

## Words of Wisdom: The Use of the Word “So”

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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 verb; and the punctuation depends on which it is.

**Rule 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.

Example: She left at 4:00 p.m. so she could catch the train to New York.  
I helped her with the figures so we could finish the project in time.

**Rule 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.

Example: So she could catch the train to New York, she left at 4:00 p.m. to walk to the station.  
So we could finish the project in time, I helped with the figures.

**Rule 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.

Example: She left at 4:00 p.m., 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.

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

**Rule 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.

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

**Rule 5:** When “so” is the last word before someone trails off, put a semicolon or period in front of “so” and ellipses after it to show the trailing off.

Example: We had not been there for days; so...  
She was at home on Wednesday, May 10, with her brother and sister. So...

No matter how much someone draws the word “so” out into several syllables, “Sooooo,” 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.