

Words of Wisdom: Where NOT to Put Punctuation

December 2010

By Shari Broussard, Vice-President

Rule 1 – Do not put a single separating comma after a coordinate conjunction: and, but, or, nor. Some people draw these little words out into two or three syllables when they say them; some pause for a long time after these words. Neither of those things makes a difference in the punctuation, nor do they necessitate the need for punctuation after the conjunction.

Example: And I haven't had time to do that.

NOT: And, I haven't had time to do that.

Rule 2 – Do not put a single separating comma after a one-syllable conjunctive adverb: so, thus, hence, then, still, yet, plus.

Example: Still there was little that she could do to change his mind.

NOT: Still, there was little that she could do change his mind.

Rule 3 – Do not put a single separating comma between the subject and the verb. It is easy to keep track of the subject and verb in a short, straightforward sentence. No one wants a comma between the subject Betsy and the verb walked in the sentence "Betsy walked." When there is a natural pause or when there is a very long sentence without punctuation, there is a tendency to throw in a comma just because you haven't used one for a while. Be sure that that single comma is not between the subject and the verb.

Example: The doctor that worked in the ER and that treated him for his injuries after the accident that took the lives of his brother and sister turned out to be an expert in the exact type of injury he sustained.

NOT: The doctor that worked in the ER and that treated him for his injuries after the accident that took the lives of his brother and sister, turned out to be an expert in the exact type of injury he sustained.

Rule 4 – Do not put a single separating comma between an adjective and the word it modifies.

Example: She is a talented, verbatim court reporter.

NOT: She is a talented, verbatim, court reporter.

Words of Wisdom: Where NOT to Put Punctuation

Continued



Rule 5 - Do not put a single separating comma or a colon between a preposition and its object.

Example: I left a message for Elizabeth and Laura.

NOT: I left a message for: Elizabeth and Laura.

NOT: I left a message for, Elizabeth and Laura.

Rule 6 - Do not put a single separating comma or a colon between the verb and its direct object.

Example: We decided later to go into the office and chat.

NOT: We decided later, to go into the office and chat.

Rule 7 - Do not put a single separating comma or a colon between a verbal - -ing, -ed, or to plus a verb - - and the word that completes it.

Example: I spent the morning researching the applicable cases and the court decisions.

NOT: I spent the morning researching, the applicable cases and the court decisions.

Rule 8 - Do not put a single separating comma in a compound dependent construction, that is, when a coordinate conjunction joins elements that cannot stand alone to express a complete thought.

Joining verbs = no comma

Example: The secretary handled that and did a fine job.

Joining completer words = no comma

Example: She did not know whether to tell him at all and what exactly to say.

Joining two prepositional phrases = no comma

Example: He remained unimpressed by John Lennon or his entourage.

Joining dependent clauses = no comma

Example: If Ms. Smith had been there and if she had been aware of the situation, she would have spoken to him about his attitude.