

Being able to judge the difference between an acceptable and unacceptable sentence fragment comes from years of reading the work of skilled writers. For ACADEMIC WRITING, most instructors don't accept sentence fragments in student writing until a student demonstrates a consistent ability to write well-constructed, complete sentences. As a rule, avoid sentence fragments in academic writing.

**EXERCISE 12-4** Revise this paragraph to eliminate all sentence fragments. In some cases, you can combine word groups to create complete sentences; in other cases, you must supply missing elements to revise word groups. Some sentences may not require revision. In your final version, check not only the individual sentences but also the clarity of the whole paragraph. Refer to sections 12a through 12e for help.

(1) Some teenagers and young adults. (2) Are continually on instant messaging almost every moment that they are using their computers. (3) Which are rarely turned off. (4) According to America Online (AOL), the most popular instant-messaging service. (5) 195 million people use its instant-messaging service. (6) Creating more than 1.6 billion messages per day. (7) Becoming an integral part of the social fabric of our world. (8) Instant messaging has replaced the telephone, and even some e-mail. (9) For millions of young adults. (10) As a result, AOL and its main rivals, Microsoft and Yahoo. (11) Continue to add new features to their instant-messaging services.

## CHAPTER 13

# Comma Splices and Run-on Sentences

### 13a What are comma splices and run-on sentences?

Comma splices and run-on sentences are somewhat similar errors: One has a comma by itself between two complete sentences, and one has no punctuation at all between two complete sentences.

A **comma splice**, also called a *comma fault*, occurs when a comma, rather than a period, is used incorrectly between complete sentences. The word *splice* means “to fasten ends together,” which is a handy procedure, except when splicing has anything to do with sentences.

A **run-on sentence**, also called a *fused sentence* and a *run-together sentence*, occurs when two complete sentences run into each other without any

punctuation. Comma splices and run-on sentences create confusion because readers can't tell where one thought ends and another begins.



**COMMA SPLICE** The icebergs broke off from the **glacier, they** drifted into the sea.

**RUN-ON SENTENCE** The icebergs broke off from the **glacier they** drifted into the sea.

**CORRECT** The icebergs broke off from the **glacier. They** drifted into the sea.

There is one exception. You can use a comma between two independent clauses, but only if the comma is followed by one of the seven coordinating conjunctions: *and, but, for, or, nor, yet, so*. A comma in such a construction is correct; see Chapter 23.



**CORRECT** The icebergs broke off from the glacier, **and** they drifted into the sea.

 **ALERT:** Occasionally, when your meaning allows it, you can use a colon or a dash to join two independent clauses. 

## 13b How can I recognize comma splices and run-on sentences?

When you know how to recognize an INDEPENDENT CLAUSE, you'll know how to recognize COMMA SPLICES and RUN-ON SENTENCES. An independent clause can stand alone as a complete sentence. An independent clause contains a SUBJECT and a PREDICATE. Also, an independent clause doesn't begin with a word that creates dependence—that is, it doesn't begin with a SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTION or a RELATIVE PRONOUN.

Interestingly, almost all comma splices and run-on sentences are caused by only four patterns. If you become familiar with these four patterns, listed in Box 13-1 on the next page, you'll more easily locate them in your writing.

 **ALERT:** To proofread for comma splices, cover all words on one side of the comma and see if the words remaining form an independent clause. If they do, next cover all words you left uncovered, on the other side of the comma. If the second side of the comma is also an independent clause, you're looking at a comma splice. (This technique doesn't work for run-on sentences because a comma isn't present.) 

Experienced writers sometimes use a comma to join very short independent clauses, especially if one independent clause is negative and the other is positive: *Mosquitoes don't **bite, they** stab*. In ACADEMIC WRITING, however, many instructors consider this an error, so you'll be safe if you use a period. (Another option is a semicolon, if the two independent clauses are closely related in meaning: *Mosquitoes don't **bite; they** stab*.)

