

RUN-ONS & COMMA SPLICES: DEFINITION, EXAMPLES & WAYS TO CORRECT

Run-on sentence: Two or more independent clauses connected with no punctuation at all.

Ex: Bob overslept Bob was late for work.

Comma splice: A kind of run-on sentence that uses a comma to try to separate two (or more) complete sentences.

Ex: Bob overslept, Bob was late for work.

5 Ways to Correct a Comma Splice

1. Insert a period to separate 2 independent clauses:

Bob overslept. Bob was late for work.

The most simplistic way to correct for a run-on sentence, this method takes little time, little thought, and no restructuring of sentences or paragraphs.

2. Insert a semi-colon to separate 2 independent clauses:

Bob overslept; Bob was late for work.

Much like the first method, this corrective measure simply adds one punctuation mark. Using a semi-colon between two sentences typically suggests a strong relationship between the sentences, a distinction not necessarily present when just inserting a period.

3. Insert a coordinating conjunction (*and, or, but, so, yet, for, nor*) after the comma.

Bob overslept, and he was late for work.

OR

Bob overslept, so he was late for work.

Although a comma is not strong enough to separate two sentences on its own, it can get by with a little help from its *fanboys* (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*).

Where the use of a semi-colon suggests a relationship between the two sentences being joined, a comma with a coordinating conjunction firmly establishes a relationship of some nature.

While both *and* and *so* both work as coordinating conjunctions to join these sentences, the use of *so* in the second example is a stronger correction because it indicates a cause-and-effect relationship between the sentences—that is, from the way the sentences have been combined, it is clear that Bob’s oversleeping caused his tardiness.

4. Insert a conjunctive adverb with a semi-colon (or period) before and a comma afterwards:

Bob overslept; therefore, he was late for work.

OR

Bob overslept. Therefore, he was late for work.

While *conjunctive adverbs* may sound intimidating, we actually use them all of the time. The most familiar conjunctive adverb is probably *however*, but other commonly used conjunctive adverbs include *therefore*, *thus*, *nevertheless*, *consequently*, *furthermore*, *meanwhile*, *likewise*, *namely*, *hence*, *accordingly*, *moreover*, and the phrase *on the other hand*.

Even if the words themselves may be familiar to us, many times when we encounter conjunctive adverbs in our writing, we feel a little insecure about how exactly to punctuate them.

Luckily, the steps are quite simple and straightforward.

1. Insert a period or semi-colon before the conjunctive adverb.
2. Insert a comma after the conjunctive adverb.

The caution with this method is to read the sentence carefully and punctuate accordingly because some of the words that can serve as conjunctive adverbs can also pull down double duty as other parts of speech and would be punctuated differently.

5. Rewrite the sentence:

Because he overslept, Bob was late for work.

OR

Bob overslept and was late for work.

Rewriting a sentence is sometimes the best way to clarify the meaning of the sentence and get out of the mental rut often created by focusing too much on one single aspect of a written piece.

The first correction above changes the sentence so that the first clause is dependent (has a subject and verb but doesn’t make sense alone). The comma in this correction is appropriate because it no longer tries to join two independent sentences but sets off the dependent clause from the independent clause.

The second correct changes the sentence to a simple sentence with a compound predicate (the subject does two different things, which means two verbs are used for one subject).