

Writing Center Reference Sheet

Correcting Run-on Sentences and Comma Splices

Avoiding run-ons and comma splices will help you to express your sentences correctly and to give each sentence the importance and impact it deserves.

A run-on sentence occurs when two or more independent clauses are combined as if they were a single sentence. An independent clause is a set of words that can stand alone as a complete sentence.

Example of a run-on sentence: Steve worked on his homework then he went to bed.

In the example above, a second sentence could begin with the word *then*. Putting a comma after the word *homework* would not correct the run-on. It would only create a comma splice, which is a type of run-on that has a comma where the period should be.

Example of a comma splice: Steve worked on his homework, then he went to bed.

A comma is not an adequate piece of punctuation to divide two independent clauses. Commas can divide a dependent clause at the beginning of a sentence from an independent clause that follows. (See the Writing Center's handout on commas for further examples of how commas are properly used.)

There are four primary ways to correct a run-on or comma splice:

1. Put a period between the two independent clauses.

Run-on sentence – The Cardinals were ahead the whole game they really outplayed the other team.

Correction – The Cardinals were ahead the whole game. They really outplayed the other team.

2. Use a semicolon to separate the independent clauses. This method is useful when you want to keep two related ideas together in the same sentence. Like a period, a semicolon can separate independent clauses. A common type of run-on or comma splice occurs when *however* or *therefore* is placed in the middle of a sentence. If that word starts a second independent clause, a semicolon is frequently the best way to separate the two independent clauses.

Comma splice – Sherry thought she had enough money to buy the movie tickets, however, she was two dollars short because the price had gone up.

Correction – Sherry thought she had enough money to buy the movie tickets; however, she was two dollars short because the price had gone up.

3. Use a comma along with a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) to connect the two independent clauses.

Comma splice – I missed the finale of my favorite television show last night, I don't know whether my favorite character lived or died.

Correction – I missed the finale of my favorite television show last night, so I don't know whether my favorite character lived or died.

4. Change one of the independent clauses into a dependent clause by adding a word like *if*, *when*, *although*, *while*, *because*, *after*, or *as* to the beginning of one of the independent clauses.

Comma splice – Tonya was driving down the street, it began to rain.

Correction – As Tonya was driving down the street, it began to rain.

Correction – Tonya was driving down the street when it began to rain.

Run-on sentence – Marco failed the test he forgot to study.

Correction – Marco failed the test because he forgot to study.