

COMMA SPLICES

A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses (thoughts capable of standing by themselves) are connected only by a comma, as in the following example:

The Titanic continues to draw big crowds, I really want to see it.

Following are four ways to correct a comma splice.

1. Turn each independent clause into a separate sentence:

The Titanic continues to draw big crowds. I really want to see it.

2. Join the independent clauses with an appropriate coordinating conjunction (joining word), preceded by a comma:

The Titanic continues to draw big crowds, but I really want to see it.

<u>Coordinating Conjunctions</u>			
and	or	for	yet
but	not	so	

3. Join the independent clauses with a semicolon, if they are closely related in meaning or intent:

The Titanic continues to draw big crowds; I really want to see it.

4. Rearrange the clauses so that one is subordinate to (depends upon) the other:

Although The Titanic continues to draw big crowds, I really want to see it.

Exercises

Please read the following sentences, and use one of the methods explained above to correct the comma splices. If a sentence needs no correction, mark it with a "C".

1. Obtaining employment is difficult right now, companies are laying people off rather than hiring them.

2. James Joyce wrote many short stories, perhaps his most well-known one is "Araby."
3. Many students enjoy reading literature, but few enjoy writing about it.
4. Chicken pox, mumps, and measles are common childhood diseases, as is whooping cough.
5. I would rather cross at Argentia than at Port aux Basques, I prefer a day on a boat to a day in the car.
6. He enjoyed traditional music, jazz, and rock, he did not like opera, though, because it made no sense to him.

Answer Key

1. Obtaining employment is difficult right now, as companies are laying people off rather than hiring them.
2. While James Joyce wrote many short stories, perhaps his most well-known one is "Araby."
3. Many students enjoy reading literature, but few enjoy writing about it. C
4. Chicken pox, mumps, and measles are common childhood diseases, as is whooping cough. C
5. I would rather cross at Argentia than at Port aux Basques; I prefer a day on a boat to a day in the car.

He enjoyed traditional music, jazz, and rock. He did not like opera, though, because it made no sense to him.

Be aware of the proper use of conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases, examples of which follow:

<u>Conjunctive Adverbs</u>					
again	consequently	hence	likewise	nonetheless	then
also	further	however	moreover	otherwise	therefore
besides	furthermore	indeed	nevertheless	similarly	thus (etc.)

<u>Transitional Phrases</u>		
after all	for example	in reality
as a result	in addition	in truth
at the same time	in fact	on the contrary
even so	in other words	on the other hand (etc.)

Conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases do not function as simple coordinating conjunctions (joining words), and if you use them that way you will create comma splices.

Examples:

- A. The anti-sealing demonstrators claimed that Newfoundlanders' attitudes about animal harvesting were outdated, in other words they felt that their own views were more progressive and enlightened. **X Comma splice!**

- B. They did not support their position with facts, furthermore their acceptance of other forms of animal slaughter seemed hypocritical. **X Comma splice!**

- C. The demonstrators later told the media that their activities here had been a great success, however those of us who witnessed their actions felt otherwise. **X Comma splice!**

The comma splices above can be corrected using the methods described on page one. Remember, too, that since conjunctive adverbs and transitional phrases at the beginning of independent clauses serve as introductory words, they are usually followed by a comma!

Examples:

- A. The anti-sealing demonstrators claimed that Newfoundlanders' attitudes about animal harvesting were outdated. In other words, they felt that their own views were more progressive and enlightened. (Each independent clause is turned into a separate sentence.)

- B. They did not support their position with facts, and furthermore, their acceptance of other forms of animal slaughter seemed hypocritical. (The independent clauses are joined with an appropriate coordinating conjunction, preceded by a comma.)
- C. The demonstrators later told the media that their activities here had been a great success; however, those of us who witnessed their actions felt otherwise. (The independent clauses are joined with a semicolon.)
- D. While the demonstrators later told the media that their activities here had been a great success, those of us who witnessed their actions felt otherwise. (The independent clauses are rearranged so that one is subordinate to the other.)

Exercises

Again, please read the following sentences, and use one of the methods explained above to correct the comma splices. If a sentence needs no correction, mark it with a “C”.

1. In particular areas of Scotland and Ireland there is a longstanding belief that sea creatures can assume a human form, specifically, it is believed that a seal can transform into a woman.
2. Many traditional Gaelic songs and stories have this folk belief as a theme; indeed, tales of “silkie” have been reported from southernmost Ireland to the Orkney Islands.
3. The seal who assumes a human form is not always female, however, for example in the ballad “The Great Silkie” a seal becomes a man and fathers a human son.
4. A word processor can make writing much easier, though it cannot be trusted to do all of your editing for you.
5. The spelling checker in a word processing program can certainly assist a writer in creating an error-free document, however there are numerous misspellings it cannot be programmed to detect.

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