

Comma Splices

A Guide to Recognizing and Avoiding
Them

What is a comma splice?

- The term “comma splice” is often confusing to students
- It sounds like a punctuation error, but it’s not!
- A comma splice is NOT “a comma in the wrong place”
- Comma splices are serious grammar errors at the sentence level
- Comma splices are considered “major errors” by most writing teachers

Definition:

- A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses—clauses that could stand alone as sentences—are joined (“spliced”) with just a comma and without benefit of a coordinating conjunction
- Thus we have two sentences “pretending” to be one
- A fused sentence is closely related to a comma splice
- It occurs when two sentences are fused without the benefit of **any** punctuation

Consequences:

- Often, comma splices will not obscure the meaning of a sentence: the reader can still understand the writer's message.
- However, when we have comma splices in our writing, we send a message to our readers that we are not competent writers; we do not quite understand what a sentence is (or isn't)!
- This undermines our credibility, and our readers will not take our message as seriously as it should be taken.

Examples:

- I like all sports, basketball is probably my favorite.
- The writer makes some interesting points, he does not develop them very well.
- Colonial New England has a bloody history, many wars were waged over control of its rocky, unproductive soil.
- The Misfit is an interesting character, the speech he makes about religion is complex.

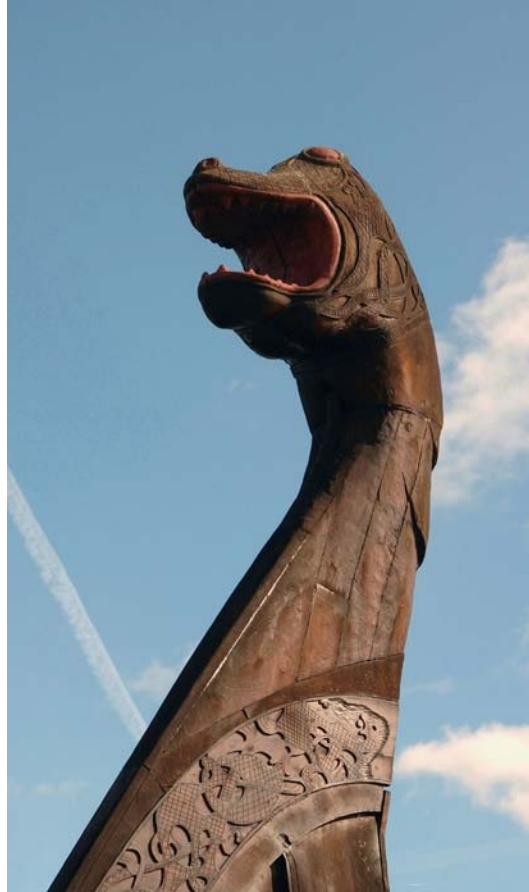
Special Cases:

- When a conjunctive adverb (however, moreover, and nevertheless are common ones) comes between two independent clauses and we join them with just a comma, it is **STILL** a comma splice!
 - I like all sports, however, basketball is probably my favorite.
- We still have two independent clauses joined by a comma—by definition, a comma splice.

Common Pattern:

- Beware of sentences in which the same word is repeated in the middle of the sentence on either side of a comma. This is a common comma splice pattern:
- I chose to write about Hawthorne, Hawthorne is one of the most famous American authors of the nineteenth century.

Comma splices make your English professor unhappy!
Here is a picture of your professor when your essay has
comma splices:



Scary, huh? Here is your English professor
when your paper has no comma splices:



- Which would you rather have grading your essay?

How to Fix Comma Splices

- There are several ways to fix comma splices:
 - Make the two independent clauses separate sentences by putting a period between them
 - Change the comma into a semicolon (;).
Semicolons are stronger than commas and can be used to link independent clauses
 - Insert the appropriate coordinating conjunction (the “FANBOYS”: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So) after the comma

When to choose which “fix”?

- Which option you choose will depend upon a variety of circumstances
- For example, if you are writing an in-class essay and catch a comma splice while proofreading, you should probably use a semicolon because it is the neatest “fix”
- Always use semicolons when you have a conjunctive adverb (see slide 6) linking two independent clauses:
 - I like all sports; however, basketball is my favorite.

More Fixes

- Use the appropriate FANBOYS to clarify the relationship between the ideas expressed in your independent clauses:
 - The writer makes some interesting points, but he does not develop them very well.
 - The Misfit is an interesting character, and the speech he makes about religion is very complex.

- We hope that helps!
- If you still have questions, come see us in the Success Center: Student Center 235, upstairs over the bookstore
- We have helping hands and helpful handouts!
- Comma splices are pesky, but together we can defeat them