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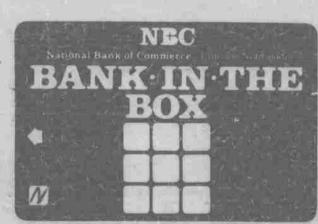


by Berke Breathed

Journalism punctuation rules need exlamation point to 'spike punch'!



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The Art of Punctuation

Hi there! I meant that very softly, but because of the exclamation point, you undoubtedly got some sense of urgency. Why should I get excited about saying "hi" to countless, faceless readers that I've never met? That's beside the point, the point of exclamation.

There are some standard journalism rules when it comes to using that exciting vertical dash and dot.



Rule #1: Never use an excla-

mation point.

Rule #2: Never use an exclamation point literally. Example "Ezzie, if we don't give those horses that shot, they'll hever win that darn race," he pointedly exclaimed.

In much the same way that a person is not allowed to yell "fire" in a crowded theater, neither are crack journalists permitted the use of a puncuate found on almost all typewriters. It is verboten, but kind of a pity. Consider the following possible headlines:

"Kerrey Vetoes DeCanip's Life." Very dull, right? Now catch this grabber:

grabber:

"Kerrey: 'DeCampa Persona Non Grata!!!" See the difference a few "ex" points can make? Try this sentence from a basic reporting viewpoint:

"Chuckles the Clown, of the Ringling Brothers circus, was found dead today in Bellevue, a monitor lizard tail found stuffed in his mouth." To not add an exclamation point after a statement such as this is to do injustice to Chuckles, the Ringling Brothers circus and the Bellevue Police Department.

One of the best things about exclamation points is that they usually make you read the sentence over, "this time, with emphasis," as a director might say. The Spanish language is smart. They turn the bigger punctuation marks upside down at the beginning of the sentence, letting the reader in on the excitement early. This is undoubtedly the Spanish language's greatest contribution to the world of punctuation, but it's hell on my Smith-Corona, flipping it over like that.

Hey! Exclamation marks are those little things that make life interesting! They're the spice in the soup! The spike in the punch!