

RULES

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:

MAIN CLAUSE + , + **MAIN CLAUSE** = ☠.

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

MAIN CLAUSE + Ø + **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	once	until
although	provided that	when
as	rather than	whenever
because	since	where
before	so that	whereas
even if	than	wherever
even though	that	whether

if
in order that

though
unless

while
why

Next, keep these *general* rules in mind:

MAIN CLAUSE + Ø + **SUBORDINATE CLAUSE** .

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.

A good writer will fix problem sentences using all four strategies: adding a period and a capital letter, using a comma and a conjunction, joining the two main clauses with a semicolon, or subordinating one of the parts with a subordinate conjunction.



©1997 - 2013 by Robin L. Simmons
All Rights Reserved.