# Comma Splices

# What is a comma splice?

According to *Writers INC: A Student Handbook for Writing and Learning*, “a comma splice is a mistake made when two independent clauses are connected (spliced) with only a comma. The comma is not enough. A period, semicolon, or conjunction is needed.” A misconception about comma splices is that the comma is in the wrong place. This is not so. Comma splices occur when a writer properly identifies where one independent clause ends and another one begins but requires more than just a comma to properly join them.

# What is an independent clause?

An independent clause is a group of words that can stand alone as a complete thought, consisting of a subject (noun phrase) and some action (main verb).

**Example:**

*I attend college, I want to further my education.*

There are two independent clauses. “I attend college,” and “I want to further my education” can both stand alone as their own complete thoughts; they both have a subject and a main verb. However, the only thing separating them is a comma. This is improper and a classic case of a comma splice.

**Solutions:**

1. Use a period to properly separate independent clauses.

*I attend college. I want to further my education.*

1. Use a semicolon to emphasize the connection between two independent clauses.

*I attend college; I want to further my education.*

1. Use one of the coordinating conjunctions (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) that works best to show equal importance between two independent clauses. Include the comma with a coordinating conjunction.

*I attend college, and I want to further my education.*

1. Use a subordinating conjunction (although, because, after, since, while, etc.) that works best to show inequality between two independent clauses. You may or may not need to use the comma with a subordinating conjunction.

*I attend college because I want to further my education*

*Because I want to further my education, I attend college.*

[Notice how the use of a subordinating conjunction makes the once independent clause dependent.]

**Exercise**

**Look at the following sentences. Fix the comma splices by rewriting the sentence using one of the four ways demonstrated on the reverse side of this handout.**

1. I would love to go to that restaurant, I am a vegetarian.
2. Professor Smith walks to school every day, she listens to audiobooks.
3. The game starts at 6:00, I will be a little late.
4. You had better do the reading, you might not pass the test tomorrow.
5. Shelly’s mother is out of town, we should have a party.

**Below is a short paragraph. Circle all the comma splices. There is a total of six comma splices.**

My favorite teacher’s name was “Deadeye” Bean. Her real name was Dorothy, she taught American history to eight-graders in the junior high section of Creston, the high school that served the north end of Grand Rapids, Michigan. It was the fall of 1944, Franklin D. Roosevelt was president, American troops were battling their way across France, Joe DiMaggio was still in the service, the Montgomery bus boycott was more than a decade away, I was a twelve-year-old black newcomer in a school that was otherwise all white.[[1]](#footnote-1)

1. Wilkins, Roger. “I Became Her Target.” *College Writing Skills with Readings*, edited by John Langan, 7th edition, McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2008, pp. 653. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)