



THE UNIVERSITY
WRITING CENTER
3211 HHRA BUILDING

COMMA SPLICES AND RUN-ON SENTENCES

Related Handouts: TERMS TO KNOW: Vital Sentence Elements, Clauses and Sentence Types;
THE SEMICOLON; THE COMMA

THE PRINCIPLE

The principle behind avoiding comma splice and run-on sentence errors is this: if two **independent clauses** occur in the same sentence, they must be connected by a semicolon or by a comma plus coordinating conjunction (*and, or, but, for, yet, so*).

A *comma splice* error occurs when two independent clauses are connected in one sentence with just a comma. A *run-on* sentence (sometimes called a *fused sentence*) occurs when two independent clauses are included in one sentence without any coordinating conjunction or punctuation joining them.

NOTE: An **independent clause** is a group of words that could stand alone as a sentence; it has a **subject** and a **verb**, and it finishes the statement it starts.

THE PROBLEM

Here are some run-on sentences and some comma splices. In each sentence, the first independent clause is underlined and the second independent clause is not, allowing you to see where the punctuation should be (in a run-on) or where the comma splice occurs.

Run-on sentences:

Weather predictions factor greatly in deciding when to start any overnight bike trip late spring and early fall are ideal for long weekend get-aways.

You should use a quality touring bike you are riding long distances.

Bill and Sue biked from Montana to Mexico last summer they covered about 65 miles per day.

Bill and Sue joined a cycling group that rode between 30 and 60 miles three times a week this way they prepared for the physical requirements of their long trip.

Cycling is a healthy pastime therefore Bill and Sue are introducing their children to the sport.

Comma Splices (These are the same sentences rewritten with comma splice errors):

Weather predictions factor greatly in deciding when to start any overnight bike trip, late spring and early fall are ideal for long weekend get-aways.

You should use a quality touring bike, you are riding long distances.

Bill and Sue biked from Montana to Mexico last summer, they covered about 65 miles per day.

Bill and Sue joined a cycling group that rode between 30 and 60 miles three times a week, this way they prepared for the physical requirements of their long trip.

Cycling is a healthy pastime, therefore Bill and Sue are introducing their children to the sport.

THE SOLUTION

There are four ways to correct both run-on sentences and comma splices:

- separating the two independent clauses into two sentences,
- rewriting one of the independent clauses as a **dependent clause**,
- linking the two clauses with a comma and coordinating conjunction,
- linking the two independent clauses with a semicolon.

Look for the independent clauses in your sentences and decide the best way to link or separate them. Here are our sentences written correctly. The correction is in bold.

Separate into two sentences:

Weather predictions factor greatly in deciding when to start any overnight bike **trip**.
Late spring and early fall are ideal for long weekend get-aways.

Rewrite one independent clause as a dependent clause (the dependent clause is in bold):

You should use a quality touring bike **when you are riding long distances**.

Link the two independent clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction:

Bill and Sue biked from Montana to Mexico last **summer, and they** covered about 65 miles per day.

Link the two independent clauses with a semicolon:

Bill and Sue joined a cycling group that rode between 30 and 60 miles three times a **week; this** way they prepared for the physical requirements of their long trip.

Cycling is a healthy pastime; **therefore**, Bill and Sue are introducing their children to the sport.

NOW SOME FINE PRINT

How do you know which type of correction to use? This is how you can exert your own style as a writer.

- If you would like the two ideas to be separate or you would like a tone that is short and more abrupt, make the independent clauses into two separate sentences.
- If you want to make one idea more important than another, maintain one independent clause and turn the other into a dependent clause. The independent clause will function as the more important of the two.
- If the two clauses are equally important and you want to show how they are related, use a comma plus an appropriate coordinating conjunction.
- If the two ideas in the independent clauses are closely related and you want to give them equal emphasis without using a coordinating conjunction, link them with a semicolon.

Take another look at the final example above for some extra information about using a semicolon. When the second independent clause begins with a word such as *however*, *therefore*, *nevertheless*, *moreover*, *consequently*, *then*, *thus*, *furthermore*, etc. (these are called **adverbial conjunctions**) you must use a semicolon after the first independent clause and a comma after the adverbial conjunction.