

Special Edition: National Punctuation Day

Hurray! It's the best day of the year for punctuation aficionados! This year we're going to venture outside the lines and consider a pair of characters on your keyboard that technically do not qualify as punctuation.

We're talking about the commercial at (@) and ampersand (&). These characters belong to a large family of typographical signs and symbols called *glyphs*, some of which occupy the upper row and other out-of-the way keys on conventional keyboards.

To use them correctly, it's important to understand that both of these glyphs were originally devised as space-saving substitutes for words or phrases in very specific applications. The @ symbol began life as shorthand for the Latin word *ad* ("at") in accounting ledgers, but more recently has become familiar and essential as the glue in the middle of email addresses. The ampersand originated as a ligature for the *e* and *t* letters in the Latin word *et* ("and") and was used primarily in legal documents, which have always benefited from anything that could make them shorter. It also was and still is sometimes used as part of a company's legal name.

Today, both symbols are appropriate in applications where space is at a premium, such as notes, bibliographies, and tabular matter. Also, graphic designers use them to great effect as swoopy design elements.

But that's about it. You should not use them in titles, heads, or normal running text where there is plenty of room for *at* or *and*. This is because they are harder to read than the words they replace, causing the reader to place more emphasis on them than they merit and thereby making the phrase or sentence more difficult to understand.

With that, we hope you have a great National Punctuation Day! Stay tuned for the next regularly scheduled issue of *KB CommEntary*.

And please remember, *when it has to be right*, KB COMM is here to help.

Sincerely,

Kathy

Kathy Breuninger

KB COMM

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