

# FINDING AND FIXING COMMA SPLICES AND FUSED SENTENCES

## Understand the problem.

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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.

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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:

| <b>SUBORDINATE CONJUNCTIONS</b> |               |          |
|---------------------------------|---------------|----------|
| 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.

