

Separate sentences

The policy is not well defined. It confuses many employees.

Comma and coordinating conjunction

The policy is not well defined, and it confuses many employees.

Semicolon

The policy is not well defined; it confuses many employees.

Subordinating conjunction

Because the policy is not well defined, it confuses many employees.

Exercise 18.2 Identifying and revising fused sentences

Revise each of the fused sentences below in two of the four ways shown above.

Example:

Tim was shy he usually refused invitations.
Tim was shy, so he usually refused invitations.
Tim was shy; he usually refused invitations.

1. Throughout history money and religion were closely linked there was little distinction between government and religion.
2. The head of state and the religious leader were often the same person all power rested in one ruler.
3. These powerful leaders decided what objects would serve as money their backing encouraged public faith in the money.
4. Coins were minted of precious metals the religious overtones of money were then strengthened.
5. People already believed the precious metals to be divine their use in money intensified its allure.

Exercise 18.3 Sentence combining to avoid comma splices and fused sentences

Combine each pair of sentences below into one sentence without using a comma splice or fused sentence. Combine sentences by (1) supplying a comma and coordinating conjunction, (2) supplying a semicolon or (3) subordinating one clause to the other. You will have to add a letter, or change words as well as punctuation.

Example:

The sun sank lower in the sky. The colors gradually faded.
As the sun sank lower in the sky, the colors gradually faded.
[The first clause is subordinated to the second.]

1. The exact origin of paper money is unknown. It has not survived in coins, shells, and other durable objects have.
2. Perhaps goldsmiths were also bankers. Thus they held the gold of their wealthy customers.
3. The goldsmiths probably gave customers receipts for their gold. These receipts were then used in trade.

4. The goldsmiths were something like modern-day bankers. Their receipts were something like modern-day money.
5. The goldsmiths became even more like modern-day bankers. They began issuing receipts for more gold than they actually held in their vaults.

Exercise 18.4 Revising: Comma splices and fused sentences

Identify and revise the comma splices and fused sentences in the following paragraph.

All those parents who urged their children to eat broccoli were right, the vegetable really is healthful. Broccoli contains sulforaphane, moreover, this mustard oil can be found in kale and Brussels sprouts. Sulforaphane causes the body to make an enzyme that attacks carcinogens, these substances cause cancer. The enzyme speeds up the work of the kidneys then they can flush harmful chemicals out of the body. Other vegetables have similar benefits however, green, leafy vegetables like broccoli are the most efficient. Thus wise people will eat their broccoli it could save their lives.

Note See page 398 for an exercise involving comma splices and fused sentences along with other sentence errors.

Pronoun Reference



A pronoun such as *it* or *they* derives its meaning from its antecedent, the noun it substitutes for. Therefore, a pronoun must be clearly and unmistakably to its antecedent in order for the sentence to be clear. A sentence such as *Jim told Mark he was not in Jim or to Mark.*

One way to make pronoun reference clear is to ensure that the pronoun and antecedent agree in person, number, and gender (see 18.1.4). The other way is to ensure that the pronoun refers unambiguously to a single, close, specific antecedent.



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Exercise



Exercise

Revised with a semicolon

The increased time devoted to watching television is not the only cause of the decline in reading ability; however, it is one of the important causes.

The increased time devoted to watching television is not the only cause of the decline in reading ability; it is, however, one of the important causes.

Exercise 18.1 Identifying and revising comma splices

Correct each comma splice below in two of the ways described on pages 362–63. If an item contains no comma splice, mark the number preceding it.

Example:

Carolyn still had a headache, she could not get the child-proof cap off the aspirin bottle.

Carolyn still had a headache because she could not get the child-proof cap off the aspirin bottle. [Subordination.]

Carolyn still had a headache for she could not get the child-proof cap off the aspirin bottle. [Coordinating conjunction.]

1. Money has a long history, it goes back at least as far as the earliest records.
2. Many of the earliest records concern financial transactions, indeed, early history must often be inferred from commercial activity.
3. Every known society has had a system of money, though the objects serving as money have varied widely.
4. Sometimes the objects have had real value, in modern times, however, their value has been more abstract.
5. Cattle, fermented beverages, and rare shells have served as money, each one had actual value for the society.

Fused Sentences

Combine two main clauses only with an appropriate conjunction or punctuation mark between them.

When two main clauses are joined without a word to connect them, the result is a fused sentence. Fused sentences can rarely be understood on their own, and they are never acceptable in standard written English.

Example: The policy is not well defined it confuses many employees.

Corrected: The policy is not well defined, it confuses many employees. (See pages 362–63.)



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Exercise

Revision of comma splices and fused sentences

1. Underline the main clauses in your draft.

Sailors trained on the ship they learned about wind and sails. Trainees who took the course ranged from high school students to Navy officers. The ship was built in 1910, it had sailed ever since. In almost a century, it had circled the globe forty times. It burned in 2001 its cabins and decks were destroyed.

