



NATIONAL PUNCTUATION DAY®

“A celebration of the lowly comma, correctly used quotation marks, and other proper uses of periods, semicolons, and the ever-mysterious ellipsis.”

Featured in Chase's Calendar of Events



Congratulations to the 10 winners of the National Punctuation Day® Punctuation Paragraph Contest

He said (to me): “Hey, Punk! You waitin’ for me to come over there and give you a lesson in good [expletive deleted] grammar?” I paused; my heart raced rat-a-tat-tat, but my voice – it just couldn’t find itself. Then, suddenly ...

— Sean Bradley, Dubuque, Iowa —

The editor's challenge—use 13 punctuation marks in a short, three-sentence paragraph—was one that intrigued this copy editor, and I asked myself: Was I up to the challenge? The fabulous grand prize (“punctuation goodies”) is a grammar geek’s dream come true; I’m sure to win...yeah, that’s the spirit! So, thanks for the editorial (Telegraph Herald [my hometown newspaper], September 13, 2011) and for taking me away from editing the cockroach chapter in my zoology lab manual...I hope I still make my deadline.

— Sue Dillon, Dubuque, Iowa —

“If punctuation marks wore clothes, the comma would dress in brown—not rich, chocolate, winter-boots brown but faded, school-uniform khaki—and the ellipsis (remember those from Editing 101?) would wear a purple dress with oversized shades and sit alone sipping a martini,” said the founder of National Punctuation Day as she announced the day’s events to celebrate the “lowly comma . . . and the ever-mysterious ellipsis.” She was vague about the clothing choices of the question mark, suggesting that “the question mark is like the lady who changes [her dress] as the minutes tick by, with her husband yelling ‘late!’ as he slams the door.” She was more certain about the colon’s dress: monochromatic; balanced on top and bottom; and modest in size, color, and fit, as if to say, “look not at me but at what comes after me.”

— Demorah Hayes, Montgomery, Alabama —

*“Get that [*****] animal off my keyboard!” he roared—apparently abandoning his (short-lived) enthusiasm for her new kitten. Clearly, the honeymoon was over: first, the tantrum over hairs in the sink; next, the brouhaha about the napkin rings; and now, the paroxysm aimed at Tippy. Jenny’s mind raced over her options: Should she leave him . . . or should she kill him?*

— Ann Heinrichs, Chicago, Illinois —

Elia Kazan’s On the Waterfront (1954) poses the question: When is an act of betrayal an act of conscience? The film centers on streetwise Terry Malloy, whose sense of self-preservation succumbs to the self-realization (“I was ratting on myself all them [sic] years and . . . didn’t even know it!”) that he must betray corrupt associates—even his brother—for the collective good of oppressed longshoremen. Many believe On the Waterfront’s view of labor relations is naïve; it works, nonetheless, because the interior concerns of its hero dominate the entire film.

— Renee Hirshfield, St. Louis, Missouri —

I grew up in white neighborhoods where the little girls I played with privately asked my mother, “Why is she always dirty?” When my second-grade teacher (an older African American woman we’ll call Mrs. E.) persecuted me for unknown reasons, prompting stomachaches every morning before school, I never attributed her treatment to my racial background—such a possibility would not have entered my eight-year-old psyche; I figured she was just loony and mean! It wasn’t until I was much older that my parents told me my offense: “She [Mrs. E] thought you didn’t know your place ... that you didn’t act black enough.”

— Eva McGough, Seattle, Washington —

Who would've thought that I — a female chemist from upstate New York (LeRoy) — would spend my entire career in the Houston oil industry? Had you suggested it back then, I would have told you this: "I just graduated [from SUNY Albany] and I'm on a mission to cure cancer ...; you're nuts!" Well, my self-assurance vanished when I learned how interesting and high-tech the oil industry really is.

— Jeanne M. Perdue, Houston, Texas —

*“What’s in a name? ...[A] rose [b]y any other name would smell as sweet.” wrote Shakespeare in *Romeo and Juliet* (II, ii, 1-2). Seemingly correct, this statement fails to acknowledge—indeed ignores—the reality of what truly is in a name; people aren’t so cavalier when it’s their own name that is involved. Lest there be any doubt about this, try one of the following: forget your boss’ name; mispronounce a client’s name; or, even worse, call your wife by a former girlfriend’s name!*

— Bert Randall, Clarksburg, Maryland —

The semiliterate — and unintentionally hilarious — sound bites of the 2012 presidential candidates (such as this recent gem by Texas Gov. Rick Perry, quoted in the Milford [Mass.] Daily News: "If Washington continues to thumb their nose at the American people ... who knows what may come out of that?") make me wonder if we should return to the back-to-basics teaching methods of the 1950s. I know what you're thinking: "Okay, genius, did all those grammar drills, diagrams, and rote memorizations turn you into a gifted writer?" Alas, no; but as prosaic as my sentences may be, at least they're sentences!

— Kathleen Summers, Arlington, Virginia —

Writing has long been a source of pleasure (and some pain, too) in my life; I can't seem to stop doing it. "Write on!" shouted my down-to-earth friend Sue Katz when we last discussed this topic—and then she asked the obvious question, "You can't really stop anyway, can you?" Later, she emailed me the following: "I love the quotation by E.L. Docktorow [sic], who once said, 'Writing is a...form of schizophrenia.'"

— Allen Young, Orange, Massachusetts —

Best student entry

As a student, I am often told by my English instructors (often—but not too often; I do get good grades in English [but not always, as I am merely human]) that my writing has some . . . “weaknesses” in punctuation: it’s rife with commas, inundated with brackets, and is distinctly lacking in exclamation points. National Punctuation Day is an excellent excuse to correct my oft-paralyzing literary Achilles heel—punctuation—and appreciate the scope and subtleties of the powers of our brilliant ally, the English language! After all, what were such marvelous tools as punctuation marks crafted for, if not our use?

— Aubrey Gonzalez, Huntsville, Alabama —