28.10: **SPECIAL LOOK: YES AND NO**  
AND THEIR “BROTHERS, SISTERS, AND COUSINS” LIKE **UH-HUH/UNH-UNH, ET CETERA**

Assume that all of the rules that apply to *yes* and *no* also apply to *uh-huh* and *unh-unh* and *yep* and *nope* and *yea* and *nay* and any other variations you can think of.

Note that there are two ways to spell the negative: *unh-unh* and *huh-uh*. Though either may be used, it seems that the use of *unh-unh* makes the distinction between the positive and negative clearer. It is a matter of personal preference.

**Rule**

**The Words Yes and No.1:** For the plural of *yes*, use *yes’s*; the plural of *no*, use *no’s*.

You need to use yes’s and no’s rather than nodding your head.  
All we need are yes’s and no’s.  
Did you say to use yes’s and no’s?

**Discussion**

The apostrophe form of the plurals seems to be neater. In the end, however, it is a matter of personal preference: *yes’s* and *no’s* or *yeses* and *noes*. There is a need to make them consistent with each other.

**Rule**

**The Words Yes and No.2:** When the word *yes* or *no* is used generically and refers to a general positive or negative response, do not put quotes around it.

This requires a yes-or-no answer.  
You don’t have to explain. Just give her a yes or no.  
All you have to do is give me a general yes or no.

**Discussion**

Often, although the words *yes* or *no* may be used, the reference is to a general positive or negative answer. In other words, the attorney would take an answer of “Never” or “Always” or “Sure” or “I think so” and is not looking for the specific words *yes* or *no*. In this case, the words *yes* and *no* are not quoted.

**Rule**

**The Words Yes and No.3:** When the word *yes* or *no* is used in a specific sense as a possible answer, use quotes around it and capitalize it.

You need to say “Yes” or “No” or “I don’t know” or “I am not sure.”
You have to respond with “Yes,” not “Uh-huh.”
Please just use “No” when you mean it. Don’t shake your head.

A  No.  
Q  I am sorry. Was that “No”?  
A  “No.”
Whenever these words are quoted, they are capitalized.

**Rule**

**The Words Yes and No.4:** When the word *yes* or *no* is said multiple times, use commas or periods to separate the words.

Q Were you aware of the affair?
A Yes, yes, yes.
A Yes. Yes. Yes.

Q Were the injuries life threatening?
A No, unh-unh.
A No. Unh-unh.

**Reporting**

Some reporters would make the claim for making a distinction between the period and comma, based upon how these are said: If they are said quickly, commas; said slowly and deliberately, periods. It generally is a matter of personal preference.

**Rule**

**The Words Yes and No.5:** When the words after the *yes* or *no* simply reflect or “echo” the words of the question, use a comma after the *yes* or *no*.

Q Did you see her earlier in the day?
A Yes, I did.
A Yes, I saw her.
A No, I didn’t.
A No, I did not see her.

**Rule**

**The Words Yes and No.6:** When the words after the *yes* or *no* do not repeat or echo the words of the question but provide additional information, use a period after the *yes* or *no*.

Q Did you see her earlier in the day?
A Yes. She had left with her sister.
A Yes. I think it was around 10:00.
A No. I had to leave before she arrived.
A No. I had an appointment away from the office.

**Discussion**

This is another area where struggling with the punctuation does not pay big dividends. It is not as if the reader of the transcript looks at the period or comma after the *yes* or *no* and exclaims, “Oh, my gosh. This punctuation is just so confusing. I cannot understand this sentence because of the punctuation.” This is not a distinction which has a major -- or any -- impact on the meaning of the sentence.
It is really easy to get this one right. It is about whether the words after the yes or no echo the words of the question, that is, repeat the words of the question. If they do, use a comma; if they don’t, use a period. When the words after yes or no add information beyond what is being asked in the question, use a period. There is no need for any exceptions to these rules.

**RULE**

**THE WORDS YES AND NO.7:** When the words after the yes or no begin with coordinate conjunctions like *but* or subordinate conjunctions like *because* or *though*, use a period after the yes or no.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>Did you see her earlier in the day?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Yes. And we didn’t speak at the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Yes. Because she had something I needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>No. But the next day.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>No. Nor anytime later.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>Was she involved in the deception?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>No. Nor was her sister.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>No. Though I didn’t know it at the time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Yes. And no one could prove it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Yes. But along with her siblings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>Did they travel together?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>No. Although I think they did meet up later.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>No. Or at least not on that trip.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Yes. But they were concerned about security.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Yes. Since it was cheaper.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DISCUSSION**

Though theoretically we might throw a semicolon into the mix here, inserting a semicolon and finding a way for there to be a distinction between the semicolon and the period before elements that begin with coordinate or subordinate conjunctions is fruitless. There is no semicolon rule that makes it correct in this construction.

**REPORTING**

In the minds of some reporters, there is another way to analyze this that has to do with looking at the material after the yes and no and determining whether it can answer the question by itself. In this thinking, if the words after yes or no answer the question by themselves, a comma is used; if they don’t, a period is used.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q</th>
<th>Was she alone in the car?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>No, my brother was with her.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>No. She was on her way to the bank.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Though this is an acceptable rule to follow, it requires that every single yes and no be analyzed individually and a decision made for each sentence. This would seem to require that a lot more thought be given to each occurrence of yes and no without improving the readability of the transcript.
Rule

The Words Yes and No.8: If the answer continues after the yes or no and its echoed answer -- e.g., after “Yes, I did” or “No, she hasn’t” -- put a period after the echoed answer before the addition of another sentence.

Q Have you attended all board meetings?
A Yes, I have. I have not missed one.

Q Did she seem interested in your offer?
A No, she didn’t seem interested. She was happy where she was.

Q Was she a part of the team that did the analysis?
A Yes, she was. Later, however, she resigned from that team.

Rule

The Words Yes and No.9: When the word yes or no is at the end of the sentence, it takes a comma in front of it.

I saw her that day, yes.
The bank did not have the record of the transaction, no.
The injury was to her left hand, yes.

Rule

The Words Yes and No.10: When the word yes or no is in the middle of the sentence and the sentence is complete and makes sense without it, surround the word with commas.

She did not write to me, no, when she was away.
I wasn’t aware of it at the time but, yes, was shocked to find it out later.
The house was locked, yes, with an alarm system.