

The Comma Splice

DEFINITION: Comma splices combine, with a comma, two or more independent clauses without the use of a conjunction.

EXERCISE: CIRCLE THE COMMA SPLICES IN THE PARAGRAPHS BELOW.

Everyone shares the experience of waiting in line at grocery stores, in airports, and in school, however, waiting in line can be an isolating experience. The tension between closeness with others and isolation is a dynamic found on public transportation, too. Some people seclude themselves by listening to music with headphones, others choose to read books.

HAVING TROUBLE? If you cannot identify which commas are joining two or more independent clauses without the use of a conjunction, reviewing grammatically correct ways to connect independent clauses will help you.

How do I Revise Comma Splices?

To correct a comma splice and join two independent clauses, try one of the following:

- Add a comma and a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).
 - EXAMPLE: Her argument details the relationship between the soap industry and American culture, but she fails to convince her readers that grungy youth subculture is a reaction against the clean, sterile domestic sphere.
- Add a semicolon.
 - EXAMPLE: Advertising is pervasive; advertisements surround us.
- Separate the clauses into two sentences.
 - EXAMPLE: Her argument details the relationship between the soap industry and American culture. However, she fails to convince her readers that grungy youth subculture is a reaction against the clean, sterile domestic sphere.
- Restructure the sentences using a dependent clause. Note how the subordinating conjunction changes the sentence's meaning slightly.
 - EXAMPLE: Though her argument details the relationship between the soap industry and American culture, she fails to convince her readers that grungy youth subculture is a reaction against the clean, sterile domestic sphere.

EXERCISE: USE ONE OF THE ABOVE METHODS TO CORRECT THE FOLLOWING COMMA SPLICES.

1. The suspicious woman crept through Helen's backyard, the woman disappeared into the woods bordering Helen's property.
2. Oscar brought his family's garbage and recycling behind their condominium complex, he sorted the bags into appropriate receptacles.
3. By tracing Toomer's repetitive lyric phrases – indicators of blues style and collective voice – throughout *Cane*, we can assess *Cane*'s complex relationship to early blues music development, in addition, we can better understand the relationship between Toomer's oscillating use of realistic and romantic language and blues music.
4. My heart beats fast, my hands shake.
5. People across the world are becoming more and more similar to one another, globalization has both positive effects and negative consequences.

HAVING TROUBLE? Let's take a closer look at these strategies for joining independent clauses.

Comma and Coordinating Conjunction

Use the acronym FANBOYS to remember the seven coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so. To join two independent clauses, add a comma after the first independent clause and a coordinating conjunction directly after the comma.

EXAMPLE: Air pollution poses risks to all people, but it can be deadly for asthma sufferers.

Adding a Semicolon

Semicolons can join two independent clauses with or without a conjunctive adverb (therefore, consequently, however, etc.) Semicolons must be used sparingly and only when the two independent clauses have balanced sentence structure and meaning.

EXAMPLE: Albert plays the cello beautifully; many couples ask him to play at their weddings.

Restructure Sentences Using a Dependent Clause

Add a dependent clause to an independent clause to create a complex sentence. When dependent clauses are placed before independent clauses, commas must follow dependent clauses.

EXAMPLE: Although air pollution poses risks to all people, it can be deadly for asthma sufferers.

HAVING TROUBLE? In order to understand how to join independent clauses, you should have a firm understanding of independent clauses themselves.

Understanding Independent and Dependent Clauses

DEFINITIONS: All clauses must contain one subject and one verb. An independent clause contains a subject and a verb and can stand alone as a sentence.

Dependent clauses also contain subjects and verbs, but they begin with subordinating conjunctions (since, although, whenever, though, before, once, etc.) and are therefore unable to stand alone as sentences.

IDENTIFY WHICH CLAUSES ARE INDEPENDENT:

1. She is a hardworking individual.
A. Independent
B. Dependent
2. Although we never confirmed the date.
A. Independent
B. Dependent
3. Once the media picks up on this story.
A. Independent
B. Dependent

HAVING TROUBLE? Let's take a closer look at independent and dependent clauses.

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE EXAMPLE: Inez had a lovely wedding.

DEPENDENT CLAUSE EXAMPLE: Even though her flowers arrived late...

