

Comma Splices or Run-On Sentences

Problem:

Two sentences (or independent clauses) cannot be jammed together and presented as only one sentence, either without any punctuation between them (*fused sentences*) or with only a comma between them (*comma splice*).

He spilled the hot minestrone soup she laughed at him. (*fused sentences*)

He spilled the hot minestrone soup, she laughed at him. (*comma splice*)

Remember that a comma is weak; it is never strong enough to splice or yoke together two sentences.

Solution:

There are three ways to solve the problem created by these errors.

1. Combine the ideas in a compound sentence. This requires either a semicolon or a coordinating conjunction such as *and* or *but*.
2. Combine them in a complex sentence. This requires a subordinating conjunction like *as*, *because*, *although*, *if*, *when*, *where*, *while*.
3. Separate them into two separate sentences.

These three solutions create different relationships, so you should select the best solution for the context.

Examples:

1. Please bring me your coat, I will hang it up for you. (*comma splice*)

You can create a compound sentence here in one of two ways. You can replace the comma with a semicolon:

Please bring me your coat; I will hang it up for you.

You can also place a coordinating conjunction after the middle comma. These words are all two or three letters long: *and, but, or, for, yet, nor*, and sometimes *so*.

Please bring me your coat, and I will hang it up for you.

This is the best solution if the two clauses are relatively short, closely related in meaning, and roughly equal in importance.

2. The dog is sleeping soundly it had a good dinner. (*fused sentences*)

Because these sentences stand in cause-effect relationship, you would choose Solution 2:

Because it had a good dinner, the dog is sleeping soundly.

The two sentences are made into one complex sentence by the addition of the subordinating conjunction *because*. This is the best solution when the two clauses are closely related but not equal in importance. The clause without the subordinating conjunction (*the dog is sleeping soundly*) is given more emphasis.

3. She arrived, I left the room quickly. (*comma splice*)

Here you might choose Solution 3, and divide the two clauses into two sentences.

She arrived. I left the room quickly.

This solution is advisable if the clauses are long, not closely related in meaning, or if (as in this example) you want the dramatic emphasis of separation.