

From the founder of National Punctuation Day®

# The Write Stuff

by



**THE NEWSLETTER GUY®**

## I MEAN, LIKE WHO TAUGHT THESE PEOPLE HOW TO SPEAK?

**T**oyota, the manufacturer of self-propelled automobiles, invented a verbal tic several years with an ad campaign featuring “moving forward” as its tag line, as if moving in any other direction made sense or would sell cars.

“Toyota . . . moving backward.”

“Toyota . . . moving sideways.”

Before Toyota, how did we ever know in which direction we were moving? Compass? GPS? Common sense?

Soon, this verbal tic—and its cousin, “going forward”—was picked up by TV and radio news reporters, anchors, and talk-show hosts. Also by politicians, teachers, and motivational speakers. And anyone else whose mouth moves and out come words.

### THE NEXT PANDEMIC

Here’s the cycle: The verbal tic creeps into people’s daily language patterns, like a virulent flu virus that meets the Centers for Disease Control’s criteria for a pandemic—“*occurring over a wide geographic area and affecting an exceptionally high proportion of the population.*”

This tic has become so prevalent that people who know better are moving forward while moving our language backward.

“*I think, going forward, inflation will remain negligible in the foreseeable future.*” —Bob Brinker, syndicated radio host of Money Talk.

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“**H**ow we look is a matter of personal preference and is really rather easy to deal with, but —language, language— which is so central and important to one’s success is too often sorely lacking.

“I am constantly saddened and dismayed by the way in which we have come to torture the English language. . . .”

“College students who use the term ‘he goes’ in place of ‘he says’ and whose sentences are riddled with ‘you know?’ and who cannot complete a sentence without inserting the word ‘like’ at least three times. . . . “My advice: Stop it this minute!”

— Rita Moreno, Actress,  
speaking at Mills College,  
Oakland, CA





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And this comment from Dawn Hudson, chairwoman of the Ladies Professional Golf Association board, on the firing of Executive Director Carolyn Bivens: *"We reached a point which made it difficult for Carolyn herself to see herself going forward and being able to lead in this environment."*

Remove the words "going forward" from these sentences. Do they still make sense? Did these words add meaning to the sentence?

Even the United States government got into the act. "We can't move forward until you send it in" was the tag line on the U.S. Census Bureau's television commercials.

Move forward? The United States government? That's like an oxymoron, isn't it?

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***"Going forward, I just feel that after the season everybody has to sit down and look at what gives us the best opportunity to win going forward."***

**— Coach Mike Singletary, San Francisco 49ers —**

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And Pittsburgh Steelers quarterback Ben Roethlisberger, upon hearing the news that there wasn't enough evidence to prosecute him for the second sexual assault he's been charged with in the last year, said at a press conference, *"I'm happy to put this behind me and move forward."*

My favorite use of this verbal tic comes from 49ers coach Mike Singletary. He said this at a press conference last year: *"Going forward, I just feel that after the season everybody has to sit down and look at what gives us the best opportunity to win going forward."*

Of course, now Toyotas dangerously move forward all by themselves, without any prompting from their drivers. A just reward for what Toyota has done to our language.

### **MORE VERBAL TICS**

Some of the more discouraging verbal tics involve the use of the words "like," "you know," and "I mean."

For example, consider this comment from Pleasant Hill (CA) City Councilman David Durant: "I drove down Pleasant Hill Road and I was like, wow!"

Or Jackie Lee, on receiving a call from the national women's table tennis team coach informing her she had been named to the U.S. Olympic team:

*"The national team coach was like, 'Are you still sleeping?' . . . 'My dad refused to accept it. He was like, 'I won't believe it until I see the plane ticket.'"*

Or this survivor of a shooting in Milwaukee, who told a reporter, *"I'm like, oh my God. My back is burning. I'm hit! I'm hit! Then I crawled out of the care and I was like, someone please help me, I'm hit."*

Or shortstop Jimmy Rollins, of the Philadelphia Phillies, responding to a question in Sports Illustrated about the strangest thing he's thought of while standing at shortstop: *"There have been times where I look up in the sky and I'm like, it would be nice to be barbecuing right now."*

### **YOU KNOW?**

My wife is fond of telling me that I pepper my conversation with the verbal tic "you know?"

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# National Punctuation Day is September 24

**Punctuation marks:  
Commas, colons, periods  
that give words meaning.**

**A**h. It's the essence of punctuation in a simple haiku. Last year we had a baking contest—and what a delicious exercise that was! This year, to celebrate the 7th annual **National Punctuation Day (NPD)** on September 24, we're trying something a bit more literary—the first National Punctuation Day® Haiku Contest, with the winners receiving a plethora of punctuation goodies.

It will be a celebration of proper punctuation in traditional Japanese-style verse. Send your best poetry to [Jeff@NationalPunctuationDay.com](mailto:Jeff@NationalPunctuationDay.com) and let the literary games begin! Haikus must be received by September 30.

I founded NPD in 2004 to draw attention to the importance of proper punctuation. It's a day for librarians, educators, and parents—people interested in teaching and good writing skills to their students and their children.

It's also a day to remind business people that they are often judged by how they present themselves.

NPD is the holiday that reminds America that a semicolon is not a surgical procedure. NPD is celebrated in schools and businesses throughout the world with activities, games, programs, and contests.

NPD has received worldwide media attention, with newspaper coverage from



***The Newsletter Guy makes it a policy not to patronize roadside merchants selling food out of the back of their trucks, especially when they can't spell the items they are selling. He's afraid the food might be as bad as the punctuation.***

Manila to London, from Ghana to Toronto, and from Seoul to Seattle, in addition to broad radio and TV coverage in the United States—including a short segment on *Regis and Kelly* in 2008 and a one-hour online chat on *The Washington Post* website in 2009.

The NPD website ([www.NationalPunctuation-Day.com](http://www.NationalPunctuation-Day.com))—in addition to highlighting the latest in literacy

news and featuring incorrectly punctuated signs from all over the world—serves as a resource that helps educators teach good writing skills and helps students understand the basics of punctuation. Business people worldwide use it as a reference guide.

— Jeff Rubin  
The Newsletter Guy  
and founder of  
National Punctuation Day®



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I don't agree, and I also don't argue. I just smile, because, like, disagreeing with her over something like this is not worth, you know, wrecking a marriage.

## I MEAN TO SAY

Ralph Barbieri, a longtime sports talk-show host in San Francisco, begins many of his sentences with the words "I mean," whether or not he's responding to a question asking him what he means.

But the award for most "I means" in 60 seconds goes to this former University of California (Berkeley) football player who stammered his way through this 2009 TV interview:

**Q:** *How do you feel now that you have your first game out of the way?*

**A:** *I mean this was a wonderful way to start the season.*

**Q:** *What was the key on the play where you ran 62 yards for a touchdown?*

**A:** *I mean I got some great blocks and . . .*

**Q:** *Last year you had a severe hip injury. How does it feel now?*

**A:** *I mean it feels great. People: I mean, going forward, let's all be like, a little more careful when we speak. You know?*

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I'm looking for organizations that are seeking more effective ways to communicate with their employees, customers, members, and donors.

I will reward you handsomely if your referral turns into my customer. Thanks for your help.

— Jeff Rubin, *The Newsletter Guy®*



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