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:

**Main Clause** + , + so + **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:

**Main Clause** + Ø + so that + **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 they are 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.