

Comma Splices and Run-on Sentences

Explanation

A comma splice (CS) and a run-on sentence (RO) both occur when two independent clauses, or two complete sentences, are connected incorrectly. For a comma splice, the two independent clauses have been combined with just a comma:

CS Example: I enjoy amusement parks, I didn't have fun at Great America.

For a run-on sentence, the two independent clauses have been combined without any punctuation or conjunction between them:

RO Example: My mom made dinner I ate at home.

Since independent clauses are complete sentences, each with its own subject and verb, they are grammatical units that must stand alone. As such, every independent clause must be offset or separated by proper punctuation or by a combination of punctuation and a coordinating conjunction. Below are the three ways to fix comma splices and run-on sentences.

1. Use a period.

The easiest way to fix a comma splice or run-on sentence is to use a period. For a comma splice, change the comma into a period. For the run-on, add a period after the first independent clause.

CS Example: I enjoy amusement parks, I didn't have fun at Great America.

Becomes: I enjoy amusement parks. I didn't have fun at Great America.

RO Example: I ate at home my mom made dinner.

Becomes: My mom made dinner. I ate at home

2. Add a coordinating conjunction with a comma.

Another way to fix a comma splice or a run-on sentence is by using a coordinating conjunction and comma. Coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so*) along with a comma before the conjunction can be used to combine two independent clauses. Each of the coordinating conjunctions adds different meaning to your sentence – “but” adds contradiction, “so” adds a cause-and-effect relationship, and so on – so you must pick the conjunction that works best for the information in your sentence.

For a comma splice, simply add a coordinating conjunction after the already present comma. For a run-on, add a comma and then a coordinating conjunction after the first independent clause.

CS Example: I enjoy amusement parks, I didn't have fun at Great America.

Becomes: I enjoy amusement parks, but I didn't have fun at Great America.

RO Example: I ate at home my mom made dinner.

Becomes: My mom made dinner, so I ate at home.

3. Use a semi-colon.

Like a period, a semi-colon can also be used to separate two independent clauses. However, semi-colons are best used with two clauses that are closely related. Semi-colons allow writers to indicate in a subtle way that the information in these two separate independent clauses should be contemplated together. A semi-colon by itself stresses that the two sentences are elaborating on the same point, but a semi-colon followed by a however and a comma show that the two independent clauses are in opposition.

Consider the two examples below – the comma splice contains two sentences that are in opposition, while the run-on has two complimentary sentences elaborating on the same idea.

CS Example: I enjoy amusement parks, I didn't have fun at Great America.

Becomes: I enjoy amusement parks; however, I didn't have fun at Great America.

RO Example: I ate at home my mom made dinner.

Becomes: My mom made dinner; I ate at home.

Exercise

Correct the comma splices and run-on sentences below.

1. I like cats, I hate dogs.
2. I studied hard this semester I made good grades.
3. My father is chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations, he also heads the Warrant Committee.
4. Entrepreneurship is the study of small business college students are embracing it enthusiastically.
5. Your ice cream will melt, you should eat it quickly.

Below are passages from famous novels. The punctuation has been changed, and in some cases, coordinating conjunctions have been removed. Add punctuation and/or coordinating conjunctions to fix all of the comma splices and run-on sentences. Remember to pick the coordinating conjunctions and punctuation that adds the correct meaning to your sentences.

1. A Christmas frost had come at midsummer a white December storm had whirled over June, ice glazed the ripe apples drifts crushed the blowing roses
2. There [were] things which he stretched, mainly he told the truth.
3. External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge no warmth could warm him, no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he, no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose, no pelting rain less open to entreaty.
4. It is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth, it is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind.
5. All men live enveloped in whale-lines, all are born with halters round their necks it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever present perils of life.

Answer Key

Possible answers for the sentences.

1. I like cats, **but** I hate dogs.
2. I studied hard this semester; I made good grades.
3. My father is chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations. **He** also heads the Warrant Committee.
4. Entrepreneurship is the study of small business, **and** college students are embracing it enthusiastically.
5. Your ice cream will melt, **so** you should eat it quickly.

Possible answers for the passages.

1. A Christmas frost had come at midsummer; a white December storm had whirled over June; ice glazed the ripe apples, **and** drifts crushed the blowing roses. (from *Jane Eyre*)
2. There [were] things which he stretched, **but** mainly he told the truth. (from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*)
3. External heat and cold had little influence on Scrooge. **No** warmth could warm him, **and** no wintry weather chill him. No wind that blew was bitterer than he; no falling snow was more intent upon its purpose; no pelting rain less open to entreaty. (from *A Christmas Carol*)
4. It is very painful for me to be forced to speak the truth. **It** is the first time in my life that I have ever been reduced to such a painful position, **so** I am really quite inexperienced in doing anything of the kind. (from *The Importance of Being Earnest*)
5. All men live enveloped in whale-lines; all are born with halters round their necks. **It** is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever present perils of life. (from *Moby Dick*)