2. Focus on sentences that contain two or more main clauses.

3. If nothing falls between the clauses or only a comma does, revise in one of the following ways. The choice depends on the relation you want to establish between the clauses, as explained below and opposite.

Separate main clauses with a period.

Sailors trained on the ship. They learned about wind and sails.

Separate main clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction.

The ship was built in 1910, and it had sailed ever since.

Separate main clauses with a semicolon.

The ship was built in 1910; it had sailed ever since.

Subordinate one clause to the other, depending on which clause is more important.

When it burned in 2001, its cabins and decks were destroyed.

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Comma Splices

18a Separate two main clauses with a comma only when they are joined by a coordinating conjunction.

A comma cannot separate main clauses unless they are linked by a coordinating conjunction (*and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, *yet*). Readers expect the same main clause to continue after a comma alone. When they find themselves reading a second main clause before they realize they have finished the first, they may have to reread. You have several options for revising comma splices.

Making separate sentences

Revising a comma splice by making separate sentences from the main clauses will always be correct. The period is not only correct

Main clauses without *and*, *but*, etc. 363
but preferable when the ideas expressed in the two main clauses are only loosely related:

Comma splice

Chemistry has contributed much to our understanding of foods, many foods such as wheat and beans can be produced in the laboratory. Chemistry has contributed much to our understanding of foods. Many foods such as wheat and beans can be produced in the laboratory.

Revised



Making separate sentences may be the best option if you are used to writing very long sentences in your native language and often write comma splices in English.

Inserting a coordinating conjunction

When the ideas in the main clauses are closely related and equally important, you may correct a comma splice by inserting the appropriate coordinating conjunction immediately after the comma to join the clauses:

Comma splice

Some laboratory-grown foods taste good, they are nutritious. Some laboratory-grown foods taste good, and they are nutritious.

Revised

Using a semicolon

If the relation between the ideas expressed in the main clauses is very close and obvious without a conjunction, you can separate the clauses with a semicolon.

Comma splice

Good taste is rare in laboratory-grown vegetables, they are usually bland. Good taste is rare in laboratory-grown vegetables, and they are usually bland.

Revised

Subordinating one clause

When the idea in one clause is more important than that in the other, you can express the less important idea in a phrase or a subordinate clause. (See p. 273 for a list of subordinating conjunctions and pp. 413–15 for more on subordination.) Subordination is often more effective than forming separate sentences because it defines the relation between ideas more precisely:

Comma splice

The vitamins are adequate, the flavor is deficient.

Revised

The vitamins are adequate, and the flavor is deficient. [Both ideas receive equal weight.]

Improved

Even though the vitamins are adequate, the flavor is deficient. [Emphasis on the second idea.]

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Comma Splices and Fused Sentences

A sentence or main clause contains at least a subject and a predicate, which together express a complete thought that can stand alone (see p. 253). When two main clauses fall together, readers need a signal box shows the ways to provide this signal.

Punctuation of two or more main clauses

Separate main clauses with periods

- Main clause • Main clause

Hybrid cars are popular with consumers. Automakers are releasing new models.

Link main clauses with a coordinating conjunction and a comma

- Main clause • Main clause

Hybrid cars are popular with consumers, and automakers are releasing new models.

Link main clauses with a semicolon

- Main clause ; Main clause

Hybrid cars are popular with consumers; automakers are releasing new models.

Relate main clauses with a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb or transitional expression.

- Main clause ; however, for example, etc. Main clause •

Hybrid cars are popular with consumers; as a result, automakers are releasing new models.

With a comma splice or a fused sentence, two main clauses run together without one of the signals listed in the box, and readers often must reread for sense. A comma splice joins (or splices) main clauses *only* with a comma, not with a coordinating conjunction as well.

Comma splice

The ship was huge, its mast stood eighty feet high.

A fused sentence (or run-on sentence) joins main clauses with no punctuation at all:

Fused sentence

The ship was huge its mast stood eighty feet high.

Exception Experienced writers sometimes use a comma without a coordinating conjunction between very brief main clauses that are grammatically parallel:

He's not a person, he's a monster.

However, many readers view such punctuation as incorrect. Unless you are certain that your readers will not object to the comma in a sentence like this one, separate the clauses with periods or semicolons, as described in this chapter.

Grammar checkers A grammar checker can detect many comma splices, but it will miss most fused sentences. For example, a checker flagged *Money is tight, we need to spend carefully* but not *Money is tight we need to spend carefully*. A checker may also question sentences that are actually correct, such as *Money being tighter now than before, we need to spend carefully*. Verify that revision is actually correct on any flagged sentence.

An English sentence may not include more than one main clause unless the clauses are separated by a comma and a coordinating conjunction or by a semicolon or colon. If your native language does not have such a rule or has accustomed you to writing long sentences, you may need to edit your English writing especially for comma splices and fused sentences.



Hybrid cars are popular with consumers and automakers are releasing new models.



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