



Grammar: Comma Splices and Fused Sentences

What are Comma Splices and Fused Sentences?

These errors fall under “run-on sentences” which involve the improper linking of independent clauses. Think of a clause like a puzzle piece: every piece has a picture which may be connected with a hole and a knob necessary to connect it; punctuation and/or conjunctions are like the holes and knobs which connect clauses. All of the pieces come together to form one big picture, but the shapes need to lead into each other to fit. For pieces to fit with each other and form the intended picture, they must be fit properly; similarly, clauses need to be linked properly together to fit and form a coherent idea.

Comma splices occur when two independent clauses are linked by just a comma.

Sammy D. Eagle was noisy, the Simpson Owl had a hard time reading.

Fused sentences occur when two clauses are linked with no end punctuation or “connector” word/phrase.

The Simpson Owl enjoys reading mystery novels Sammy D. Eagle prefers action-adventure stories.

Why are comma splices and fused sentences considered wrong?

They are considered “wrong” because they blur the boundaries of sentences. Consider the above scenarios; in the first sentence, the second clause relies on the information in the first one because the implication is that the noise is what is creating a hard time for the Simpson Owl. Because this clause relies on another to show the full context, it makes sense to combine them into one sentence. In the second example, both clauses consider the same kind of information about the

Speaking and Writing Center [1]: An independent clause has a subject and a verb and can stand on its own; the errors discussed in this handout occur when two or more independent clauses are improperly joined to form one sentence.

Speaking and Writing Center [2]: If we continue with the puzzle metaphor, two clauses joined by just a comma have a mismatched knob and hole-- they don't fit together properly.

Speaking and Writing Center [3]: Red items are subjects.

Speaking and Writing Center [4]: Blue items are verbs.

Speaking and Writing Center [5]: Notice the comma. This would be a comma splice because there is no proper end punctuation or “connector” word/phrase that relates the relationships between both clauses.

Speaking and Writing Center [6]: Think of this as a missing knob-- there is nothing to connect it with.

Speaking and Writing Center [7]: Notice the lack of any punctuation and “connector” words/phrases. Due to this, the relationship between these clauses is not clearly defined.



Simpson Owl and Sammy D. Eagle so again, it makes sense to combine them into one sentence. There are many ways to do this.

How to identify and fix them

Start by identifying where each clause starts and ends by looking for the **subject** and **verb**. Then, use one of three methods:

A: Add a period between the clauses creating two separate sentences.

The **Simpson Owl** enjoys reading books. **Sammy D. Eagle** loves to cheer on the sports teams.

Speaking and Writing Center [8]: A period can be used for two independent clauses that contain separate, complete ideas and don't rely on each other for meaning.

B: Add a semicolon between the clauses.

The **Simpson Owl** likes to study quietly; **Sammy D. Eagle** prefers to play loud music while he studies.

Speaking and Writing Center [9]: See the "Punctuation: Using Semicolons and Colons" handout for more details on how to use a semi-colon.

Speaking and Writing Center [10]: In this sentence, the semicolon indicates that there is a relationship between the two clauses being that both of them discuss the interests of the mascots.

C: Add a conjunction between the clauses.

Conjunctions are simply words or phrases that connect clauses

Speaking and Writing Center [11]: Notice that in both the subordinating and coordinating sentences, the conjunction gives a clear relationship between the clauses, so it is reasonable to combine them into one sentence.

The **Simpson Owl** had a hard time reading because **Sammy D. Eagle** was noisy."

Speaking and Writing Center [12]: This is called a subordinating clause because it explains the "why"-- in this case, it explains why the Simpson Owl was finding it difficult to read.

The **Simpson Owl** perched on the tree branch, and **Sammy D. Eagle** soared high in the sky.

Speaking and Writing Center [13]: Notice that you place a comma before a coordinating conjunction that introduces a second independent clause.

Speaking and Writing Center [14]: These are coordinating clauses as neither clause relies on the other to make sense on its own; they coordinate since each idea has "equal weight". "And" is one of the 7 coordinating conjunction. You can remember all 7 using the acronym FANBOYS: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so