



Mark your calendars: March 13 is National Exclamation Point Day! (This statement is true, but its incorrect punctuation is an ironic way to start a column about exclamation points.)

In professional writing—which obviously includes CDC writing for products like internal newsletters, web content, and partner announcements—use exclamation points for exclamatory statements only. Sorry to be the one to tell you this, but exclamation points don’t make something exciting if it’s not. And if everything is emphasized with an exclamation, then nothing is. Exclamation marks should be saved for what the author genuinely considers the most exciting part.

“We know what an exclamation is,” you’re probably thinking as you read this. “We’re not in second grade! Also, we’re punctuating these exact thoughts correctly as we think them.”

Ordinary statements express facts, ideas, or opinions. They don’t ask questions, make requests, give commands, or exclaim anything. But an exclamation is a forceful statement that expresses high levels of emotion or excitement.

Writer and novelist F. Scott Fitzgerald *hated* when people used exclamation points inappropriately, calling it “laughing at your own joke.” Ouch. That hurt a little, F. Scott.

Consider the following sentences and if it makes sense to put an exclamation point at the end of them. Also think about your audience and the impact of having the right tone for your statement. If an exclamation mark would sound frivolous, and you work for a very serious publication, that would be a problem.

- The new staff directory is here! (No, this is a statement—although we guess there are people who would be very excited about a new staff directory.)
- October is National Domestic Violence Awareness Month! (No, this is a statement. See how an exclamation point seems inappropriate here?)
- Join our webinar titled “My Great Uncle Reads the Phone Book Aloud in a Monotone!” (No, this is a statement.)
- Elton John is going to lead our team meeting today! (Yes. Also, please invite me.)

Use a period to announce your professional webinar or news. Let the content—not the punctuation—entice the reader to attend the webinar, open the email, or click the link.