

FINDING AND FIXING COMMA SPLICES AND FUSED SENTENCES

Understand the problem.

Comma splices and fused sentences—also known as *run-ons*—are sentences that contain two or more **main clauses** incorrectly joined together.

Every main clause has an independent **subject** and **verb**, which means that the clause can stand alone as a **complete sentence**. If you cram two or more main clauses together with incorrect or missing punctuation, you hurt the logical parade of ideas.

A **comma splice** incorrectly joins two main clauses with a **comma**, like this:

MAIN CLAUSE + , + **MAIN CLAUSE** = ☠.

A **fused sentence** has two main clauses joined with no punctuation at all:

MAIN CLAUSE + ∅ + **MAIN CLAUSE** = ☠.

Know the solution.

To fix a comma splice or fused sentence, use one of the four strategies below.

STRATEGY 1 — MAKE TWO COMPLETE SENTENCES.

Because **comma splices** and **fused sentences** contain two (or more) **main clauses**, you can always add a period (a full stop) at the end of the first clause and then begin the second one with a capital letter.

Read the fused sentence below:

Grandma still rides her Harley motorcycle her toy poodle
balances in a basket between the handlebars.

A break should occur between *motorcycle* and *her*. To fix the problem with **Strategy 1**, you revise the sentence like this:

Grandma still rides her Harley **motorcycle**. **Her** toy poodle
balances in a basket between the handlebars.

STRATEGY 2 — USE A COMMA AND A COORDINATING CONJUNCTION.

There are seven **coordinating conjunctions**. Some students remember the seven by learning the word *fanboys*. Each of the seven letters of *fanboys* stands for one of the coordinating conjunctions.

F = for; **A** = and; **N** = nor; **B** = but; **O** = or; **Y** = yet; **S** = so

Teamed up with a comma (,), these seven coordinating conjunctions can correctly join two main clauses.

Consider our original example:

Grandma still rides her Harley motorcycle her toy poodle
balances in a basket between the handlebars.

To fix the problem with **Strategy 2**, you should do this:

Grandma still rides her Harley **motorcycle, and her** toy poodle
balances in a basket between the handlebars.

The important thing to remember with **Strategy 2** is that you must use a coordinating conjunction that *logically* joins the two complete sentences. The coordinating conjunction *but*, for example, would not work in the example above because the sentence is not showing *contrast*.

STRATEGY 3 — USE A SEMICOLON.

Unlike a comma, a **semicolon** (;) is a strong enough mark of punctuation to join two **main clauses**.

Use a semicolon like this:

Grandma still rides her Harley **motorcycle**; **her** toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

Keep these three things in mind when you use a semicolon:

- The two main clauses that the semicolon joins should be closely related in meaning.
- Do not capitalize the word that follows the semicolon unless that word is a **proper noun**, one that is *always* capitalized.
- Limit your use of semicolons. Semicolons are like glasses of champagne; save them for special occasions.

STRATEGY 4 — USE A SUBORDINATE CONJUNCTION.

When you are fixing a comma splice or fused sentence, **subordinate conjunctions** are the most difficult to use because 1) there are many subordinate conjunctions to choose from, and 2) you must use the right punctuation.

First, review the list:

SUBORDINATE CONJUNCTIONS		
after	in case	that
although	in order that	though
as	insofar as	till
as if	just as	unless
as long as	no matter how	until
as soon as	now that	when
as though	once	whenever
because	provided that	where
before	rather than	whereas
even if	since	wherever
even though	so that	whether
how	than	while
if		why

Next, keep these general rules in mind:

MAIN CLAUSE + Ø + **SUBORDINATE CLAUSE** .

SUBORDINATE CLAUSE + , + **MAIN CLAUSE** .

Here is the original problem sentence:

Grandma still rides her Harley motorcycle her toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

To fix the sentence with **Strategy 4**, you could revise like this:

While Grandma rides her Harley motorcycle, her toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

Grandma rides her Harley **motorcycle as her** toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

A good writer will analyze a problem sentence and then choose the best strategy to fix the error.

