

COMMA SPLICES

A **comma splice** results when two independent clauses (complete sentences) are incorrectly joined or "spliced" with a **comma**. Remember, each clause must have a subject and a verb; each clause must express a complete thought.

COMMA SPLICES:

The cruise missile is a slow but highly evasive nuclear missile that can fly under enemy **radar**, **it** can be launched from air, land, or sea to strike within a few hundred feet of the pre-selected target.

Scotland Yard began using fingerprints in **1901**, **Sir** William Henschel developed the first system for their use.

Richard wanted to go to the football **game**, **Shana** wanted to watch basketball.

NOTE: Sometimes one can identify a sentence by noticing the rise or fall of one's voice. *Most* sentences end with a fall in the speaker's voice.

CORRECTING COMMA SPLICES: FIVE METHODS

1. Divide the two independent clauses into two separate sentences.

sentence. sentence

COMMA SPLICE: Most secretaries spend more than sixty percent of their time at their **desks**, **they** spend their time typing, transcribing, making and answering telephone calls, scheduling the boss's appointments, and putting together research projects and reports.

CORRECTED: Most secretaries spend more than sixty percent of their time at their **desks**. **They** spend their time typing, transcribing, making and answering telephone calls, scheduling the boss's appointments, and putting together research projects and reports.

2. Use a semicolon to join two related independent clauses.

sentence; sentence

COMMA SPLICE: The ogre caught the **unicorn**, **the** terrible ogre then took the terrified beast to the Pinnacles of Pain Mountains.

CORRECTED: The ogre caught the unicorn; the terrible ogre then took the terrified beast to the Pinnacles of Pain Mountains.

3. Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, so, but, for, yet, or, nor—use the acronym “fanboys” to remember them) to join two equally important ideas presented in two clauses.

and
but
sentence, so sentence
for
yet
nor
or

COMMA SPLICE: Sabrina had a little **dragon**, **its** scales were as sharp as razors.

CORRECTED: Sabrina had a little **dragon**, **and** its scales were as sharp as razors.

4. Use a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb to join related independent clauses. Frequently used conjunctive adverbs include the following:

however	then	as a consequence	in addition
therefore	nonetheless	as a result	besides
moreover	indeed	for example	in conclusion
furthermore	in fact	hence	in other words

sentence; therefore, sentence
 nevertheless
 consequently (logical connection)
 furthermore

COMMA SPLICE: According to the poll results, one third of the students were very conservative politically, they thought themselves to be liberal.

CORRECTED: According to the poll results, one third of the students were very conservative politically; however, they thought themselves to be liberal.

NOTE: Sometimes words like "however" simply serve as an interruption in a sentence rather than joining two sentences: Sally, however, could not make up her mind about the artistic quality of the film.

5. Use a subordinating conjunction to create a dependent clause. By themselves dependent clauses are fragments and must be connected to an independent clause. Commonly used subordinating conjunctions are:

after	ever since	that	where
although	how	though	whereas
as	if	unless	wherever
as if	in order that	until	whether

NOTE: Remember, how a word is used determines its function in a sentence. Sometimes a word can be used as a subordinating conjunction; sometimes the same word can function as a preposition.

The jury came into the courtroom **after** the judge. (preposition)

The jury came into the courtroom **after** the judge was seated. (subordinating conjunction)

COMMA SPLICE: The manned space missions most often discussed are space stations orbiting the earth and a permanent moon base, more spectacular schemes for space cities are also discussed.

CORRECTED: The manned space missions most often discussed are space stations orbiting the earth and a permanent moon base **although** more spectacular schemes for space cities are also discussed.

independent clause (sentence) dependent clause
 no comma

COMMA SPLICE: I went through with the surgery, I was very glad I'd had it.

CORRECTED: **After** I went through the surgery, I was very glad I'd had it.

dependent, independent clause (sentence)

By themselves dependent clauses are fragments:

While I was waiting for the bus

After the results of the exit poll were in

Because the blockade was meant to increase public outcry

EXCEPTIONS: If you are in doubt of the correct punctuation, use the more traditional methods.

- A comma splice *is* permissible in a series of independent clauses (three or more) where the last two clauses are separated by “**and, but,**” or “**or.**”

The Yo-Yo King demonstrated his new trick, the Skateboard Princess performed her new **stunt, and** the manager of Play Palace treated everyone to chili dogs and root beer.

