



Avoiding Comma Splices and Run-on Sentences

A comma splice occurs when two or more independent clauses or complete ideas are separated incorrectly by a comma. A clause is a complete thought – it consists of a subject and a verb. A run-on sentence takes place when two or more independent clauses or ideas lack any punctuation between them.

So, how does one fix a comma splice or run-on sentence?

Fix#1: Add a Conjunction

A conjunction is a word that connects two sentences or clauses together (e.g., for, and, but, or, yet, so, etc.). A comma splice can be corrected by adding a conjunction right after the comma. Consider the following examples.

Example of a comma splice:

If government officials decide to use electronic voting machines, they should ensure that all voters receive receipts for their votes, these paper receipts would clearly state that the voters really voted for the candidates that they selected.



Corrected:

If government officials decide to use electronic voting machines, they should ensure that all voters receive receipts for their votes, **as** these paper receipts would clearly state that the voters really voted for the candidates that they selected.

Example of a fused sentence:

Long ago, people voted on paper ballots and marked them with ink or some similar means voters could look over their ballots to ensure that they did not make a mistake.

Corrected version:

Long ago, people voted on paper ballots and marked them with ink or some similar means, **so** voters could look over their ballots to ensure that they did not make a mistake.

Fix#2: Change the Comma to a Semicolon

A semicolon is another way to fix a semi-colon or a comma splice; however, caution is advised as it is important that you first fully understand the function of a semicolon. A semicolon is, in a way, a cross between a full-stop and a comma. It shows a close connection between two items, and yet marks a distinction between them so as to form two different clauses. Be careful though not to place it between independent clauses that have no logical link between them. In that case, just use a full-stop.

In the examples below, the independent clauses in the example refer to the same subject, which is why a semicolon may be used between them.



Example of a comma splice:

In most schools, there are extremely serious academic consequences for plagiarizing, for example, some require that the student receive an F in the course.

Corrected:

In most schools, there are extremely serious academic consequences for plagiarizing; for example, some require that the student receive an F in the course.

Example of a fused sentence:

Direct quotations is one way of using other sources in your work however direct quotations should not be overused in a paper.

Corrected:

Direct quotations is one way of using other sources in your work; however, direct quotations should not be overused in a paper.

Fix#3: Create Separate Sentences

Finally, you can also just use a full-stop. In fact, when in doubt, use a full-stop! Particularly, if your sentences are long and overloaded with information, a semicolon will not work.