



Comma Splices

What is a comma splice?

An independent clause is a word group with a subject and a verb that can stand alone as a sentence. There are special rules for joining independent clauses listed below. Comma splices incorrectly join two independent clauses with a comma.

Example:

A comma splice uses a comma to link two independent clauses, this is incorrect punctuation.

Both “halves” of this sentence could stand alone as individual sentences, so these independent clauses cannot be joined with just a comma.

How can I tell if I have a comma splice?

- 1. Does your sentence contain two independent clauses (groups of words that could stand alone as a sentence)?** If you answered **NO**, then you don’t have a comma splice. If you answered **YES**, then go on to number 2.
- 2. Are the clauses in your sentence joined with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so (*hint: remember FAN BOYS*))?** If you answered **YES**, then you don’t have a comma splice. If you answered **NO**, then go on to number 3.
- 3. Are the clauses in your sentence joined with a semicolon?** If you answered **YES**, then you don’t have a comma splice. If you answered **NO**, then you need to revise your sentence; it’s a comma splice.

Ok, so I have a comma splice. What can I do to fix it?

Basically, you have four choices:

Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

A comma splice uses a comma to link two independent clauses, but this is incorrect punctuation.

Use a semicolon (or, if appropriate, a colon or a dash).

A comma splice uses a comma to link two independent clauses; this is incorrect punctuation.

Make the independent clauses into separate sentences.

A comma splice uses a comma to link two independent clauses. This is incorrect punctuation.

Restructure the sentence so that you no longer have two independent clauses.

Although it is incorrect punctuation, some writers use a comma splice to link two independent clauses.