**R U L E S**

**For Finding and Fixing Comma Splices and Fused Sentences**

**Understand the problem.**

What are comma splices and fused sentences? They are problem sentences that contain two or more main clauses incorrectly joined together. Every main clause contains an independent subject and verb, so it can stand alone as a complete sentence.

A comma splice incorrectly joins two main clauses with a comma, like this:

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Main Clause + + Main Clause = ⮿

A fused sentence has two main clauses joined with no punctuation at all, like this:

Main Clause + Main Clause = ⮿

**Know the solution.**

To fix a comma splice or fused sentence, use one of the four strategies below.

**Strategy 1 — Make two complete sentences.**

Because comma splices and fused sentences contain two main clauses, you can always add a period [a full stop] at the end of the first clause and then begin the second one with a capital letter. Take a look at the fused sentence below:

Grandma still rides her Harley motorcycle her toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

A break should occur between motorcycle and her. To fix the problem with Strategy 1, you would revise the sentence like this:

Grandma still rides her Harley **motorcycle. Her** toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

**Strategy 2 — Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction.**

There are seven coordinating conjunctions. Some students remember the seven by learning the word fanboys. Each of the seven letters of fanboys stands for one of the coordinating conjunctions.

F = for; A = and; N = nor; B = but; O = or; Y = yet; S = so

Teamed up with a comma, these seven coordinating conjunctions can correctly join two main clauses. Take a look at our original example:

Grandma still rides her Harley motorcycle her toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

To fix the problem with Strategy 2, you should do this:

Grandma still rides her Harley **motorcycle, and her** toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

The important thing to remember with Strategy 2 is that you must use a coordinating conjunction that logically joins the two complete sentences. The coordinating conjunction but, for example, wouldn't work in the example above because the writer isn't showing contrast.

**Strategy 3 — Use a semicolon.**

Unlike a comma, a semicolon is a strong enough mark of punctuation to join two main clauses. Use a semicolon like this:

Grandma still rides her Harley **motorcycle; her** toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

Keep these three things in mind when you use a semicolon:

* The two main clauses that the semicolon joins should be closely related in meaning.
* Don't capitalize the word that follows the semicolon unless that word is a proper noun, one that is always capitalized.
* Limit your use of semicolons; you should not wantonly scatter them throughout your writing. Semicolons are like glasses of champagne; save them for special occasions.

**Strategy 4 — Use a subordinate conjunction.**

When you are fixing a comma splice or fused sentence, subordinate conjunctions can be the most tricky to use. There are two reasons that subordinate conjunctions are tricky: 1) there are many subordinate conjunctions to choose from, and 2) you must use the right punctuation. For those who are not faint of heart, here are the things to keep in mind.

First, know your subordinate conjunctions. Here is a list:

after although as because before

even if even though provided that rather than since

so that than that until when

whenever where whereas wherever whether

in order that if though unless while

why

Next, keep these general rules in mind:

Main Clause + Subordinate Clause .

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Subordinate Clause + + Main Clause.

Now take a look at the original problem sentence:

Grandma still rides her Harley motorcycle her toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.

To fix the sentence with Strategy 4, you could do something like these two examples:

* **While** Grandma rides her Harley motorcycle, her toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.
* Grandma rides her Harley motorcycle **as** her toy poodle balances in a basket between the handlebars.