

Comma Splices and Run-on Sentences

Why do commas matter?

Commas are used to help make writing clearer for readers. You know how a sentence should sound when you're the one writing it. Commas help you ensure that your reader knows how he or she should read and understand that sentence.

The Problems

What is a run-on sentence?

A run-on sentence occurs when two or more sentences have been linked together without any connecting words or punctuation.

For example: "John went to the Arctic Circle he saw many polar bears."

What is a comma splice?

A comma splice occurs when two or more sentences are linked together with a comma only.

For example: "The weather is beautiful today, I want to go outside."

The comma cannot be used by itself to connect two sentences.

The Solutions

How you revise a run-on or comma splice depends on what you want to accomplish.

Period + capital letter, or, starting a new sentence

Separate the incorrect sentence into two separate sentences by placing a period in between, communicating that these two sentences have no particular relationship other than that one logically follows the other:

"The weather is beautiful today. I want to go outside."

Comma + conjunction

To show a particular relationship between the sentences, connect the sentences with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet):

"The weather is beautiful today, so I want to go outside."

"John went to the Arctic Circle, and he saw many polar bears."

"The weather is terrible today, but I want to go outside"

Semicolon

Link the two sentences together using a semicolon. A semicolon may be used alone:

"John wanted to go to the restaurant; his wife wanted to go to the mall."

The semicolon may also be used with a conjunctive adverb (however, moreover, thus, therefore, otherwise, nevertheless, etc.):

"John wanted to go to the restaurant; however, his wife wanted to go to the mall."

Practice

These exercises are meant to help you gauge your understanding of run-ons and comma splices. If you get confused, just ask one of the WRC staff for help.

1. Circle the sentence with the **run-on** and then write a correct version of the sentence below:

- a. When George visited Alaska, he went on a dog-sledding trip.
 - b. A team of eight dogs pulls each sled and the load that that sled is carrying.
 - c. The driver stands on the back of the sled the dogs pull him, too.
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2. Circle the sentence with the **run-on** and then write a correct version of the sentence below:

- a. Jennifer brought her friend, Harry, to the play they saw *Singing in the Rain*.
 - b. After the play they went to dinner at a taverna that serves mostly seafood and is famous for its house wine.
 - c. Jennifer paid for Harry's dinner because she owed him from when they went out the week before.
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3. Circle the sentence with the **comma splice** and then write a correct version of the sentence below:

- a. Helen ate some grapes, they are her favorite fruit.
 - b. I eat an apple a day, but I had to go to the doctor anyway.
 - c. Costas bought a whole box of apples and only three oranges.
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4. Circle the sentence with the **comma splice** and then write a correct version of the sentence below:

- a. The subjects covered in my astronomy class include the sun, the stars, the moon, and all 8 planets.
- b. If humans can inhabit Mars, then dogs will probably survive there, too.
- c. The Earth orbits around the sun, the moon orbits around the Earth.

5. Without looking at the previous page, write down the definition of a **comma splice** in your own words.:

6. Without looking at the previous page, write down the definition of a **run-on** in your own words:

7. Now write down the three ways that you can properly connect two sentences.

Extra Challenge

For the following questions, circle the correct version(s) of the sentence—more than one version may be correct.

1. Helen ate some grapes they are her favorite fruit
 - a. Helen ate some grapes they are her favorite fruit.

- b. Helen ate some grapes; they are her favorite fruit.
 - c. Helen ate some grapes, they are her favorite fruit.
 - d. Helen ate some grapes. They are her favorite fruit.
2. A dog followed the little girl home from school because she held a treat
- a. A dog followed the little girl home from school because she held a treat.
 - b. A dog followed the little girl home from school, because she held a treat.
 - c. A dog followed the little girl home from school, because, she held a treat.
 - d. A dog, followed the little girl home from school because she held a treat.
3. Mothers who want to buy mittens should look near the coats
- a. Mothers, who want to buy mittens, should look near the coats.
 - b. Mothers who want to buy mittens, should look near the coats.
 - c. Mothers, who want to buy mittens should look near the coats.
 - d. Mothers who want to buy mittens should look near the coats.
4. The Parthenon which is the highest point in Athens overlooks my house
- a. The Parthenon, which is the highest point in Athens overlooks my house.
 - b. The Parthenon, which is the highest point in Athens, overlooks my house.
 - c. The Parthenon which is the highest point in Athens overlooks my house.
 - d. The Parthenon which is the highest point in Athens, overlooks my house.
5. Penguins huddle over their eggs in winter and their chicks are born in spring
- a. Penguins warm their eggs all winter, and their chicks are born in spring.
 - b. Penguins warm their eggs all winter and, their chicks are born in spring.
 - c. Penguins warm their eggs all winter and their chicks are born in spring.
 - d. Penguins warm their eggs all winter; and their chicks are born in spring.
6. Caterpillars incubate in their cocoons and come out butterflies
- a. Caterpillars incubate in their cocoons and come out butterflies.
 - b. Caterpillars incubate in their cocoons, and come out butterflies.
 - c. Caterpillars incubate in their cocoons and, come out butterflies.
 - d. Caterpillars incubate in their cocoons and come out, butterflies.