

## The Comma Splice Repair Guide

### What is a comma splice?

Comma splices occur when two independent clauses are joined by a comma. Independent clauses are complete thoughts; in other words, they are sentences that can stand alone. (See the BU Writing Centre *Types of Sentences* handout.)

### How can I identify comma splices in my writing?

Whenever a comma appears in your writing, check the environment of that comma. If an independent clause is written on both the left and right sides of the comma, you have a comma splice.

### I found a comma splice! How can I fix it?

Comma splices can be corrected five ways, *each with different punctuation*. The method that you choose depends upon the length of your two independent clauses and the types of sentences used in the rest of your paragraph. Remember, your writing will always be better if you vary sentence types. (See the BU Writing Centre *Vary Your Sentence Structure* handout.)

### Here is a practice comma splice.

In the following, notice that there is an independent clause on both the left and right sides of the comma. It is a comma splice.

***The students are working on sentence structure, they are learning how to repair comma splices.***

### Here are five ways to fix it:

1. Replace the comma with a period and capitalize the first word of the second independent clause. This method works best with longer sentences. If used with two short sentences, the result may sound choppy.

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2. Replace the comma with a semi-colon. If your sentences are closely related, this method works well. If you can replace the semi-colon with *and*, then the semi-colon is a good choice.

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3. Add a coordinating conjunction\* (FANBOYS = *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*) after the comma.

***The students are working on sentence structure, so they are learning how to repair comma splices.***

4. Use a conjunctive adverb\* or transitional phrase\*, such as *therefore, additionally, or however*, in one of two ways:
  - a. Put a semi-colon after the first independent clause. Add an uncapitalized conjunctive adverb followed by a comma at the start of the second independent clause.

***The students are working on sentence structure; thus, they are learning how to repair comma splices.***

- b. Put a period after the first independent clause. Add a capitalized conjunctive adverb followed by a comma at the start of the second independent clause.

***The students are working on sentence structure. Thus, they are learning how to repair comma splices.***

5. Subordinate one of the independent clauses by using a subordinating conjunction\* such as *because, since, or when*. The subordinate clause can be placed at the beginning or end of the sentence using different punctuation and sometimes a change in pronoun placement. NOTE: Unlike an independent clause, a subordinate (dependent) clause cannot stand alone and must be connected to an independent clause.

***Because the students are working on sentence structure, they are learning how to repair comma splices.***

***The students are learning how to repair comma splices because they are working on sentence structure.***

\* Each coordinating conjunction, conjunctive adverb/transition expression, and subordinating conjunction alerts the reader to a relationship between the two sentences/clauses it connects, so you must carefully choose the word or words that identify that relationship. (See the BU Writing Centre *Establishing Strong Connections* handout.)