## BOX 13-1 PATTERN



### Detecting comma splices and run-on sentences

- Watch out for a PRONOUN starting the second independent clause.
  - NO The physicist Marie Curie discovered **radium**, **she** won two Nobel Prizes.
  - YES The physicist Marie Curie discovered **radium**. **She** won two Nobel Prizes.
- Watch out for a CONJUNCTIVE ADVERB (such as *furthermore*, *however*, *similarly*, *therefore*, and *then*; see, section 7h, for a complete list) starting the second independent clause.
  - NO Marie Curie and her husband, Pierre, worked together at **first**, **however**, he died tragically at age forty-seven.
  - YES Marie Curie and her husband, Pierre, worked together at **first**. **However**, he died tragically at age forty-seven.
- Watch out for a TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSION (such as *in addition*, *for example*, *in contrast*, *of course*, and *meanwhile*; see Box 4-5, section 4g.1, for a reference list) starting the second independent clause.
  - NO Marie Curie and her husband won a Nobel Prize for the discovery of **radium**, **in addition**, **Marie** herself won another Nobel Prize for her work on the atomic weight of radium.
  - YES Marie Curie and her husband won a Nobel Prize for the discovery of **radium**; **in addition**, **Marie** herself won another Nobel Prize for her work on the atomic weight of radium.
- Watch out for a second independent clause that explains, says more about, contrasts with, or gives an example of what's said in the first independent clause.
  - NO Marie Curie died of leukemia in **1934**, **exposure** to radioactivity killed her.
  - YES Marie Curie died of leukemia in **1934**. **Exposure** to radioactivity killed her.

## 13c How can I correct comma splices and run-on sentences?

Once you have identified a COMMA SPLICE or a RUN-ON SENTENCE, you're ready to correct it. You can do this in one of four ways, as shown in Box 13-2 and discussed further in the sections given in parentheses.

## BOX 13-2 SUMMARY



### Ways to correct comma splices and run-on sentences

- Use a period between the INDEPENDENT CLAUSES (13c.1).
- Use a semicolon between the independent clauses (13c.2).
- Use a comma together with a COORDINATING CONJUNCTION (13c.3).
- Revise one independent clause into a DEPENDENT CLAUSE (13c.4).

## 13c.1 Using a period to correct comma splices and run-on sentences

You can use a period to correct comma splices and run-on sentences by placing the period between the two sentences. For the sake of sentence variety and emphasis (see Chapter 18), however, you want to choose other options as well, such as those shown in 13c.3 and 13c.4. Strings of short sentences rarely establish relationships and levels of importance among ideas.

**COMMA SPLICE** A shark is all **cartilage**, it doesn't have a bone in its body.

**RUN-ON SENTENCE** A shark is all **cartilage** it doesn't have a bone in its body.

**CORRECT** A shark is all **cartilage**. It doesn't have a bone in its body. [A period separates the independent clauses.]

## 13c.2 Using a semicolon to correct comma splices and run-on sentences

You can use a semicolon to correct comma splices and run-on sentences by placing the semicolon between the two sentences. Use a semicolon only when the separate sentences are closely related in meaning. For the sake of sentence variety and emphasis, however, you'll want to choose other options, such as those shown in 13c.1, 13c.3, and 13c.4; for correct semicolon use, see Chapter 24.

**COMMA SPLICE** The great white shark supposedly eats **humans**, **research** shows that most white sharks spit them out after the first bite.

**RUN-ON SENTENCE** The great white shark supposedly eats **humans** **research** shows that most white sharks spit them out after the first bite.

**CORRECT** The great white shark supposedly eats **humans**; **research** shows that most white sharks spit them out after the first bite. [A semicolon separates two independent clauses that are close in meaning.]

### 13c.3 Using a comma together with a coordinating conjunction to correct comma splices and run-on sentences

You can connect independent clauses with a comma together with a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, for, or, nor, yet, so*) to correct a comma splice. You can also correct a run-on sentence by inserting a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction.

 **ALERT:** Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction that links independent clauses (23b). 

When you use a coordinating conjunction, be sure that your choice fits the meaning of the material. *And* signals addition; *but* and *yet* signal contrast; *for* and *so* signal cause; and *or* and *nor* signal alternatives.

**COMMA SPICE** Every living creature gives off a weak electrical charge in the **water**, **special** pores on a shark's skin can detect these signals.

