


Comma Mis/Uses: Comma Splices

A **comma splice** is one instance of comma misuse. Comma splices occur when a comma is used to offset two *independent clauses* in a sentence.


Examples of Comma Splices:

- I was tired today, I didn't get enough sleep.
- When I was a kid, I was a fast reader, now I am much slower at reading.
- The cat followed the laser pointer, it was easily amused by the silly game.



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An *independent clause* can stand on its own (“independently”). In other words, it contains both a subject + a verb.



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It can be difficult to determine where the comma splice is when there are additional commas in the sentence. As “When I was a kid” serves as the introductory clause, it needs a comma after it. The comma between “reader” and “now” is incorrect, however, as it separates two different ideas that can stand on their own as complete sentences.

Handout created by
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Based on “Comma Splices”
from *The McGraw-Hill
Handbook of English
Grammar and Usage*,
pp. 119-122

How Can We Fix Comma Splices?

1. Use a period to create two complete sentences.

Incorrect: I was tired today, I didn't get enough sleep.



Correct: I was tired today. I didn't get enough sleep.

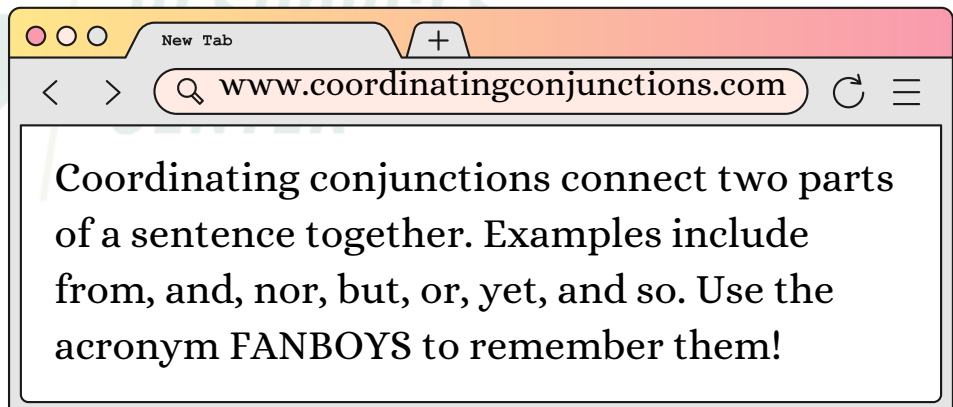
Note: While an easy solution, simple sentences like these aren't the end-all be-all of comma splice fixing. Use this solution sparingly throughout your draft or your sentences may become repetitive and monotonous.

2. Use a coordinating conjunction to combine the two clauses.

Incorrect: When I was a kid, I was a fast reader, now I am much slower at reading



Correct: When I was a kid, I was a fast reader, **but** now I am much slower at reading.



3. Use a semicolon.

Incorrect: The cat followed the laser pointer, it was easily amused by the silly game.



Correct: The cat followed the laser pointer; it was easily amused by the silly game.

Note: Semicolons are a type of punctuation that separate two independent clauses. Reserve this solution for sentences where the two ideas being connected are clearly, closely, logically related.*