



# Interrobang: The Forgotten Punctuation



by

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What is an interrobang? Most people have no idea what it is, much less ever heard the term. An interrobang is a form of forgotten punctuation. It's a combination of an interrogation point, better known as a question mark, and a bang, an old printer's term for punctuation better known as an exclamation point. Why would anyone want to have access to yet another form of punctuation? Well, before I answer that, let's review the history of the interrobang.

In 1962, the head of a New York ad agency, Martin Speckter, designed the interrobang. He felt that advertising employees needed something to combine a shout with a question to signify that emotional mixture people produce during times of stress or extreme upset. "You want to do what?!" To name his new punctuation mark, readers of *Type Talks* entered suggestions in a contest and interrobang was chosen.

The interrobang received some attention at first. Newspapers, magazines and even talk shows offered reports on the new mark. Even the *Wall Street Journal* had an editorial about the interrobang in April 1962, deeming it perfect for rhetorical questions such as, "'Who forgot to put gas in the car?'" where the question mark alone just isn't adequate." Only the interrobang can convey attitude, curiosity and wonder in print form.

The mark's popularity was such that in 1966 the American Type Founders issued a metal typeface called *Americana* to include the interrobang. The manufacturer Remington Rand had the key as an option on the 1968 typewriter and commented, "[the interrobang] expresses Modern Life's Incredibility." (Source unknown.)

Sadly, although the mark enjoyed popularity among the advertising world in the 1960s, it never caught on. Fortunately however, it is not a dead punctuation form. Its name and definition do appear in some American dictionaries and it can be found as a Windows symbol font, and in the Unicode character set. Additionally, the interrobang can be found in the Wingdings 2 font in Microsoft Word. To see it, or use it, go to Format, choose Fonts, then Wingdings 2. Under this font, you will find four different versions of the interrobang. Hit the ~ key, the ] key, the shift 6 key, or the shift - (hyphen) key.

More recently, in 1996 a New York art studio designed variations of the mark, one for each font found in its computer library.

Personally, I find this punctuation mark to be very useful. I use it in drafts of my writing as a placeholder while trying to decide the right inflection to give a tag-line. It would be easier if we could bring back the interrobang into everyday usage, if publishers would realize the value of this mark. Think of the number of overwritten tag-lines it could eliminate alone. Try this mark, use it, get to know it. If you like it, let the publishers know.



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