

From the founder of National Punctuation Day®

The Write Stuff

by



THE NEWSLETTER GUY®

ON THE ROAD AGAIN

By Jeff Rubin

I was thinking the other day that it was time I sent another newsletter, and when I looked up I realized it has been nearly two years since my last one. Omigod!

I've not been the best practitioner of the advice I give to the companies that hire me to write and design their newsletters — “You should publish your newsletter at least four times a year.” In my defense, I am the victim of the same malady that befalls my

“The older I grow, the less important the comma becomes. Let the reader catch his own breath.”

**Elizabeth Clarkson
Zwart**

Jeff and Norma in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, PRC.



customers — they are busy doing what they do to make a living, and sometimes their newsletters fall through the cracks.

It's been a busy two years. Since I sent my fall 2006 newsletter, my wife, Norma, and I developed and began performing *Punctuation Playtime*®, a program for elementary schools that teaches punctuation to children (www.PunctuationPlaytime.com);

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WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO OUR LANGUAGE?

News item: *The Texas State School Board, in a 9-6 vote, passed a comprehensive set of new English standards for all grade levels in Texas schools, adopting back-to-the-basics education guidelines for teaching our national language.*

Grammar. Spelling. Punctuation. What has happened to the English language in the United States?

As reported in the *Wichita Falls Times Record News* (Ann Work, June 15, 2008), “a local valedictorian explains — ungrammatically — that ‘me and my friend’ will take a trip this summer.

“A Wichita Falls school

A teacher writes about a student, saying she believes he will go ‘strait’ to college after graduation.

district administrator sends an e-mail, explaining that he is ‘sighting’ number trends — not ‘citing.’

“A teacher writes about a student, saying she believes he will go ‘strait’ to college after graduation.”

Businesses, reported Work, are spending \$3 billion annually to train their employees in reading and writing skills.

According to The Report of the Commission for a College-Ready Texas, 50 percent of Texas’s college freshmen must enroll in remedial classes.

Nationwide, it’s become a Texas-size problem.

Nearly half of the incoming freshmen in the California State University system score below proficient in English on placement tests that determine what level of courses student should take.

In the country’s largest state community college system, more than 300,000 students ended up in remedial classes during the 2006 school year.

Nationwide, 28 percent of incoming freshmen enrolled in remedial college classes, according to a 2004 report by the National Center for Education Statistics.

In Texas, parents can look forward to seeing their children learn more grammar, phonics, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, handwriting, and basic writing skills.

The board’s decision reflects

a growing concern that public schools are graduating generations of children who are not only unfit for college, but also for the workplace. Statistics seem to confirm this.

Whole Language, an English course of study that stressed creative writing skills but skimped on teaching grammar, spelling, and punctuation — it was felt these skills would be acquired in the writing process — wasn’t working. A 2007 study by ACT, a college entrance exam company, found that only 19 percent of Texas high school graduates were college ready in English and other subjects.

A national survey of high school and college instructors by ACT revealed that what students learn in high school and what they need to know for college does not always match up.

“What college teachers say is they want students with a firm grasp of the basics,” said Cynthia Schmeiser, president and chief operating officer of the education division at ACT.

The results of the survey might help explain why community colleges and universities send so many freshmen to remedial classes.

Read the complete article on the Texas State School Board’s decision at www.timesrecordnews.com/news/2008/jun/15/readiness-question/

I’D APPRECIATE A REFERRAL

I’m looking for new customers for my newsletter business and I need your help.

Please recommend me to a company that needs help with its existing newsletter, or a business, association or non-profit you’ve worked with that has talked about a newsletter but hasn’t done one.

I’m looking for organizations that are seeking more effective ways to communicate with their employees, customers, members and donors.

I would not only appreciate your referral, but I will reward you handsomely if it turns into my customer. Thanks for your help.