**RUN-ON SENTENCE** Every living creature gives off a weak electrical charge in the **water** **special** pores on a shark's skin can detect these signals.

**CORRECT** Every living creature gives off a weak electrical charge in the **water**, **and** **special** pores on a shark's skin can detect these signals.

**EXERCISE 13-1** Revise the comma splices and run-on sentences by using a period, a semicolon, or a comma and coordinating conjunction. For help, consult 13c.1 through 13c.3.

**EXAMPLE** Artists in Santa Fe, New Mexico, are proudly reviving interest in ancient Hispanic crafts the artists display their handmade items during the annual Traditional Spanish Market in July.

Artists in Santa Fe, New Mexico, are proudly reviving interest in ancient Hispanic *crafts*. *The artists* display their handmade items during the annual Traditional Spanish Market in July.

1. Every summer, Santa Fe holds the country's oldest and largest open market for traditional Hispanic work, however, few people know how respected and valuable the artistry is.

2. Some artists sell small items such as silver jewelry and prayer books covered in buffalo hide other artists offer detailed altarpieces and Spanish colonial furniture.
3. Members of the Lopez family never use commercial dyes they go to nearby caves to gather plants for brewing into natural colors.
4. Teenagers of the Rodriguez family create straw appliqué crucifixes, they take tiny pieces of flattened straw, rub them until shiny, and lay them delicately into wood.
5. Market visitors admire the colorful blankets Mr. Irwin Trujillo weaves to his own designs he rarely mentions that one of his blankets was purchased by the famous Smithsonian Institution, a museum in Washington, DC.

### 13c.4 Revising one independent clause into a dependent clause to correct comma splices and run-on sentences

You can revise a comma splice or run-on sentence by revising one of the two independent clauses into a dependent clause. This method is suitable only when one idea can logically be subordinated (17e) to the other. Also, be careful not to punctuate the dependent clause as a complete sentence. If you do, you've created the error of a SENTENCE FRAGMENT.


#### Create dependent clauses with subordinating conjunctions

One way to create a dependent clause is to insert a SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTION (such as *because*, *although*, *when*, and *if*—see section 7h for a complete list). Always choose a subordinating conjunction that fits the meaning of each particular sentence: *because* and *since* signal cause; *although* signals contrast; *when* signals time; and *if* signals condition. Dependent clauses that begin with a subordinating conjunction are called ADVERB CLAUSES.

**COMMA SPLICE** Homer and Langley Collyer had packed their house from top to bottom with **junk**, **police** could not open the front door to investigate a reported smell.

**RUN-ON SENTENCE** Homer and Langley Collyer had packed their house from top to bottom with **junk** **police** could not open the front door to investigate a reported smell.

**CORRECT** **Because** Homer and Langley Collyer had packed their house from top to bottom with **junk**, **police** could not open the front door to investigate a reported smell. [Because starts a dependent clause that is joined by a comma with the independent clause starting with police.]

 **ALERT:** Place a comma between an introductory dependent clause and the independent clause that follows (23c). 

### Create dependent clauses with relative pronouns


You can create a dependent clause with a RELATIVE PRONOUN (*who, whom, whose, which, that*). Dependent clauses with a relative pronoun are called ADJECTIVE CLAUSES.

**COMMA SPlice** The Collyers had been crushed under a pile of **newspapers, the newspapers** had toppled onto the brothers.

**RUN-ON SENTENCE** The Collyers had been crushed under a pile of **newspapers the newspapers** had toppled onto the brothers.

**CORRECT** The Collyers had been crushed under a pile of **newspapers *that had toppled*** onto the brothers. [The relative pronoun *that* starts a dependent clause and is joined with the independent clause starting with *The Collyers* after deletion of *the newspapers*.]



**ALERT:** Sometimes you need commas to set off an adjective clause from the rest of the sentence. This happens only when the adjective is NONRESTRICTIVE (nonessential), so check carefully (see 23f). 

**EXERCISE 13-2** Identify and then revise the comma splices and run-on sentences. Circle the numbers of correct sentences. For help, consult 13b through 13c.4.

