



# The IWU Writing Center: How to Avoid Comma Splices

A comma splice is an error that occurs when two independent clauses (two complete sentences) are separated by only a comma. Comma splices can be considered a type of run-on sentence.

## *Spotting Comma Splices:*

Comma splices can be spotted when two clauses that are separated by a comma could stand on their own. The following sentence is an example of a comma splice.

The stock market has moved in one direction lately, it has gone down.

This sentence is incorrect because each clause can be understood when read without the other.

The stock market has moved in one direction lately.

AND

It has gone down.

These two independent clauses can stand on their own (independently) as their own sentences. Therefore, the punctuation used to separate them should be a period or semicolon instead.

## *Correcting Comma Splices:*

There are three ways to correct a comma splice: adding a semicolon, adding a conjunction, or making two separate sentences.

1. *Semicolons:* You can correct a sentence with a comma splice by substituting the comma for a semicolon.
  - a. *EX:* The river extended beyond the mountains, we saw the clouds merge with the water in the horizon.
    - i. This sentence has a comma splice because both clauses are independent.
  - b. *CORRECTED EX:* The river extended beyond the mountains; we saw the clouds merge with the water in the horizon.
    - i. The sentence is corrected now that the comma is substituted for a semicolon. It is easy to think of a semicolon as being “stronger” than a comma. It can hold the two independent clauses together.

2. *Conjunctions*: Another way to correct a sentence with a comma splice is to add a conjunction after the comma.
  - a. *EX*: My heart broke, the owners had no insurance.
    - i. To correct this sentence, a conjunction can be placed after the comma. The conjunction must make sense within the context of the sentence.
  - b. *CORRECTED EX*: My heart broke because the owners had no insurance.
    - i. This sentence is now corrected because the conjunction “because” has been inserted in between the independent clauses. Notice how the conjunction fits into the sentence and does not disrupt the meaning. Other common conjunctions: and, but, for, but, so, etc.
  
3. *Making Separate Sentences*: The third way to correct a comma splice is to make the independent clauses into two separate sentences separated by a period or other punctuation mark.
  - a. *EX*: I always find writing essays difficult, I usually leave them until the last minute.
    - i. To correct this sentence, a period can be inserted in place of the comma. This will separate the clauses into separate sentences.
  - b. *CORRECTED EX*: I always find writing essays difficult. I usually leave them until the last minute.
    - i. The comma splice has been broken up into two grammatically correct sentences.