- Achieve a dramatic effect by using commas without coordinating conjunctions to link several brief, closely related independent clauses:

He came, he saw, he conquered.

- A comma may be used to separate a second clause which reverses a negative first clause:

That night the princess did not sleep, she danced the night away.

*Adapted from *The Borzoi Handbook for Writers*, (1993).

COMMA SPLICE EXERCISES

A. DIRECTIONS: In the following exercise, indicate whether an item is a comma splice (CS) or is correct (C).

EXAMPLES:

- a. cs No one offered to help us, they just honked their horns impatiently.
- b. c Walking down the street, I could hear the birds singing in the trees.
- c. c Joe hurried into the room; then he strolled slowly to the window.
- d. cs My sister has never married, moreover, she plans never to get married.

1. ____ One of the most interesting plants is the cactus, for it is able to live without water for years.
2. ____ The average woman does not find it hard to get a job, instead she finds it hard to get a promotion.
3. ____ The time you spend in traffic court is not actually very long, but it seems like a long time.
4. ____ I never did any studying in high school; as a matter of fact, I never even took a book home with me.
5. ____ One of my problems is spelling, the other one is writing legibly.
6. ____ This is not actually a real diamond, it is only a good imitation.
7. ____ Cassette recorders are not merely toys; they are also very effective learning tools.
8. ____ The tires on this bike are in good condition, furthermore, the chrome is clean.
9. ____ Compared with others on the team, Janet has remarkable stamina.
10. ____ The collar on this shirt is small, therefore, this shirt will not fit a person with a large neck.
11. ____ Even after the car was tuned, it still was difficult to start in the mornings.
12. ____ The trail was steep and very rocky, nevertheless, every one of the hikers reached the top.
13. ____ Our neighbors are all trustworthy people, the kind you want your children to associate with.
14. ____ The dog walked around the garage, looking for the cat.

15. ____ Jill didn't really want to visit me, all she wanted was to borrow money.

DIRECTIONS: Identify each sentence as correct (C) or comma splice (CS).

EXAMPLES: cs John went home, then he ate dinner.

c We bought a new car, a new house, and a snowmobile last winter.

1. ____ The basis of Hinduism is a firm belief in the unity of man, God, and universe.
2. ____ Most people, however, are incapable of perceiving this unity, they see instead a multitude of separate phenomena.
3. ____ The goal of life for a Hindu is to stop seeing himself as a subject observing many objects, he must realize that subject and object are the same.
4. ____ The flying fox is not really a fox at all, rather, it is a kind of bat whose head resembles that of a fox.
5. ____ Proper lighting is a necessity for good eyesight, but direct sunlight can damage eyesight.
6. ____ Mosquitoes are found in various climates, they thrive in Alaska as well as in the tropics.
7. ____ Once limited to the Western states, rodeos now enjoy a national popularity.
8. ____ Because they are high in Vitamin A, both apricots and broccoli are nutritionally valuable foods.
9. ____ Kansas City calls itself the City of Fountains, its goal is to build a new public fountain every year.
10. ____ Manila hemp rope remains very useful, although it is not as strong as nylon, it does stretch as much.
11. ____ Fiberglass makes excellent roofing, aluminum is also a popular material.
12. ____ Canoeing, one of America's favorite sports, can prove to be exciting and dangerous.
13. ____ Although some Texans do not like to admit it, Alaska is our largest state.
14. ____ Getting the right to vote is one thing, using it is another.
15. ____ Baking one's bread requires time, patience, and practice, these ingredients cannot be bought or borrowed

A. ANSWERS:

- | | | | |
|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1. C | 5. CS | 9. C | 13. C |
| 2. CS | 6. CS | 10. CS | 14. C |
| 3. C | 7. C | 11. C | 15. CS |
| 4. C | 8. CS | 12. CS | |

B. ANSWERS:

- | | | | |
|-------|-------|--------|--------|
| 1. C | 5. CS | 9. CS | 13. C |
| 2. CS | 6. CS | 10. CS | 14. CS |
| 3. CS | 7. C | 11. CS | 15. CS |
| 4. CS | 8. C | 12. C | |