(1) Drug dealers sentenced to Rikers Island Detention Center in New York City listen carefully, they like the thought of making \$200,000 a year legally. (2) Speaking to them is a 33-year-old self-made millionaire he knows firsthand about gangs and drugs. (3) Fernando Mateo dropped out of school in the tenth grade, however, he learned how to be a carpet layer. (4) Mateo's bosses showed him no respect therefore, he started his own business with a \$2,000 loan from his father. (5) Thirteen years later, he owns two big stores, his business brings in \$3 million per year.

## 13d How can I correctly use a conjunctive adverb or other transitional expression between independent clauses?

CONJUNCTIVE ADVERBS and other TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS link ideas between sentences. When these words fall between sentences, a period or semicolon must immediately precede them—and a comma usually immediately follows them.

Conjunctive adverbs include such words as *however, therefore, also, next, then, thus, furthermore*, and *nevertheless* (see section 7f for a complete

list). Be careful to remember that conjunctive adverbs are not COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS (*and*, *but*, and so on; see 13c.3).

**COMMA SPLICE** Buying or leasing a car is a matter of individual preference, **however**, it's wise to consider several points before making a decision.

**RUN-ON SENTENCE** Buying or leasing a car is a matter of individual preference **however** it's wise to consider several points before making a decision.

**CORRECT** Buying or leasing a car is a matter of individual preference. **However**, it's wise to consider several points before making a decision.

**CORRECT** Buying or leasing a car is a matter of individual preference; **however**, it's wise to consider several points before making a decision.

Transitional expressions include *for example*, *for instance*, *in addition*, *in fact*, *of course*, and *on the one hand/on the other hand* (see Box 4-5, section 4g.1, for a complete list).


**COMMA SPLICE** Car leasing requires a smaller down payment, **for example**, in many cases, you need only \$1,000 or \$2,000 and the first monthly payment.

**RUN-ON SENTENCE** Car leasing requires a smaller down payment, **for example** in many cases, you need only \$1,000 or \$2,000 and the first monthly payment.

**CORRECT** Car leasing requires a smaller down payment. **For example**, in many cases, you need only \$1,000 or \$2,000 and the first monthly payment.

**CORRECT** Car leasing requires a smaller down payment; **for example**, in many cases, you need only \$1,000 or \$2,000 and the first monthly payment.



**ALERT:** A conjunctive adverb or a transitional expression is usually followed by a comma when it starts a sentence (23g). 

**EXERCISE 13-3** Revise comma splices or run-on sentences caused by incorrectly punctuated conjunctive adverbs or other transitional expressions. If a sentence is correct, circle its number. For help, consult 13d.

1. During the nineteenth century, over 2,500 black cowboys and cowgirls herded cattle in the West however, few people are familiar with their accomplishments.
2. Many former Texas slaves had become expert riders and cattle handlers, therefore, ranchers hired them to round up five to six million loose cattle after the Civil War.



3. Black cowboys often guarded the railroad boss and his cash payroll for example, the black cowhand Bose Ikard often guarded up to \$20,000 and “never lost a dime.”
4. Stagecoach Mary battled blizzards, rain, and heat as she delivered the US mail to isolated cabins in Montana, in addition, this elderly black woman managed to fight off thieves and wolves along the way.
5. Paul W. Stewart spent eleven years collecting information and artifacts about African Americans in the West as a result, everyone can see the displays at the Black American West Museum in Denver, Colorado.

## CHAPTER 14

# Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

## MISPLACED MODIFIERS

### 14a What is a misplaced modifier?

A **modifier** is a word or group of words that describes or limits another word or group of words. A **misplaced modifier** is positioned incorrectly in a sentence, which means, therefore, that it describes the wrong word and changes the writer’s meaning. Always place a modifier as close as possible to what it describes.

#### Avoiding squinting modifiers

A **squinting modifier** is misplaced because it modifies both the word that comes before it and the word that follows it. Check that your modifiers are placed so that they communicate the meaning you intend.

**NO** The football player being recruited **eagerly** believed each successive offer would be better. [What was *eager*? The recruitment or the player’s belief?]

**YES** The football player being recruited believed **eagerly** that each successive offer would be better.

**YES** The football player being **eagerly** recruited believed that each successive offer would be better.