

So vs. So that

“ . . . , so . . . ”

“So” is used as a coordinating conjunction to show a response or a reaction. In the format

Sentence 1 , “so” Sentence 2

the first sentence is the action and the second is the response/counter action.
action→continuation action→counter action

Example 1:

Jake bought the marshmallows, so Tina bought the chocolate and graham crackers.

In this example, Jake purchased the marshmallows. Tina then purchased the chocolate and graham crackers as a continuation of Jake’s action. “So” in this sentence serves to show the continuation of a complete act, purchasing supplies for making some s’mores.

“So that . . . , . . .” or “. . . so that . . . ”

“So that” is used as a subordinate clause to show purpose or to give an explanation. It is used to show an action producing an intended result or a cause producing an effect. In the format

Sentence 1 “so that” Sentence 2

the first sentence is the action/cause and the second is the intended result/effect. In the format

“So that” Sentence 1 , Sentence 2

the first subject-verb clause is the intended result/effect and the second is the action/cause.

action→intended result cause→effect

Example 1:

So that she would not be late for class, Elizabeth set her alarm.

Though this example is grammatically correct, it sounds a bit awkward because “so that” is rarely used as a subordinate clause to introduce a sentence. In this example, the intended result is that Elizabeth not be late for class. The action taken to produce this result is that she set her alarm. “So that” in this sentence serves to show the relationship between the action and the intended result.

Example 2:

Pavlov rang the bell so that the dog would salivate.

In this example, Pavlov rang the bell, and the dog salivated. Ringing the bell is the cause; the dog salivating is the effect. “So that” in this sentence serves to show the relationship between Pavlov ringing the bell and the dog salivating.

When “. . . so . . .” means “. . . so that . . . ”

Often, we shorten phrases in American English, especially in conversation. Thus, we may use “so” when we mean “so that.” This is acceptable as long as the punctuation identifies whether you are using “so” as a conjunction or as a shortened form of “so that.”