

## Comma Splices and Run-Ons

The comma splice and the run-on are two other kinds of faulty “sentences” that give false signals to the reader. In each instance the punctuation suggests that there is only one sentence, but, in fact, there is material for two.

The **comma splice** consists of two independent clauses with only a comma between them:

*The weather was disappointing, we canceled the picnic.* [A comma by itself cannot join two independent clauses.]

The **run-on** differs from the comma splice in only one respect: It has no comma between the independent clauses. Therefore, the run-on is two independent clauses with *nothing* between them:

*The weather was disappointing we canceled the picnic.* [Independent clauses must be properly connected.]

Because an independent clause can stand by itself as a sentence and because two independent clauses must be properly linked, you can use a simple technique to identify the comma splice and the run-on. If you see a sentence that you think may contain one of these two errors, ask yourself this question: “Can I insert a period at some place in the word group and still have a sentence on either side?” If the answer is yes and there is no word such as *and* or *but* following the inserted period, then you have a comma splice or a run-on to correct. In our previous examples of the comma splice and the run-on, we could insert a period after the word *disappointing* in each case, and we would still have an independent clause—therefore, a sentence—on either side.

### Four Ways to Correct Comma Splices and Run-Ons

Once you identify a comma splice or a run-on in your writing, you need to correct it. There are four different ways to fix these common sentence problems.

#### 1. Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

**Incorrect:** We canceled the picnic the weather was disappointing. [run-on]

**Correct:** We canceled the picnic, *for* the weather was disappointing. [Here we inserted a comma and the coordinating conjunction *for*.]

Knowing the seven coordinating conjunctions will help you in writing sentences and correcting sentence problems. Remember the acronym FANBOYS: *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*.

#### 2. Use a subordinating conjunction.

**Incorrect:** The weather was disappointing, we canceled the picnic. [comma splice]

**Correct:** *Because* the weather was disappointing, we canceled the picnic.

By inserting the subordinating conjunction *because*, you can transform the first independent clause into a dependent clause and correct the comma splice. Knowing the most common subordinating conjunctions will help you in writing sentences and correcting sentence problems. Here again is a list of frequently used subordinating conjunctions.



<i>after</i>	<i>if</i>	<i>until</i>
<i>although</i>	<i>in order that</i>	<i>when</i>
<i>as</i>	<i>provided that</i>	<i>whenever</i>
<i>as if</i>	<i>rather than</i>	<i>where</i>
<i>because</i>	<i>since</i>	<i>whereas</i>
<i>before</i>	<i>so that</i>	<i>wherever</i>
<i>even if</i>	<i>than</i>	<i>whether</i>
<i>even though</i>	<i>unless</i>	<i>while</i>

### 3. Use a semicolon.

**Incorrect:** The weather was disappointing, we canceled the picnic.

**Correct:** The weather was disappointing; we canceled the picnic.

**Correct:** The weather was disappointing; *therefore*, we canceled the picnic.

This comma splice was corrected by a semicolon. The first correct example shows the semicolon alone. The second correct example shows a semicolon followed by the conjunctive adverb *therefore*. The conjunctive adverb is optional, but, as we have already seen, conjunctive adverbs can make the relationship between independent clauses stronger. Here is a list of conjunctive adverbs you saw on page 424.

<i>however</i>	<i>on the other hand</i>
<i>otherwise</i>	<i>then</i>
<i>therefore</i>	<i>consequently</i>
<i>similarly</i>	<i>also</i>
<i>hence</i>	<i>thus</i>

Consider using the acronym HOTSHOT CAT, made up of the first letter of each of these common conjunctive adverbs. The acronym will help you remember them. Other conjunctive adverbs include *in fact*, *for example*, *moreover*, *nevertheless*, *furthermore*, *now*, and *soon*.

### 4. Make each clause a separate sentence.

**Incorrect:** The weather was disappointing, we canceled the picnic.

**Correct:** The weather was disappointing. We canceled the picnic.

To correct the comma splice, replace the comma with a period and begin the second sentence (the second independent clause) with a capital letter. This method is at once the simplest and most common method of correcting comma splices and run-ons. For a run-on, insert a period between the two independent clauses and begin the second sentence with a capital letter.

## Techniques for Spotting Problem Sentences

1. For the fragment, ask yourself: "If someone were to say or write this to me, would I expect the person to add to the statement or rephrase it?"
2. In checking for the comma splice or run-on, ask yourself: "Is there a point in this word group at which I can insert a period and create a sentence on either side?" (The question is not necessary if there is a coordinating conjunction—FANBOYS—at that point.) [For-And-Nor-But-Or-Yet-So].