

COMMA SPLICES

The comma splice is one of the most common errors in composition. Unlike a run-on, which contains no punctuation, a comma splice contains punctuation used incorrectly.

EXAMPLE: Bob saw the tornado coming, he ran for the basement.

There are two independent clauses here. Clearly, both clauses have a noun and a verb, and both clauses are complete thoughts.

1. *Bob saw the tornado coming.*
2. *He ran for the basement.*

FOUR WAYS TO CORRECT A COMMA SPLICE:

1. Insert a period: *Bob saw the tornado coming. He ran for the basement.*
2. Insert a semi-colon: *Bob saw the tornado coming; he ran for the basement.*
3. Insert a comma and a coordinate conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so): *Bob saw the tornado coming, so he ran for the basement.*
4. Make one of the sentences a dependent clause: *Because Bob saw the tornado coming, he ran for the basement.*

Correct the following sentence using all four methods listed above.

1. Bowser is a good pet, he is a bad watchdog.
 - a. Place a period between the clauses.
 - b. Separate the clauses with a semicolon.
 - c. Use a conjunction and a comma between the clauses.
 - d. Make one of the sentences a dependent clause.

CAUTION: A common error is the comma splice that involves the use of conjunctive adverbs, such as *consequently, however, besides, nevertheless, then, thus, still*, etc. To correct, use a semi-colon before conjunctive adverbs when they come between independent clauses.

Comma Splice: *We had lunch at the Woodman, then we all went out to Lake Pomeran.*

Correct: *We had lunch at the Woodman; then we all went out to Lake Pomeran.*

Comma Splice: *We were sure we'd be late, nevertheless, we got there before the curtain went up.*

Correct: *We were sure we'd be late; nevertheless, we got there before the curtain went up.*

It is important to know the distinction between two kinds of conjunctions or connecting words.

coordinate conjunctions	conjunctive adverbs
<i>for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so</i>	<i>also, besides, consequently, however, therefore, likewise, nevertheless, then, thus, still</i>
This is a complete list. There are no other coordinate conjunctions.	This is not a complete list.

What is the difference? The words in the first column are always used as conjunctions, but the words in the second column are **NOT** always used as conjunctions. When they are used as adverbs, their location in the sentence can shift.

NOTE: A conjunctive adverb is just an adverb used to provide a connecting link between independent clauses. For example:

The boss told Jerry to finish the job; however, he couldn't get done that day.

He thought she was being wasteful; besides, he was saving up for a new car.

NOTE: A number of phrases, such as **in fact, as a result, to be sure, after all, for instance, for example**, can be used to perform the same function as the single-word conjunctive adverbs.

Nature has a way of taking care of her mistakes; as a result, no living species should be considered useless or dispensable.

When words such as **however, consequently, and nevertheless** do not join independent clauses, do not use a semicolon. Simply put a comma before and a comma after the word.

Wrong: *The senator's wife; however, did not want him to run again.*

Correct: *The senator's wife, however, did not want him to run again.*

Wrong: *All the avid fishermen; to be sure, would be out on the lake before dawn.*

Correct: *All the avid fishermen, to be sure, would be out on the lake before dawn.*

Read the following examples, and observe why each is punctuated differently.

Sally has the flu; therefore, she cannot attend class today.

Therefore separates two independent clauses.

John is, therefore, the best player we have on the team.

Therefore does not join independent clauses.

It seems to me, however, that there is no available transportation at that time of day.

However does not join independent clauses. The "that" clause is dependent.

I would like to go; however, there is no available transportation at that time of day.

However separates two independent clauses.

Correct the following sentence using the four methods listed in this handout as well as the information given on conjunctive adverbs.

1. She got the highest grade on her test, she won the scholarship.
 - a. Place a period between the clauses.
 - b. Separate the clauses with a semicolon.
 - c. Use a conjunction and a comma between the clauses.
 - d. Make one of the sentences a dependent clause.

Try writing a comma splice on your own and correct it by using all four methods.