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Grammar Tips

Run-Ons, Comma Splices & Fused Sentences

Run-Ons / Comma Splices / Fused Sentences

Problem: Two or more sentences are incorrectly connected.

Incorrect	Correct
My paper is almost done it wasn't too difficult.	My paper is almost done. It wasn't too difficult.
My paper is almost done and it wasn't too difficult.	My paper is almost done, and it wasn't too difficult.
My paper is almost done, it wasn't too difficult.	My paper is almost done; it wasn't too difficult.

What is a comma splice?

A comma splice is the inappropriate linking of two sentences by a comma only. This is not permissible.

Example of a comma splice:

Eight inches of rain fell in twenty-four hours, all the creeks swelled rapidly.

What is a fused sentence?

A fused sentence is the linking of two sentences inappropriately with no punctuation.

Example of a fused sentence:

The city had only one swimming pool without an admission fee the pool was poorly maintained.

Another term for a fused sentence is a run-on sentence.

Each time you have a subject (the do-er, or the thing talked about) and a verb (word that shows action in the sentence), you have created a sentence/statement. Two separate statements or sentences can't be linked without correct punctuation or connecting words.

Example of a comma splice:

Sue had already founded a successful company, she saw no reason to get an advanced degree.

There are two separate subject-verb combinations: Sue-founded and she-saw. These can't just be linked with a comma.

Example of a fused sentence:

Health costs are rising rapidly solutions to the problem are not clear.

There are two separate subject-verb combinations: costs-are rising and solutions-are not. There can't just be linked together like this.

There are several ways to fix comma splices and fused sentences.

1. Create two separate sentences:

Fused: Football does not cause the most injuries among student athletes gymnastics is the most dangerous sport.

Fixed: Football does not cause the most injuries among student athletes. Gymnastics is the most dangerous sport.

2. Join main clauses with a comma plus a conjunction like: and, but, or, for, nor, so or yet.

Spliced: Schizophrenia is a mental illness, its causes may be physical.

Fixed: Schizophrenia is a mental illness, but its causes may be physical.

3. Join the main clauses with a semicolon:

Spliced: Some parents refuse to become involved in their children's squabbles, they fear the children will resent the interference.

Fixed: Some parents refuse to become involved in their children's squabbles; they fear the children will resent the interference.

4. Subordinate one of the clauses. Subordinators are words like: although, while, when, because, since, unless, who, which, that, etc.

Fused: Margaret Atwood is best known for her novels her essays and poems are also worth reading.

Fixed: Although Margaret Atwood is best known for her novels, her essays and poems are also worth reading.

Sometimes students have a hard time grasping that a fairly short sentence can be a run-on. Try to find the multiple sentences embedded.

Examples and descriptions from:

Anson, Chris M. and Robert A. Schwegler. "Sentence Fragments." The Longman Handbook for Writers and Readers. New York: Longman, 2000. 310-322.