

**Grammar Nerd's Nerd-out:
Joining Two Complete Thoughts
And End of Sentence Punctuation
by Tim Burke**

Today we'll look at a basic comma rule that we use a lot but often don't apply correctly. Here's an example of the mistake: She frowned at the troll and her brother yelled insults at it.

RULE:

AND is joining two sentences (complete thoughts), so we must have a comma before AND.

Meet the basic joining word called the FANBOYS, a mnemonic device for recalling the following words that fit in this group:

FANBOYS = For and nor but or yet so

[for is a fanboy if you can replace it with BECAUSE]

She wept, for she had failed. She wept because she had failed.

Thank you for the gift. Thank you because the gift (oops! doesn't work! Not a FANBOYS in this example)

Subject + Verb, FANBOYS Subject + Verb or in less fancy-pants grammarian terms:

complete thought, FANBOYS complete thought.

CORRECT: I love tennis, but I hate soccer.

Wrong: I love tennis but I hate soccer. [forgot comma]

Wrong: I love tennis, but hate soccer. [doesn't join 2 sentences]

CORRECTION: I love tennis but hate soccer.

Wrong: I love tennis, however I hate soccer. I hate tennis, therefore I don't play. (there's no "H" in Fanboys so not a FANBOYS)

CORRECTION: I love tennis. However, I hate soccer. I love tennis; however, I hate soccer.

I hate tennis; therefore, I don't play. I hate tennis. Therefore, I don't play.

Practice. Which sentence is correct?

1. a) The players were all psyched to win the tournament but the coach was pessimistic.

- b) The players were all psyched to win the tournament, but the coach was pessimistic.
2. a) Though the teacher was grateful for the small class size, he was far less appreciative, for the length of the class.
b) Though the teacher was grateful for the small class size, he was far less appreciative for the length of the class.
3. a) The test wasn't fair due to its extreme length, yet all the students passed.
b) The test wasn't fair due to its extreme length yet all the students passed.
4. a) The parents were open to the idea of adopting a pet, but completely opposed to adopting a cat.
b) The parents were open to the idea of adopting a pet but completely opposed to adopting a cat.
5. a) The parents were completely opposed to the idea of their son playing football, however they were quite open to his joining the ultimate frisbee team.
b) The parents were completely opposed to the idea of their son playing football; however they were quite open to his joining the ultimate frisbee team.
c) The parents were completely opposed to the idea of their son playing football, however, they were quite open to his joining the ultimate frisbee team.

ANSWERS. 1. b (2 complete thoughts) 2. b (*for* not a FANBOYS here) 3. a (2 complete thoughts) 4. b (not 2 complete thoughts) 5. b (*however* not a FANBOYS)

Advanced Topic for the Grammar Nerd

Today we're going to explore double punctuation marks at the end of the sentence. (the source is the 16th edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style* so don't even *think* about arguing...)

Which of the following are correct? Answers at the end of the test.

Abbreviation

1. a) Students should always bring the usual supplies like pencils, pens, etc.
b) Students should always bring the usual supplies like pencils, pens, etc..
2. a) Should students always bring the usual supplies like pencils, pens, etc.?
b) Should students always bring the usual supplies like pencils, pens, etc?
3. a) My students never remember to bring the usual supplies like pens, pencils, etc!
b) My students never remember to bring the usual supplies like pens, pencils, etc.!

Question mark with exclamation mark

4. a) Are you seriously going to tell her that?!
b) Are you seriously going to tell her that?
c) Are you seriously going to tell her that!?

Quotation with question mark

5. a) The guy I was pointing to asked, "Who me?"
b) The guy I was pointing to asked, "Who me?".
c) The guy I was pointing to asked, "Who me."?

6. a) Are you the guy who asked, "Who me?"?
b) Are you the guy who asked, "Who me?"
c) Are you the guy who asked, "Who me"?
7. a) The serial killer who was holding a dripping axe and standing over the ten bodies actually asked, "Who me?!"
b) The serial killer who was holding a dripping axe and standing over the ten bodies actually asked, "Who me?!"
c) The serial killer who was holding a dripping axe and standing over the ten bodies actually asked, "Who me"?

ANSWERS. 1. a (statement so one period suffices) 2. a (keep abbreviation and add question mark/exclamation mark) 3. b 4. b (Never exclamation mark plus question mark in formal English) 5. a (statement so one question mark inside quotations suffices) 6. b (question but one question mark inside quotations suffices) 7. a (question mark inside for quoted material and exclamation mark outside to show overall statement's strong emotion)

Send me an email at tim@timburketales.com for questions you may have for future columns