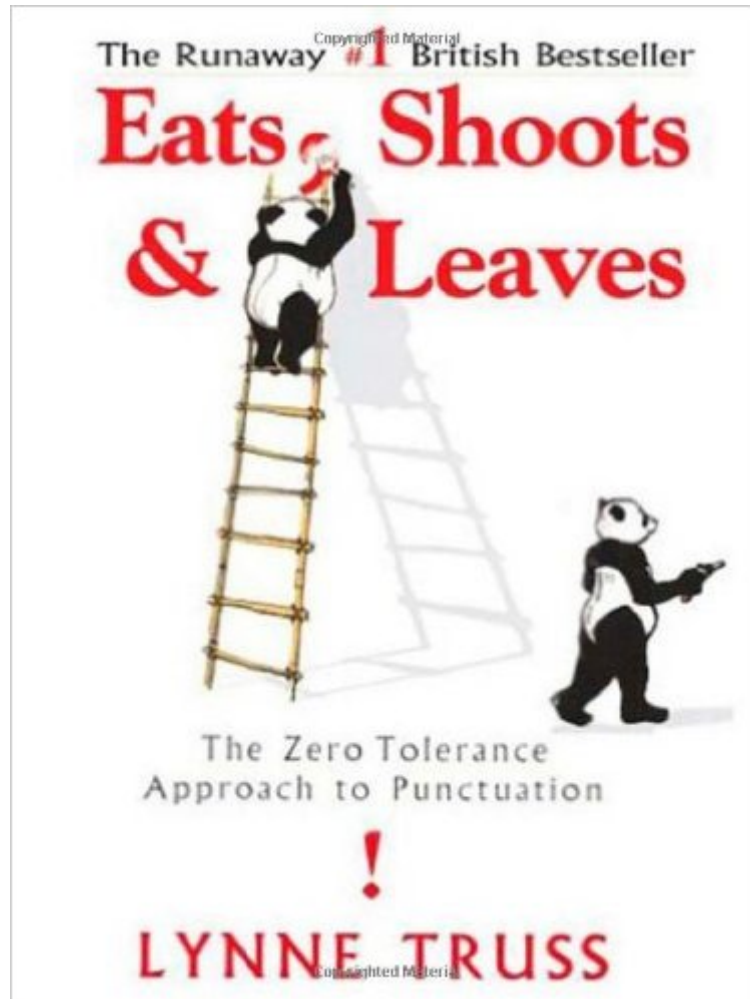


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# Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach To Punctuation



## Synopsis

The spirited and scholarly #1 New York Times bestseller combines boisterous history with grammar how-toâ€™s to show how important punctuation is in our worldâ”period. In *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, former editor Lynne Truss, gravely concerned about our current grammatical state, boldly defends proper punctuation.Â She proclaims, 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. Using examples from literature, history, neighborhood signage, and her own imagination, Truss shows how meaning is shaped by commas and apostrophes, and the hilarious consequences of punctuation gone awry. Featuring a foreword by Frank McCourt, and interspersed with a lively history of punctuation from the invention of the question mark in the time of Charlemagne to George Orwell shunning the semicolon, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves* makes a powerful case for the preservation of proper punctuation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Readers, check your reaction to the following sentence: Lynne Truss, an English grammarian is bloody fed up with sloppy punctuation. Does that sentence leave you feeling confused, irritated, or angry? Do you feel you have to second-guess the author of the sentence, forced to ascertain whether s/he was writing to Lynne Truss or about Ms. Truss? But that sort of thing is almost the norm these days, on both sides of the Atlantic. Of course, we Americans have been struggling for years with FRESH DONUT'S DAILY and Your Server: "MILLY" -- not to mention the

archy-and-mehitabel school of e-mail that neither capitalizes nor punctuates and reading through this kind of sentence really gets confusing i think it does at least do you too? Turns out that even the British--including the elite "Oxbridge" intelligentsia--are wildly ignorant of punctuation's rules and standards. Lynne Truss, an English grammarian and author of *EATS, SHOOTS & LEAVES*, is bloody fed up with it! So she wrote this handy little book that is ever-so-correct but not condescending, sometimes savage but not silly, full of mission and totally without mush. Think of Truss as punctuation's own Miss Manners, a combination of leather and lace, with maybe a bit more emphasis on the leather. (She advocates forming posses to paint out incorrect apostrophes in movie placards.) But her examples of bad punctuation serve a purpose: bad punctuation distorts meaning. *EATS, SHOOTS & LEAVES* includes numerous hilarious backfires of punctuation -- statements and missives that use the exact same words but convey totally opposite messages due to inappropriate punctuation.

Here's a small book you'll want to stuff in your pocket for that next flight or train trip to pass the time and avoid the embarrassment of having to explain to people you know that you're chuckling over a book on punctuation. Oddly enough the quite funny joke on which the title is based only appears on the dust jacket. But there is enough deadpan humor, historical trivia, and useful information in this modest work to make up for the lapse. If you think punctuation is just a collection of gratuitous furbelows with strict rules intended to keep grade school teachers, snobs, and compulsive personalities preoccupied, take a deep breath. To be sure our author Lynne Truss is a punctuation vigilante and does not take these matters lightly. Offenses to the language put her into a royal snit. Her temperament inclines to "zero tolerance", but in practice Truss recognizes the need for flexibility. The written presentation of our language is dynamic and continues to evolve. The preservation of punctuation rather than a fussy observance of rules is her goal. Maybe just maybe that preservation motive explains her regret at not mothering the children of the 16th century Venetian printer, Aldus Manutius the Elder, for whom we have to thank for italics and semicolons. Our present day punctuation began with Greek dramatists providing actors with cues for their onstage delivery. With the development of printing, printers became the innovators for this notational art. Over time conventions developed governing their use and were codified as rules. Creative types bristle at most forms of restraint. Gertrude Stein thought commas to be "servile", semicolons "pretentious", and question marks "completely uninteresting".

"If there is one lesson that is to be learned from this book, it is that there is never a dull moment in

the world of punctuation." Perhaps that is hyperbole, but there is never a dull moment in *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation* (Gotham Books) by Lynne Truss. Surely the book will not be the sensation it was in Britain, but it is witty, informative, and entertaining; you can't ask for more from a punctuation manual. And if you do not yet think that punctuation is important, you will after you see all the misunderstandings a little comma can cause. Take the peculiar title, which is from a joke: A panda goes into a café, orders a sandwich, eats it, takes out a revolver, fires it into the air, and goes out. When the waiter calls to ask what is going on, the panda plunks a badly punctuated wildlife manual onto the table and growls: "Look me up." The waiter finds the entry: "PANDA. Large, black-and-white, bear-like mammal native to China. Eats, shoots and leaves." Oh, let's have one more. There was an American actor playing Duncan in *Macbeth*, listening with concern to the battle story of a wounded soldier, who cheerfully called out: "Go get him, surgeons!" Misplaced comma; it should of course be: "Go, get him surgeons!" Another story related here, a true one, shows that a comma can literally be a life-or-death matter. The book is zero tolerance indeed. Truss says it doesn't matter if you have a PhD and have read all of Henry James twice, "If you still persist in writing, 'Good food at it's best', you deserve ..." and she lists some ghastly punishments.

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