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SSC - 245

Comma Splices and Run-on Sentences

Overview: When two or more independent clauses occur in the same sentence, connected only by a comma, the result is an error called a comma splice. Comma splices can make your writing difficult to understand. It is important to avoid errors in your writing so that you can clearly convey your points and maintain the reader's interest.

Remember: An **Independent Clause** has a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought. In other words, an independent clause could be its own sentence.

Comma Splices are the result of two or more independent clauses joined only by a comma. A comma, by itself, cannot connect independent clauses.

A **Run-on Sentence** is the result of two independent clauses joined with no punctuation between them.

A comma splice or a run-on can be corrected in several ways:

1. The independent clauses can be separated into two sentences by adding a period.

Comma splice: The coffee was too hot to drink, he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

Run-on: The coffee was too hot to drink he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

Revised version: The coffee was too hot to drink. He waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

2. The independent clauses can be separated with a semi-colon. Use this method only if the two independent clauses are very closely related.

Comma splice: The coffee was too hot to drink, he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

Run-on: The coffee was too hot to drink he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

Revised version: The coffee was too hot to drink; he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

3. A coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS) can be added after a comma.

Comma splice: The coffee was too hot to drink, he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

Run-on: The coffee was too hot to drink he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

Revised version: The coffee was too hot to drink, so he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

4. Turn one of the independent clauses into a dependent clause by adding a subordinating conjunction.

Comma splice: The coffee was too hot to drink, he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

Run-on: The coffee was too hot to drink he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

Revised version: The coffee was too hot to drink, **even though** he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

5. Add a semicolon, a conjunctive adverb, and then a comma, in that order.

Comma splice: The coffee was too hot to drink, he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

Run-on: The coffee was too hot to drink he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

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Revised version: The coffee was too hot to drink; consequently, he waited ten minutes before taking the first sip.

Practice: Be careful not to overuse any one of these techniques. Varying your sentence structure helps to keep your reader's interest and allows you to develop your personal writing style. Now look at your own writing. Examine your use of commas. Are you using commas to separate two independent clauses? If so, correct those comma splices by using the techniques described here. Try using all five of the techniques to create different types of sentences. In addition to correcting the comma splices, alternating between the five correction techniques will help add variety to your sentences, making your writing more interesting.

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