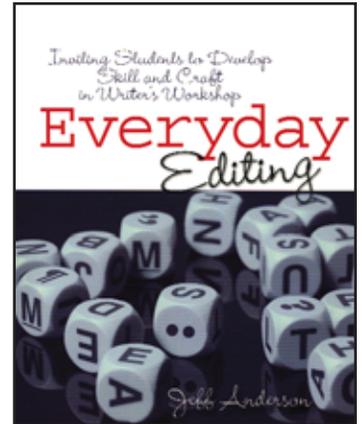
— Jeff Rubin

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THE BOOK NOOK

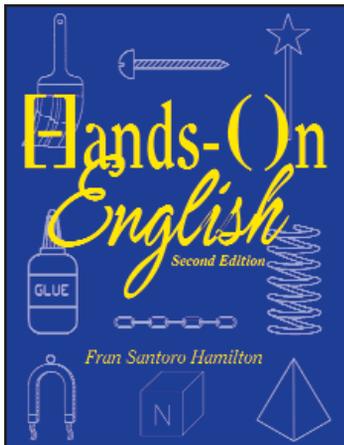


Everyday *Editing* is a terrific book for teachers and students.

Jeff Anderson, the author, asks teachers to stress that editing and revision are meaningful parts of the writing process, not merely a hunt for errors.

And, he invites students to carefully look at their writing and to think about how punctuation, grammar, and style can best be used to hone and communicate meaning.

Visit www.writeguy.net for more information on *Everyday Editing* and Jeff's other books. Buy it online and at your favorite bookstore.



This English handbook (now in its second edition) makes grammar visual with functional symbols to represent parts of speech.

It helps fourth graders through adults develop confidence in English.

Author Fran Santoro Hamilton also offers practice pages and a card game — as well as a variety of free resources to help people enjoy English and use it effectively.

For our California readers, *Hands-On English* is on California's approved list of supplementary materials for English and ESL. The materials are eligible for purchase with AB 1802 funds.

www.grammarandmore.com

WEB LINKS FEATURED IN THIS NEWSLETTER

www.NationalPunctuationDay.com: The national holiday I founded (recognized by *Chase's Calendar of Events*), will be celebrated for the fifth time September 24. See how schools across the country have added punctuation activities on this day. Check the photo pages, including our trip to China (where we nearly got arrested!) and our Punctuation Meat Loaf recipe!

www.PunctuationPlaytime.com: The on-site, high-energy punctuation program for children in grades 1-6. Check the photos of *Punctuation Playtime®* programs.

www.venturacountystar.com/news/2008/apr/19/man-delivers-comma-sense-to-students/: *Ventura County Star* article on *Punctuation Playtime's* six programs in Simi Valley, CA.

www.timesrecordnews.com/news/2008/jun/15/readiness-question/: Texas State School Board adopts back-to-the-basics education guidelines for teaching English.

www.PinoleRecall.com: Find out how a small group of people changed the political history of a small California city.

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will help you get your newsletter done on time, every time. We offer crisp writing, eye-catching design, and punctual delivery. Give me a try!

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> From front page

we performed 56 of those programs in schools from California to Chicago; we promoted the program at education conferences/trade shows in Chicago, St. Louis, Orlando, Nashville, Seattle, Denver, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Long Beach, Sacramento, and San Diego; we went to China (for fun!); and we helped overthrow the government of Pinole, CA, the city we call home (www.PinoleRecall.com).

(While the last item was fun, it was very serious business. It was the most exhilarating and exhausting experience of my life. It proved to me that the people truly do have power, especially in a small town.)

I do not offer these activities as an excuse, but an insight into how difficult it is to stay on track with your marketing. And your sales. And your life.



That's me at the lectern (in sunglasses), about to announce that the Concerned Citizens of Pinole had collected enough petition signatures to force a special recall election of three Pinole City Council members. We replaced all three with better people.

So, I hope you're paying more attention to these than I am, and that there's not so much on your plate that you don't have time for the important things in life.

I've asked my congressman to sponsor a bill adding four more hours to each day, but so far, no response.

I wish all of you a great summer.



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