

LEFT UNEDITED – Punctuating a few points —and the plight of ‘attendees’

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As a news editor, the abuse of punctuation is frustrating—perhaps similar to the annoyance faced by a professional plumber when forced to correct amateur pipe work.

Sure, he gets paid for it, but does anyone really want toilet water on their glasses, or a parade of interrupting commas wearing out the delete button on a keyboard?

Then, there’s the misunderstood apostrophe, a little mark designed to indicate possession—Peter’s column, for example. The little friend is not a decoration. He has a job to do.

Yet, how many times have you seen your Facebook friends make reference to Republican’s, the Johnson’s or the Rolling Stone’s—not in the context of

ownership, but as a plural?

This just in: The “s” at the end of a noun is usually all that is needed to indicate there is more than one of something [there are exceptions].

That is s’s job—yes, even a letter can possess something—and the self-sufficient “s” does not need any help from fifth-wheel punctuation to do it.

Let’s be clear, the apostrophe is not some generic sidekick to “s” at the end of a word. Would you spell “yes” as “ye’s”? “Boss” as “bos’s”?

Unfortunately, some journalists occasionally fall prey to apostrophe abuse. Even a certain managing editor, who shall remain nameless—check *The Villager’s* masthead—recently gave me a column about “panda’s” in the Denver Zoo. Just keeping me on my toes, she said, or is that toe’s?

Then there is punctuation that should seldom ever be used at all. I often tell our writers that if they cannot articulate to me why they used a semicolon, don’t do it. A long dash is often more effective anyway—don’t you think so?

Same thing with exclamation points. Leave them to quoted matter, but even then use them judiciously. There is nothing like ! to make one sound like a used-car salesman, and if your sentence can’t get me excited without one, ! is not going to make it happen.

There are also words that should not be used in journalism, or anywhere else for that matter. If I never again see the word “attendee” in *The Villager*, it will be infinitely too soon.

Most good journalism is conversational and people simply do not use such words in conversation. Festival-goers, fine. Movie fans, fine. Art lovers, fine. Sports fans. Partiers. Students. Dancers. Politicos. Jugglers. Editors, fine. Anything, but attendees, unless you’re talking about people forced at gunpoint to attend something.

Keeping such problems at bay is just part of what an editor does as we strive to seamlessly create copy that works without the reader even noticing why it works.

Everyone needs a good editor. Even good editors need them. *The Villager* has proudly won many awards, but it is

the edited versions that win, the name of this column notwithstanding.

The work of *editor's* is never *done*; believe me!!