



## March 2006 Book Review: *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*

A recent article in the *New York Times* celebrated the proper use of the semicolon in a most unusual place—a placard on the subway. It made Lynne Truss, author of *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, a self-proclaimed punctuation stickler, happy. In case you've seen or heard of the book and wondered what it's about, the following is a short book report.

Truss's book is a *New York Times* best seller, with 241 Amazon ratings of five stars. While the book is a punctuation primer, it's also an entertaining read with a bit of punctuation history thrown in.

To demonstrate the importance of proper punctuation, Truss begins her book with two letters. While the letters contain the same words in exactly the same order, the punctuation used gives the documents completely opposite meanings. It's proof of the power of punctuation.

Beginning with the apostrophe, Truss covers the various punctuation marks. Her examples describe the confusion and miscommunication caused by misusing apostrophes and are sure to give you a chuckle while reminding you of the proper rules.

Commas are often a matter of opinion, according to Truss. Particularly the serial comma used at the end of a series. She emphasizes the importance of proper comma use with an example: "No dogs please" and "No dogs, please." The placement of the single comma completely changes the meaning of the sentence from one where dogs are unable to induce pleasure to one where dogs are not welcome.

In the chapter entitled *Airs and Graces*, Truss differentiates between colons and semicolons and their use. And going a step further, she argues for the continued use of these marks for how they add depth to our language and writing.

Dashes, exclamation marks, italics, question marks and the simple period all contribute to the slant or mood of a sentence. Each has its place for use in accurate communication. But even Truss admits the hyphen is a messy, confusing mark, without clear rules.

While the book is entertaining and educational, pure punctuation sticklers should be warned: Truss breaks the main rule in writing which is to follow the punctuation rules you establish in your own writing. Even so, it remains a readable and amusing source of solid punctuation rules for all types of business professionals.

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