

Rules for Avoiding Comma Splices and Fused Sentences

Two common errors in writing are **fused sentences** and **comma splices**.

A **fused sentence** is really two sentences joined with no punctuation.

Example: Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age he is now the world's greatest golfer.

This sentence should be divided between the words **age** and **he**. Some students try to correct the error by putting a comma between these two words. But a comma alone cannot correct a fused sentence. It creates another sentence error, the comma splice.

A **comma splice** is two sentences joined with a comma and no conjunction.

Example: Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age, he is now the world's greatest golfer.

A comma splice is incorrect because two sentences cannot be joined with a comma alone. They must be separated by something stronger.

There are five ways to correct a fused sentence or a comma splice.

1. Use a period and a capital letter to separate the two sentences.

Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age. He is now the world's greatest golfer.

2. Use a semicolon to separate.

Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age; he is now the world's greatest golfer.

3. Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction: *and, but, or, nor, for, so, and yet*.

Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age, **and** he is now the world's greatest golfer.

4. Use a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb. The most common conjunctive adverbs are listed below. (When a conjunctive adverb joins two sentences, use a semicolon before it and a comma after it.)

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| however | in fact |
| therefore | moreover |
| consequently | nevertheless |
| then | thus |

Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age; **therefore**, he is now a great golfer.

5. Make the two sentences into one sentence with a subordinating conjunction. The most common subordinating conjunctions are listed below.

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| after | since | when |
| although | so that | whenever |
| as | than | where |
| because | though | wherever |
| before | unless | while |
| if | until | |

When a subordinating conjunction begins a sentence, use a comma to connect the two clauses. Otherwise, use no comma.

Because Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age, he is now a great golfer.

Tiger Woods is now a great golfer because he began playing golf at an early age.

Comma Splices and Fused Sentences I

Practice: In each group of sentences below, find and circle the number of the sentence that is wrong. Then correct the sentence by using one of the five methods listed above.

1. Yesterday when I went shopping, I bought a pair of shoes, a shirt, and a belt.
 2. Eudora Welty was a well-known novelist and short story writer, she grew up in Jackson, Mississippi.
 3. Laura attends Mississippi State University, but her brother goes to Jackson State.
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1. My favorite subject is math, it is so much more logical than English.
 2. Marie, my best friend since elementary school, is getting married in March, so I'm planning to give her a shower.
 3. I was quite upset when I realized I had failed the first test; however, I worked hard and made a B in the class.
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1. My friends and I went to see *Family Man* at Northpark, then we went to Red, Hot, and Blue to eat ribs.
 2. Although Jonathan is good at sports, his favorite pastime is playing the guitar.
 3. When I was in high school, my parents set a strict curfew; now that I'm at Hinds, I have more freedom.
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1. Between the library and the bookstore is a deli, all the menu choices are expensive.
 2. The last student left at 4:00, but the teachers stayed until 7:00.
 3. I wanted to go shopping Sunday; however, I realized most stores were closed for the holiday.
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1. My brother loves to cook, so I bought him some cookware for Christmas.
 2. She wrote me a long letter after her trip to Africa and told me of her many adventures.
 3. Jamie called Pam yesterday and invited her to the party Saturday night this may explain why she is so happy
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1. We drove down Highway 55 until we reached Jackson then we stopped to rest at a roadside park.
 2. The hamburgers were slightly burned; therefore, we decided to cook something else to eat.
 3. We ate our breakfast, rushed out the door, and jumped in the car when we realized we were an hour late.
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1. There used to be a video store on the corner; it closed last year due to financial difficulty.
2. Yesterday I worked on my research paper, a requirement of Composition II, even though I was tired I worked until midnight.
3. After the rain stopped, the temperature rose very quickly, and the humidity became unbearable.

Comma Splices and Fused Sentences II

Practice: Some sentences below are correct, but most are comma splices or fused sentences. Find the incorrect sentences and correct them.

1. My mother is a registered nurse, she often has to work at night.
2. No one in my family likes turkey we always have Mexican food on Thanksgiving Day.
3. Some talk show hosts are genuinely funny and interesting, others seem mindless.
4. If you borrow my dress, please return it by the weekend; I might need it Saturday night.
5. Some people prefer to work with their minds, some prefer to work with their hands.
6. Happy people usually have many friends, however complainers often find themselves alone.
7. I like Dr. Jones he always takes the time to listen to me.
8. Tanya earned a degree in chemical engineering, then she went to law school.
9. Basset hounds love to eat and sleep; bloodhounds, on the other hand, love to hunt.
10. Beethoven was a remarkable composer, he was completely deaf during the last years of his life.
11. Mosquitoes are small insects they can cause major health problems for people and animals.
12. Baton Rouge is the capital city of Louisiana, it is considered the "Gateway to Acadia."
13. I knew I could never pass calculus when I looked at my first test, therefore I dropped the class at the first opportunity.
14. The painter worked quickly and skillfully, finishing the room in less than two hours.
15. The old woman's hands were wrinkled and worn, her nails were perfectly groomed.
16. The rooms in the apartment were large, however the closets were tiny.
17. The temperature is steadily dropping you will need a heavy coat.
18. Because the roads were icy, we decided to postpone the trip for a day or two.
19. The woman saw the mouse, began screaming, and climbed onto the table.
20. My brother has a wonderful sense of humor, my sister hardly ever smiles.

Comma Splices and Fused Sentences III

Practice: Correct the punctuation in the following paragraphs. All of the errors involve comma splices and fused sentences.

Charles Lindbergh was one of the greatest aviators of all time. As a child he showed great mechanical ability, then at the age of eighteen he entered the University of Wisconsin to study engineering. At first he was a good student, however he became more interested in aviation than in school. He left the university after two years and began flying as a daredevil stunt pilot. In 1924 he enlisted in the army to be trained as an Army Air Service Reserve pilot, he graduated from flight-training school as the best pilot in his class. He went to work for the Robertson Aircraft Corporation of St. Louis, flying mail between St. Louis and Chicago, there he earned a reputation as a capable pilot.

In 1927 Lindbergh decided to try for a prize of \$25,000 that had been offered to anyone who could fly nonstop from New York to Paris. Several pilots had already tried, none had succeeded. Some had even been killed in the attempt. Lindbergh believed he could make the flight with the right plane. He persuaded nine St. Louis businessmen to help finance the cost of the plane, helped design the plane himself, and tested it in a flight between San Diego and New York City. On May 20 Lindbergh took off from New York in the *Spirit of St. Louis*, on May 21 he landed in Paris. The flight had taken more than 33 hours, it had covered over 3600 miles. Lindbergh was considered a hero he was honored with awards and parades.

The remainder of Lindbergh's life was a mixture of tragedy and success. In 1932 his 20-month-old son was kidnapped and murdered. Then, during World War II, Lindbergh acquired a bad reputation for opposing American involvement, he was even accused of being a traitor. After Pearl Harbor was bombed, he supported the war and flew 50 combat missions in the Pacific, also he developed cruise control techniques for fighter planes. After the war Lindbergh worked as a consultant for the Air Force. For several years he withdrew from public attention, then in 1953 he published a book about his transatlantic flight, it won the Pulitzer Prize. Lindbergh traveled widely in his later years, in 1974 he died of cancer.

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