

Ch. 3: Sentence Errors

The following are common errors that happen when people incorrectly form or combine simple sentences.

3.1) Fused Sentences

The fused sentence is two simple sentences jammed together with nothing between them to separate or combine them properly. We call it a “fused sentence” even though it is not a sentence at all.

Here are two simple sentences labeled out so that you can see their patterns. They are correctly separated from each other by the middle period.

The man bought a hat. It matched his suit.
 S V DO S V DO

I am going to turn these two sentences into a fused sentence by removing the period between the two simple sentences and by not replacing it with anything else.

The man bought a hat. It matched his suit.
 → The man bought a hat it matched his suit. (X)

The new sentence begins with the capital *T* of the word *The* and ends with the period after the word *suit*. It is now one sentence enclosed by these two boundaries:

[The man bought a hat it matched his suit.] (X)

But even though this may look like a complete sentence, this is not acceptable. **Simply eliminating the period that separates the two sentences and then jamming them together cannot combine them correctly.**

Here are other examples:

1. The kitten meowed loudly. She was afraid of the thunder. (✓)
 → The kitten meowed loudly she was afraid of the thunder. (X)
2. The desk was old. It had the look of an antique. (✓)
 → The desk was old it had the look of an antique. (X)
3. The bell rang from the porch. The boys hurried home. (✓)
 → The bell rang from the porch the boys hurried home. (X)

Working Backwards

Rarely does a student write two correctly formed sentences and then say, “I think I will erase the period between these two sentences without putting any sort of conjunction, colon or semicolon, or relative pronoun between them.”

Instead, a student will first write down what looks like a nice long sentence but instead is a fused sentence. The student will not check it because it looks correct from the start.

To stop this from happening, you must be able to recognize how the fused sentence looks when it is the first thing you write. You need to recognize it in its raw form.

In other words, you should be able to look at something like this . . .

It was a long day. The calls were constant the customers were angry. (X)

. . . and recognize that there are really two simple sentences in the shaded area, without anything properly combining them.

If I had written the example like this (notice the differences in bold) . . .

It was a long day. **The calls were constant.** **The customers were angry.** (✓)

. . . you would recognize three correctly formed simple sentences with the correct boundaries of capital letters and end-punctuation:

[It was a long day.] [The calls were constant.] [The customers were angry.]

Now, isolate the last two:

The calls were constant. The customers were angry.

What ways can these two simple sentences be properly combined? By a conjunction, by a colon or semicolon, or by a relative pronoun (nests won't work for these sentences):

The calls were constant **and** the customers were angry. (✓)

The calls were constant**:** the customers were angry. (✓)

The customers, **who** constantly called, were angry. (✓)

Remember: erasing the period and jamming the sentences together with nothing between is never a correct way to combine them. That's what I did in the original:

It was a long day. The calls were constant. The customers were angry. (✓)

It was a long day. The calls were constant the customers were angry. (X)

Practice with Fused Sentences

Underline the fused sentences. Answers are on pg. 152.

1. Under the rug was the key John hid it there.
2. This was a winter day! The snow piled up a biting wind came from the North.
3. The man moved the hose to the back of the lawn the ground was dry there.
4. The car's bumper is dented because I backed into a pole yesterday.
5. Mick slept late into the afternoon he was up all night playing games.
6. Cory was disappointed. There was ice on the runway planes were not taking off.
7. The windows were dirty so I washed them with cleaning solution. They look nice now.
8. A famous battle took place on this field. Two nations fought for land and freedom.
9. I passed the preliminary exam I need to study to pass the real thing now.
10. The salesman walked Fifth Avenue it was his unofficial territory.
11. Our roof was creaking dangerously the strong winds put pressure on it.
12. Michael won the computer he had never won anything before.
13. Everyone knew that the company was losing business.
14. Ice on the runway creates tremendous problems for planes skid right off the asphalt.
15. The telemarketers keep calling the number they don't know the house is abandoned.
16. The shoppers didn't realize that the store was closing.
17. Horses make great pets they are wonderful with children.
18. Bill started crying because the wind was strong his kite had been broken.
19. The congregation listened attentively their preacher was a talented speaker.

Underline the fused sentence(s) in the following paragraphs:

20. The correct way to paint is easily learned. First, you must scrape all the walls that need scraping. Old paint should look cracked and a metal scraper is the best tool to use for this. Then you must put down cloth on the floor. The cloth catches paint drops these drops could really ruin a good carpet. After this, you must organize your working space. Cans and boxes can cause a lot of confusion. It is better to have only one or two buckets of paint in the corner that way you can be sure of where to walk. You don't want to spill paint everywhere. Finally, you should buy a stand-by-itself ladder. Ladders which must lean against the wall for support can stain the wall. The right ladder should be around six feet tall it will fit nicely under most ceilings. Taller ladders are hard to move around.

