



Dear Reader,

This month's issue of **EC Buzz** was inspired by *The Punctuation Song*, which appeared in the very first episode of *The Electric Company*. This beloved television series aired on PBS from 1971 to 1977, teaching children how to read through sketch comedy, music and animation.

I just bought the long-awaited *Best of The Electric Company* DVD boxed set and was thrilled to rediscover *The Punctuation Song*. Who wouldn't love punctuation after hearing its catchy lyrics about "those little marks that use their influence to help a sentence make more sense"?



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## Three Common Punctuation Marks and How to Use Them Properly

1. **The apostrophe** shows possession or indicates a contraction. This leads to confusion about the words *its* and *it's*. *Its*, without an apostrophe, is a possessive pronoun, just like his or her. *It's*, with an apostrophe, is a contraction of *it is*. The same situation arises with the pronoun *their* and the contraction *they're*.
2. **The semicolon** is typically used to join two closely related independent clauses into one sentence. It isn't interchangeable with the colon, which is mainly used to introduce lists. In most business writing, don't bother with the semicolon. Just join the two clauses with a comma and a conjunction such as *and*, *or*, *but* or *so*. For clarity or emphasis, it is sometimes more effective simply to split them into two short sentences.
3. **The exclamation mark** should be used sparingly. Overuse dilutes its impact. Save the shouting for when you've got something especially important or unexpected to say, or people will just tune out the noise.

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## Buzz Off : *Best of breed*

"Best of breed" is a blue-ribbon example of how business communication is going to the dogs. It refers to a product that is the best of its type. In the tech world, a "best-of-breed solution" is an attempt to fulfill all needs by combining multiple devices, each designed to solve a particular problem, into one omnibus product. (In the dog-breeding world, this would be a "mongrel".) But, as with so many tech terms, "best of breed" has morphed into meaningless marketing-speak.

Instead of writing – or saying – "best of breed", showcase one of the following:

- "specialized"
- "the top product in its class"
- "the best at what it does"

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Which buzzword is your pet peeve? Send your suggestion to [writer@ecwriting.com](mailto:writer@ecwriting.com), then look for your buzzword and name in an upcoming issue.

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## Parting Words

"Cut out all those exclamation marks. An exclamation mark is like laughing at your own jokes."

– F. Scott Fitzgerald, author

