COMMA TIP 7

Before you add a comma, know the difference between so and so that.

**So – Coordinating Conjunction**

*So,* a coordinating conjunction, can join two main clauses. The pattern looks like this:

\[
\text{Main Clause} + , + \text{so} + \text{Main Clause}.
\]

Katherine recently adopted a Great Dane puppy, *so* she spends considerable time wiping up puddles of dog urine with a sponge.

Mike agreed to help Helen move to her new apartment, *so* he spent Saturday lifting heavy furniture and struggling with unwieldy boxes.

Johnny drives a rusty sedan with no air conditioning, *so* he must use the strongest antiperspirant on the market.

**So That – Subordinate Conjunction**

*So that,* on the other hand, is a subordinate conjunction that introduces a subordinate clause. The pattern looks like this:

\[
\text{Main Clause} + \emptyset + \text{so that} + \text{Subordinate Clause}.
\]

The new puppy whines pathetically *so that* Katherine will let it sleep on the bed.

Mike soaked in a hot bath *so that* his stiff back would relax.

During the summer, Johnny drives with a big cup of ice *so that* he doesn’t overheat and pass out in the hot car.
**The Reason for the Confusion**

*So that* can confuse writers because the *that* is optional. When the *that* is missing, don’t mistake *so that* for *so*, thus adding incorrect punctuation.

Angie peeled away the crispy chicken skin *so (or so that)* she could later eat a brownie without concerns about the calories.

Before beginning his daydream, Frank opened his literature book *so (or so that)* he appeared to be paying attention to the discussion.

Unconcerned about small children or kittens, Carlotta recklessly sped through the residential neighborhood *so (or so that)* she would be home in time to watch a rerun of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, her favorite TV show.

**Quick Test**

Directions: Add commas where necessary.

1. Robbie bought a small microwave for his first apartment *so he could cook popcorn and macaroni and cheese, the only meals he could afford.*

2. Sylvia wore flat shoes on her date with Tony *so she wouldn’t intimidate this short young man with her height.*

3. Yuko bought a small aquarium and some goldfish *so her apartment wouldn’t feel so lonely.*

4. Patrick always carries an English handbook with him, even to basketball games *so that he can check other people’s grammar wherever he goes.*

5. Rachel neglected to make her car payment three months in a row *so she must hide her car in friends’ garages in an attempt to foil the repo man.*