NOTE THAT A COMMA CAN JOIN A DEPENDENT AND AN INDEPENDENT CLAUSE TOGETHER.

EXAMPLE: Even though her flowers arrived late, Inez had a lovely wedding.

COMMA SPLICES OCCUR, HOWEVER, WHEN A COMMA ATTEMPTS TO JOIN TWO INDEPENDENT CLAUSES.

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Comment [1]: Subject

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Comment [2]: Verb

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Comment [3]: The clause is independent and can stand alone as a sentence.

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Comment [4]: Subordinating conjunction

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Comment [5]: Subject

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Comment [6]: Verb

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Comment [7]: Since it begins with a subordinating conjunction, the clause is dependent and cannot stand alone as a sentence.

Understanding Subjects and Verbs

DEFINITION: Sentences are made up of subjects and verbs. Nearly every sentence must have both a subject and a verb to be complete.

THE SUBJECT OF THE SENTENCE IS THE PERSON, PLACE, THING, OR IDEA THAT IS DOING OR BEING SOMETHING.

THE SUBJECTS IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES ARE UNDERLINED:

My mother won the lottery.

After midnight, he falls asleep.

My favorite animal is the polar bear.

UNDERLINE THE SUBJECTS IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES:

No machinery is required.

Surprisingly, the Martians appeared friendly and cooperative.

The banker wore a fashionable vest.

Worried about finding employment, Sarah wondered if she should admit that she had once committed a felony.

Diligent and organized, Sam received good grades.

Once upon a time, dinosaurs roamed the Earth.

She loves eating at the restaurant around the corner.

Eventually, though, the two united.

Most of his friends have plans for after graduation.

After they crossed the finish line, the group of friends hugged each other and cheered.

The timber wolf looks like a large German shepherd.

Some later legends borrowed events from the lives of documented historical figures, but only beginning in the nineteenth century did Robin Hood take on the role of savior of the poor and defender of righteousness.

We smiled because the dinner was delicious.

THE VERB DESCRIBES THE ACTION OR STATE OF BEING TAKEN BY THE SUBJECT.

THE VERBS THAT MODIFY THE SUBJECTS ARE BOLDED:

My mother **won** the lottery.
After midnight, he **falls** asleep.
My favorite animal **is** the polar bear.

CIRCLE THE VERBS IN THE FOLLOWING SENTENCES:

Who goes there?

Instead, he rides down the stairs on a surfboard.

Baseball is good for the soul.

She thinks about her ex-boyfriend too much.

Reflecting on my life in high school embarrasses me.

Seeing the American spirit of freedom and excellence embodied in the bird, politicians and citizens alike continue to work to protect the bald eagle.

Nick hated eating at restaurants.

He often watched television at night.

Why should students pay the consequences for legislators' irresponsible decisions?

Robinson retired in 1956, concluding a ten-year-long career.

While sledding down the hill, Billy lost his hat.

Irritated, the professor asked her students to put away their cell phones.

"Please hurry," Sarah added.

PRACTICE: Now that you know that independent clauses (word groups with subjects and verbs and that can stand on their own as sentences) need to be joined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction or a semicolon, correct the following comma splices.

1. When I took the exam today, I noticed that Ahmed was not in class, I am worried that he got food poisoning from the cake we ate last night.
2. Tragedy depicts the individual confronted with death, comedy depicts the adaptability of human society.
3. I contend that we should not spend money on expensive space exploration, we have enough underfunded programs here on Earth.

4. Throughout the beginning of my term in Professor Corr's class, I enacted a strategic approach to learning, as the final paper's due date approached, my typical strategic tactics began to fail.
5. Of the many geysers in Yellowstone National Park, the most famous is Old Faithful, its spray sometimes reaches 150 feet in height.
6. Mary McLeod Bethune was the seventeenth child of former slaves, she founded the National Council of Negro Women in 1935.
7. I resisted help for both reasons, I wanted to retain the feeling of autonomy that I had forged through years of English courses with traditional assessment schemas, I was too proud to admit that I needed help with the project's technological component.
8. Most people think that Ellen and Tina are twins, Ellen, however, is two years older than Tina.
9. The economy is slowly improving, more businesses on my block are opening.
10. Most of the students are excited for summer, Nick is not.