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:

\[
\text{Main Clause} + , + \text{Main Clause} = \text{✗.}
\]

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

\[
\text{Main Clause} + \emptyset + \text{Main Clause} = \text{✗.}
\]

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 \textit{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 \textbf{proper noun}, one that is \textit{always} capitalized.
- Limit your use of semicolons. Semicolons are like glasses of champagne; save them for special occasions.

\textbf{Strategy 4 — Use a subordinate conjunction.}

When you are fixing a comma splice or fused sentence, \textbf{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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>\textbf{Subordinate Conjunctions}</th>
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Next, keep these general rules in mind:

- **Main Clause** + ∅ + **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.