

FINDING AND FIXING COMMA SPLICES AND RUN-ONS

By Marian Anders

If you write a sentence that has two independent clauses, you need to be careful about what you put in between them. A sentence with two independent clauses that are not joined correctly is a **comma splice** or a **run-on**.

The only difference between a comma splice and a run-on is that a comma splice has a comma between the two independent clauses and a run-on does not have a comma. Both of these sentences are incorrect:

Sue cooked dinner, Joe washed the dishes. CS

Sue cooked dinner Joe washed the dishes. RO

Fixing Comma Splices and Run-Ons

Comma splices and run-ons are easy to fix. You have four options. Choose whichever option you think will sound best for your sentence.

First Method: Add a **period** at the spot where the two clauses meet to separate the two clauses into two sentences.

Sue cooked dinner. Joe washed the dishes. OK

Second Method: Add a comma and a **coordinating conjunction** between the two independent clauses. The seven **coordinating conjunctions** are very special words. They are all short words—only two or three letters long. They are the **ONLY** words that can be used with a comma to separate two independent clauses. You can use the acronym FANBOYS to remember them.

Coordinating Conjunctions

For And Nor But Or Yet So

Sue cooked dinner, *and* Joe washed the dishes. OK

Sue cooked dinner, *so* Joe washed the dishes. OK

Coordinating conjunctions are the **ONLY** words that can be used with a comma to separate two independent clauses. A comma with any other word gives you a comma splice.

Third Method: You can add a **subordinating conjunction** at the beginning of one of the clauses to make the clause dependent. A comma splice or run-on occurs when you have two independent clauses. Make one of the clauses dependent, and you have solved the problem. Use whichever subordinating conjunction suits the meaning of your sentence.

After Sue cooked dinner, Joe washed the dishes. OK
Sue cooked dinner before Joe washed the dishes. OK

Notice that in the first sentence the dependent clause comes first and a comma follows it. In the second sentence, the independent clause comes first, and there is no comma. That is the correct way to punctuate this type of sentence.

Fourth Method: You can add a **semi-colon (;)** between the two clauses.

Sue cooked dinner; Joe washed the dishes. OK

For a variation on the semi-colon method, you can also add a **conjunctive adverb** and a comma. Use whichever word suits the meaning of the sentence.

Common Conjunctive Adverbs

however	therefore
consequently	furthermore
nevertheless	hence
accordingly	moreover

Sue cooked dinner; *therefore*, Joe washed the dishes.
Sue cooked dinner; *consequently*, Joe washed the dishes.

Look carefully at the punctuation of these sentences. Put a semi-colon after the first independent clause. Then write the conjunctive adverb followed by a comma. Finally write the second independent clause.