

Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation

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Summary:

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A panda walks into a café. He orders a sandwich, eats it, then draws a gun and fires two shots in the air.

"Why?" asks the confused waiter, as the panda makes towards the exit. The panda produces a badly punctuated wildlife manual and tosses it over his shoulder.

"I'm a panda," he says at the door. "Look it up."

The waiter turns to the relevant entry and, sure enough, finds an explanation.

"Panda. Large black-and-white bear-like mammal, native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves."

So, punctuation really does matter, even if it is only occasionally a matter of life and death.

Now, we all know the basics of punctuation. Or do we? A look at most neighborhood signage tells a different story. Through sloppy usage and low standards on the internet, in e-mail, and now text messages, we have made proper punctuation an endangered species.

In Eats, Shoots & Leaves, former editor Truss dares to say, in her delightfully urbane, witty, and very English way, that it is time to look at our commas and semicolons and see them as the wonderful and necessary things they are. This is a book for people who love punctuation and get upset when it is mishandled. From the invention of the question mark in the time of Charlemagne to George Orwell shunning the semicolon, this lively history makes a powerful case for the preservation of a system of printing conventions that is much too subtle to be mucked about with.

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