

THE DREADED COMMA SPLICE!

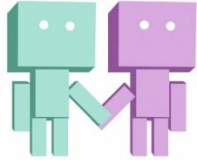
Have you ever seen a mysterious “CS” written on your essay when your professor gives it back?

CS is short for **comma splice**. A comma splice incorrectly joins two complete sentences together, and it’s a form of a run-on sentence. Think of it this way...

To “splice” means to join, or unite. There can be “good splices” and “bad splices.”

Here’s an example to give you a better picture: **think about a relationship as a kind of “splicing” of people. Each person is complete and whole in and of themselves.** They don’t need a mate to survive as people: they can live, eat, and breathe all on their own. But, they decide to get together—to splice themselves together—to make their lives more interesting. A “good splice” might join two people with lots of things in common, but a “badly spliced” couple might fight all the time about whether or not to put ketchup on the meatloaf and never come to a resolution. Their relationship might be interesting, but it’s messy: there’s ketchup everywhere!

Good Splice!



Bad Splice.



Unfortunately, a comma splice is a bad splice.

Remember how each person in a relationship is whole and complete on their own? Well, each **clause** (which is basically a bunch of words arranged according to grammar rules) in a comma spliced sentence is complete on its own—each clause doesn’t *need* the other clause, or any additional information, to make sense. That makes it an **independent clause** or **complete sentence**.

Let’s analyze a relationship between independent clauses to show how this works:

Clause 1

Paul’s sandwich must have had a lot of onions on it



Paul’s sandwich having onions on it is a complete thought. It has a subject (sandwich), a verb (had), and an object (onions). It doesn’t need more words for the clause to make sense.

Clause 2

Steve the dinosaur has indigestion



It’s too bad Steve has indigestion! We can understand Steve’s circumstances with the information we have: Steve (the subject) has (verb) indigestion (object).

What if we want these clauses to come together to form a union, to show our readers that Paul's sandwich having onions on it and Steve's indigestion are related?

If we join these two clauses with only a comma, they look like this:

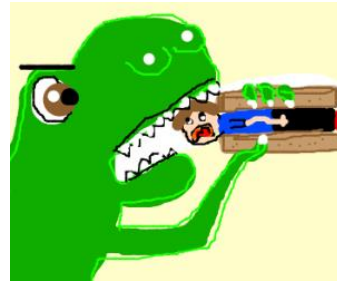
Paul's sandwich must have had a lot of onions on it, Steve the dinosaur has indigestion.



Don't do it! The above is a **bad splice**, known as a **comma splice**. We have no idea how Paul's sandwich and Steve's indigestion are related. Okay, we may have some ideas...but our job as writers is to make the relationship clear to readers—don't let your readers assume!

The picture to the right shows how Paul's and Steve's fates are intertwined. How do we communicate this ill fate to our readers?

We must use a conjunction to show this relationship, because a **comma must not stand alone!** Commas need friends to make them work correctly and to show the correct relationship between independent clauses.



Conjunctions, like for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so (remember conjunctions with the acronym **FANBOYS**) like to hang out with commas. There are more conjunctions than the FANBOYS conjunctions, as you'll see below. The key is to remember that a **conjunction shows the relationship between clauses**.

Let's fix this sentence three different ways:

1. Paul's sandwich must have had a lot of onions on it, **because** Steve the dinosaur has indigestion. **(Adding a conjunction after the comma shows the relationship between the ideas.)**
2. Paul's sandwich must have had a lot of onions on it. Steve the dinosaur has indigestion. **(Changing the comma to a period creates two complete, separate sentences that are not quite as closely related as when you add a comma + conjunction.)**
3. Paul's sandwich must have had a lot of onions on it; Steve the dinosaur has indigestion. **(Changing the comma to a semicolon shows the sentences are so closely related that no explanation of their relationship in the form of a conjunction is needed.)**

So, which way is the best way to fix the comma spliced sentence?

The answer is...sentence #1!

Paul's sandwich must have had a lot of onions on it, **because** Steve the dinosaur has indigestion.

This sentence best shows the relationship between the two spliced ideas. Without needing a picture to show them, the conjunction "because" shows readers there is a cause and effect relationship between Paul's sandwich having onions and Steve the dinosaur having indigestion.

We may need to add another sentence to clarify whether Steve ate Paul's sandwich, just Paul, or both, but readers can now clearly see how the two independent clauses are related.

Questions about comma splices or anything else? Come see a tutor or the Writing Specialist in the CAS!

CCC CAS Katie Stout, Writing Specialist, 2016