

Comma Splices and Run-on Sentences

A **comma splice** occurs when the writer uses a comma to join two independent clauses. Commas do not join clauses, but words do. When using a comma, a connecting word such as a coordinating conjunction is also required. Using a semicolon placed between independent clauses is also an option.

Examples: I want that job, I don't think I have enough experience. (incorrect)

I want that job, **but** I don't think I have enough experience. (correct)

The painting represents life, the colors represent experiences. (incorrect)

The painting represents life; the colors represent experiences. (correct)

A **run-on sentence** occurs when two or more independent clauses run together without punctuation or a joining word. One way to test your writing is to read the text aloud; the place where the sentences need to be separated can often be heard.

Examples: He failed the test he will have to take it again. (incorrect)

He failed the test, **so** he will have to take it again. (correct)

He failed the test; he will have to take it again. (correct)

- The problems of comma splices and run-on sentences can be solved with the same revisions.

Option 1: Connect two independent clauses with a comma plus a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

Examples: We watched the fireworks display, it thrilled us. (comma splice)

We watched the fireworks display, **and** it thrilled us. (correct)

Writing is an important skill it takes time to develop. (run-on sentence)

Writing is an important skill, **but** it takes time to develop. (correct)

Option 2: Separate two independent clauses with a semicolon.*

Examples: I built a new desk, I keep it in my bedroom. (comma splice)

I built a new desk; I keep it in my bedroom. (correct)

The boys fished in the lake the girls hiked up the trail. (run-on sentence)

The boys fished in the lake; the girls hiked up the trail. (correct)

*For more information on types of verbs, please see the JCCC Writing Center verbs handout.

Option 3: Separate two independent clauses into two sentences with end punctuation.

Examples: Max takes flying lessons, he will get his license soon. (comma splice)

Max takes flying lessons. He will get his license soon. (correct)

She is excited about her birthday she will be sixteen years old. (run-on sentence)

She is excited about her birthday. She will be sixteen years old. (correct)

Option 4: Change one of the independent clauses into a dependent clause to form one sentence.

Examples: Americans endeavored to put the war behind them, they began moving ahead with their lives. (comma splice)

dependent clause

While Americans endeavored to put the war behind them, they began moving ahead with their lives. (correct)

Radio still dominated the entertainment world television slowly started appearing in American homes. (run-on sentence)

dependent clause

Although radio still dominated the entertainment world, television slowly started appearing in American homes. (correct)

These are the basic comma splice and run-on sentence rules; for more complex rules, please see Writing Center staff or several handbooks available in the JCCC Writing Center.

For exercises to practice your comma splice and run-on sentence skills, please see Writing Center staff.