The Fascinating World of Conjunctive Adverbs

Celia M. Elliott
University of Illinois
cmelliot@illinois.edu

So what is a “conjunctive adverb”?
An adverb that connects two independent clauses (both have a subject & a verb)

Explains the relationship between the two clauses
• cause & effect
• sequence or priority
• contrast
• comparison

Examples: therefore, nevertheless, still, thus, consequently, hence, otherwise, furthermore, moreover, accordingly, besides, however
Conjunctive adverbs act like regular conjunctions, but they’re punctuated differently

Coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) that join independent clauses require a comma before the conjunction

“I think best in the mornings, but I fall asleep in the afternoons.” (Celia Elliott)

Conjunctive adverbs take a semicolon before and a comma after

“I think; therefore, I am.” (René Descartes, who said it in French)

English Dirty Trick #478

*However* is both a conjunctive adverb (CA) and an interrupter (I) and is punctuated differently depending on its use

CA: “I think; however, I try not to think too much.

I: “I think, however, that safety measures are required.”

How can you tell? If the words following *however* form an independent clause, then it’s a conjunctive adverb and takes a semicolon and comma

*However* can just be an adverb, too! Then it’s not punctuated at all.

CA: “*However* hard I try, I cannot think of more than two things at once.
To recap:

Punctuation is important—faulty punctuation can cause mistakes in interpretation of highly technical material

“The reason it's worth standing up for punctuation is not that it's an arbitrary system of notation known only to an oversensitive elite who have attacks of the vapours when they see it misapplied. The reason to stand up for punctuation is that without it there is no reliable way of communicating meaning.”—Lynne Truss, *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*

is ambiguous.

cmelliot@illinois.edu
http://physics.illinois.edu/people/Celia/