctuationday.com. Last year they sponsored a punctuation baking contest. (Question mark meat loaf, anyone?) This year they're posting punctuation-themed haikus:

*Exclamation points  
And question marks together?  
Only in comics.*