

How to purposefully punctuate the holiday season

Written by 'Grammar Guy' By Curtis Honeycutt Guest Columnist
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This is most likely my oldest son's last year believing in Santa. I think he's onto the big lie my wife and I have been spinning.

Will he ruin it for his younger siblings? I sure hope not. After all, our six-year-old told me just yesterday, "Dad, if you're naughty, Santa will give you Coke in your stocking." Bless her heart.

As you know, my expertise isn't in Mr. Claus; it's in mystery clauses. Christmas has plenty to teach us about punctuation, so let's delve down the chimney of Christmas present tense.

Semicolons can really slay if you use them the right way. In fact, they connect clauses better than Mrs. Claus Facetiming Santa from the North Pole. A semicolon connects two related independent clauses; they replace a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

Here's an example: Last Christmas Eve, it was too foggy to navigate the sleigh safely; Santa called on Rudolph to save the day.

Speaking of sleighs, it helps to buckle up while dashing through the snow (lest you get upset). In punctuation, a dash adds emphasis to a phrase. Dashes take the place of commas to offset writing in a dramatic way.

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For example, “The Grinch — who hated anything related to Christmas — stole Christmas from all the citizens of Whoville.”

Christmas is a season of anticipation. For those who celebrate the spiritual aspect of Christmas, the Advent season reminds us that the long-awaited Messiah would be born in a humble stable in Bethlehem. Toy-loving kids find great anticipation in going to bed on Christmas Eve so Santa can bring them toys.

In punctuation, colons build a sense of anticipation. They indicate something exciting is coming, whether it's a list, quote or explanation. Curtis has a long Christmas wish list: new pens, novelty socks and a 1968 Nolan Ryan/Jerry Koosman rookie card.

The best way to spread Christmas cheer is by singing loudly for all to hear. Similarly, commas are like Santa's helpers in the magical realm of punctuation. They help to clarify sentences.

Commas tell your reader where to pause and break up the flow of words, making it easier to understand what you mean.

Noticing the cookies and milk, Santa took a few seconds to devour a midnight snack.

Think of punctuation marks like glitter — a little bit goes a long way. When you go overboard with punctuation, your sentences are littered with excessive, sparkly dots.

— Curtis Honeycutt is an award-winning syndicated humor columnist. Connect with him on Twitter (@curtishoneycutt) or at [curtishoneycutt.com](https://www.curtishoneycutt.com).