

"You don't need to be a grammar nerd to enjoy this one....Who knew grammar could be so much fun?"—*Newsweek*

The **#1** *New York Times* Bestseller

Eats, Shoots & Leaves



The Zero Tolerance
Approach to Punctuation

LYNNE ! TRUSS

With a Foreword by Frank McCourt,
author of *Angela's Ashes*

Introduction – The Seventh Sense

Either this will ring bells for you, or it won't. A printed banner has appeared on the concourse of a petrol station near to where I live. "Come inside," it says, "for CD's, VIDEO's, DVD's, and BOOK's."

If this satanic sprinkling of redundant apostrophes causes no little gasp of horror or quickening of the pulse, you should probably put down this book at once. By all means congratulate yourself that you are not a pedant or even a stickler; that you are happily equipped to live in a world of plummeting punctuation standards; but just don't bother to go any further. For any true stickler, you see, the sight of the plural word "Book's" with an apostrophe in it will trigger a ghastly private emotional process similar to the stages of bereavement, though greatly accelerated. First there is shock.

Within seconds, shock gives way to disbelief, disbelief to pain, and pain to anger. Finally (and this is where the analogy breaks down), anger gives way to a righteous urge to perpetrate an act of criminal damage with the aid of a permanent marker.

It's tough being a stickler for punctuation these days. One almost dare not get up in the mornings. True, one occasionally hears a marvellous punctuation-fan joke about a panda who "eats, shoots and leaves", but in general the stickler's exquisite sensibilities are assaulted from all sides, causing feelings of panic and isolation. A sign at a health club will announce, "I'ts party time, on Saturday 24th May we are have a disco/party night for free, it will be a ticket only evening." Advertisements offer decorative services to "wall's – ceiling's – door's ect". Meanwhile a newspaper placard announces "FAN'S FURY AT STADIUM INQUIRY", which sounds quite interesting until you look inside the paper and discover that the story concerns a quite large mob of fans, actually – not just the lone hopping-mad fan so promisingly indicated by the punctuation.

Everywhere one looks, there are signs of ignorance and indifference. What about that film *Two*

Weeks Notice? Guaranteed to give sticklers a very nasty turn, that was – its posters slung along the sides of buses in letters four feet tall, with no apostrophe in sight. I remember, at the start of the *Two Weeks Notice* publicity campaign in the spring of 2003, emerging cheerfully from Victoria Station (was I whistling?) and stopping dead in my tracks with my fingers in my mouth. Where was the apostrophe? Surely there should be an apostrophe on that bus? If it were “*one month’s notice*” there would be an apostrophe (I reasoned); yes, and if it were “*one week’s notice*” there would be an apostrophe. Therefore “*two weeks’ notice*” requires an apostrophe! Buses that I should have caught (the 73; two 38s) sailed off up Buckingham Palace Road while I communed thus at length with my inner stickler, unable to move or, indeed, regain any sense of perspective.

Part of one’s despair, of course, is that the world cares nothing for the little shocks endured by the sensitive stickler. While we look in horror at a badly punctuated sign, the world carries on around us, blind to our plight. We are like the little boy in *The Sixth Sense* who can see dead people, except that we can see dead punctuation. Whisper it in petrified

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.

Sticklers, unite!

"If Lynne Truss were Roman Catholic I'd nominate her for sainthood."

—FRANK MCCOURT, author of *Angela's Ashes*

"[*Eats, Shoots & Leaves*] makes correct usage so cool that you have to admire Ms. Truss."

—JANET MASLIN, *The New York Times*

"'Correct usage' has been made sexy by Lynne Truss in her delightful *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, the most entertaining work of paralinguistics since Shaw's *Pygmalion*."

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"Truss is William Safire crossed with John Cleese's Basil Fawlty."

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"Lynne Truss makes [punctuation] a joy to contemplate."—*Elle*



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