3.2) Comma Splices

Comma splices try to combine simple sentences by means of a comma, nothing else.

The sun was shining. Albert basked in the warm light.

→ The sun was shining Albert basked in the warm light. (fused sentence)

→ The sun was shining , Albert basked in the warm light. (comma splice)

Why is this incorrect? The rules for combining simple sentences developed in Ch. 2 tell us that we can combine simple sentences with conjunctions, colons or semicolons, relative pronouns, or nested clauses. We cannot combine them with commas alone.

Here are other examples:

1. Dark Brown is a somber color. Yellow is more cheerful.
→ Dark Brown is a somber color , yellow is more cheerful. (X)
2. Melinda saw the tigers. We watched the apes.
→ Melinda saw the tigers , we watched the apes. (X)
3. Medieval sailors slept on the deck. Today sailors sleep in berths.
→ Medieval sailors slept on the deck , today sailors sleep in berths. (X)
4. The problem is not lack of discipline. It is lack of motivation.
→ The problem is not lack of discipline , it is lack of motivation. (X)
5. Jenny listened closely. This part of the movie was important.
→ Jenny listened closely , this part of the movie was important. (X)
6. Computers help scientists. They can crunch large numbers.
→ Computers help scientists , they can crunch large numbers. (X)
7. The papers were stained. Coffee had spilled onto the edges.
→ The papers were stained , coffee had spilled onto the edges. (X)

Again, it is probably easy to see how the comma splice gets formed when you start with two correctly formed simple sentences and then incorrectly combine them by erasing the period and inserting only a comma.

But some comma splices become difficult to spot when they are written first as comma splices. You may think that you are writing a well developed sentence, but if you are not careful, you could be making comma splices. So watch out!

Working Backwards for Comma Splices

If you can see in your mind's eye the former simple sentences that now make up the new sentence, then you can make sure the proper words or punctuation marks are now coming between them within the new sentence.

Here's a comma splice:

The sun was shining , clouds hung in the sky. (X)

To work backward, first remove the comma:

The sun was shining , clouds hung in the sky.

↓

The sun was shining clouds hung in the sky.

At this point, you must look at these words as two groups:

The sun was shining clouds hung in the sky.

These two groups can quickly be turned into separate simple sentences. Simply put a period between them and capitalize the *c* of *clouds*:

The sun was shining clouds hung in the sky.

↓

The sun was shining. Clouds hung in the sky. (✓)

Notice that between these two sentences there is no conjunction, colon, semicolon, or relative pronoun. Thus, when the middle period is omitted and only a comma gets put between them . . .

The sun was shining. Clouds hung in the sky.

↓

The sun was shining , clouds hung in the sky.

. . . you get a comma splice. Commas alone can never join simple sentences correctly. Only conjunctions, colons, semicolons, relative pronouns, or nested clauses can join sentences.

Examine how these correct options fix the comma splice below:

The sun was shining , clouds hung in the sky. (X)

→ The sun was shining ; clouds hung in the sky. (✓)

→ The sun was shining **and** clouds hung in the sky. (✓)

→ The sun was shining **although** clouds hung in the sky. (✓)

→ The sun was shining **:** clouds hung in the sky. (✓)

More Examples of Comma Splices

1. Rob felt tired , he had just run five laps. (X)
 Rob felt tired , he had just run five laps. (former simple sentences)
 ↓ ↓
 [Rob felt tired.] [He had just run five laps.] (separated simple sentences)
 S LV SC S V DO
- Correctly combined:
 → Rob felt tired **because** he had just run five laps. (subordinating conjunction)
 → Rob felt tired **for** he had just run five laps. (coordinating conjunction)
2. The box arrived , the boss went home. (X)
 The box arrived , the boss went home. (former simple sentences)
 ↓ ↓
 [The box arrived.] [The boss went home.] (separated simple sentences)
 S V S V adv.
- Correctly combined:
 → The box arrived **and** the boss went home. (coordinating conjunction)
 → The box arrived **after** the boss went home. (subordinating conjunction)
3. I watched the man , he sang the song. (X)
 I watched the man , he sang the song. (former simple sentences)
 ↓ ↓
 [I watched the man.] [He sang the song.] (separated simple sentences)
 S V DO S V DO
- Correctly combined:
 → I watched the man **as** he sang the song. (subordinating conjunction)
 → I watched the man **who** sang the song. (relative pronoun)
4. The shoes were old , the soles had cracked. (X)
 The shoes were old , the soles had cracked. (former simple sentences)
 ↓ ↓
 [The shoes were old.] [The soles had cracked.] (separated simple sentences)
 S LV SC S V
- Correctly combined:
 → The shoes were old; the soles had cracked. (semicolon)
 → The shoes were old **so** the soles had cracked. (subordinating conj.)