

28.7: SPECIAL LOOK: So

The word *so* can be an adverb or a conjunction. When *so* is an adverb, there are no punctuation issues. When *so* is a conjunction, there are two possibilities: Either it is a subordinate conjunction, or it is a conjunctive adverb; and the punctuation depends upon which it is.

So As A SUBORDINATE CONJUNCTION

So as a subordinate conjunction means “so that” or “in order that” and implies the reason for doing something.

She traveled to Wisconsin (so she could attend a seminar for the company).

The reason she traveled was to attend the seminar.

I went to the bank (so I could cash my check).

The reason I went to the bank was to cash my check.

We left (so she could put the baby to bed).

The reason we left was so that she could put the baby to bed.



DISCUSSION

As a subordinate conjunction, *so* begins a dependent clause that is used as an adverb, and the punctuation is that used for all adverb clauses.

We left the room and returned later (so he could have a private conversation).

(So he could have a private conversation), we left the room and returned later.

We left the room, (so he could have a private conversation), and returned later.

See Chapters 1 and 5 and 6 for further discussion of connecting words and adverb clauses.



RULE

THE WORD So.1: When *so* is a subordinate conjunction and means “so that” or “in order that” and begins a dependent clause that is at the end of the unit it modifies into, use no punctuation before the clause.

She left at 4:00 (so she could catch the train to New York).

I helped him with the figures (so we could finish the project in time).

We mailed the payment early (so we would get credit before the next billing).



RULE

THE WORD So.2: When *so* is a subordinate conjunction and means “so that” or “in order that” and begins a dependent clause that is at the beginning of the unit it modifies into, use a comma after the clause.

(So she could catch the train to New York), she left at 4:00 to walk to the station.

(So we could finish the project in time), I helped him with the figures.

(So we would get credit before the next billing), we mailed the payment early.

 **RULE**

THE WORD So.3: When *so* is a subordinate conjunction and means “so that” or “in order that” and begins a dependent clause, use commas around the clause when it is in the middle of the unit it modifies into.

She left at 4:00, (so she could catch the train to New York), to walk to the station.
I helped him, (so we could finish the project in time), with the figures.
We mailed, (so we would get credit before the next billing), the payment early.

So As A CONJUNCTIVE ADVERB

So as a conjunctive adverb means “therefore” or “consequently” and implies a cause-and-effect relationship.

It was a holiday; so we decided to take a trip up the coast.
(The trip was a result of having a holiday.)

The Dodgers won the final game; so they went to the playoffs.
(Going to the playoffs is the effect of winning the last game.)

I got a bonus; so I bought a car.
(The car is the result of getting the bonus.)

See Chapter 1 for further discussion of connecting words.

 **DISCUSSION**

When *so* means “therefore,” it is always a conjunctive adverb.

My husband had left; so I had no choice.
(Therefore, I had no choice.)

She did not get along with anyone in the office; so it was really difficult.
(Therefore, it was really difficult.)

The numbers did not make sense to me; so I asked questions.
(Therefore, I asked questions.)

 **RULE**

THE WORD So.4: When *so* is a conjunctive adverb and means “therefore,” use a period or semicolon in front of it and no comma after it because it is one syllable.

John, Scott, and Wayne arrived on Friday, September 5. So Marion, Carol, and Cliff had to handle the orientation as I was out of town.
(Therefore, Marion, Carol, and Cliff had to handle....)

He had drunk too much; so he had no business driving.
(Therefore, he had no business driving.)

The red Buick was moving erratically; so I pulled over and let him go by.
(Therefore, I pulled over and let him go by.)



DISCUSSION

Looking at these rules, we see that it is unusual to have a single, separating comma in front of or after the word *so*. When it means “therefore,” a comma in front of it would create a run-on sentence, and a comma after it is incorrect because it is only one syllable.



REPORTING

No matter how much someone draws the word *so* out into several syllables, “Soooooo...,” there still is not a single comma after it. In addition, the fact that a person pauses after the word, in general, is not a reason to use a single comma after it.



RULE

THE WORD SO.5: When *so* is the last word before someone trails off, put a semicolon or period in front of *so* and a dash or ellipses after it to show the trailing off (whichever you have chosen to use for trailing off).

We had not been there for weeks; so --
We had not been there for weeks; so...

She was at home on Tuesday, May 7, with her brother, sister, and me. So --
She was at home on Tuesday, May 7, with her brother, sister, and me. So...

The weather prevented us from leaving when we had planned; so --
The weather prevented us from leaving when we had planned; so...