



School of Liberal Arts

University Writing Center
"Because writers need readers"
Cavanaugh Hall 427 University Library 2125
(317)274-2049 (317)278-8171
www.iupui.edu/~uwc

Comma Splice & Fused Sentence
(closely related sentence errors
sometimes lumped together as “run-on”)

This handout provides you with some guidelines to help you identify and correct comma splices, sentence fragments, and other sentence errors. Different instructors prioritize grammatical correctness to different degrees; be sure you understand your instructor’s expectations when it comes to sentence-level clarity and correctness.

Some instructors evaluate work harshly if it has many errors of sentence boundaries. These may be either fragments or run-ons. Instructors may even speak of such errors as if the writer has committed a crime. While creating a fragment or run-on sentence is *not* a crime, these problems *can* interfere with your ability to present your ideas clearly and concisely to your reader.

Writers who join two complete sentences with only a comma have written a comma splice (abbreviated by some instructors as *CS*); writers who join two complete sentences without any punctuation have produced a fused sentence (*FS*). Though both *CS* and *FS* are grammatically incorrect, most readers are bothered more by *FS* than by *CS*.

Examples of run-ons:

He has completed his research, he will report his findings to class today. (**CS—incorrect**)
He has completed his research he will report his findings to class today. (**FS—incorrect**)

COORDINATING THE SENTENCES

(use when ideas are equally important)

One option is to write two sentences. However, a writer who wishes to keep these two sentences together as one sentence that makes no evaluation that one idea is more important than the other has two options:

1. Join them with a comma and a short coordinating conjunction (choose from *and, but, or, nor, for, yet, and so*).
2. Join them with a semicolon.

Examples:

He has completed his research, **and** he will report his findings to class today.

He has completed his research, **so** he will report his findings to class today.

He has completed his research, **but** he will not report his findings to class today.

He has completed his research; he will report his findings to class today.

(All of these are grammatically correct, but context and purpose dictate which works best.)

SUBORDINATING ONE SENTENCE

(use when one idea is more important)

Sometimes a writer wants to indicate that one sentence is more important, in which case the writer chooses an appropriate subordinating word like one of the following: *because, if, when, although, since, after, or whereas*. A subordinating conjunction like these words signals that the sentence following it should be considered less important than the other sentence. Word choice shows different kinds of relationships between the two sentence parts.

Examples:

After he has completed his research, he will report his findings to the class. (time sequence)

Because he has completed his research, he will report his findings to the class. (cause/effect)

He will report his findings to the class **when he has completed his research**. (time sequence)

Notice that when the subordinate clause (sentence) comes first, a comma separates it from the main clause. When the main clause comes first, there is no comma before the subordinate clause.

Created by Nancy Stahl. Revised May 2008.