



Comma Splices

What is wrong with these sentences? The asterisk (*) at the start marks them as faulty.

***I bought the book, I haven't read it.**

***The forest fires last year were terrible, the sky was smoky and red all summer.**

***She parked the car, she went into the store.**

All of these sentences contain examples of comma splices. A comma splice occurs when two sentences – two independent clauses – are joined by only a comma. In formal written English, a comma is generally considered not “strong” enough to connect two sentences. It is sometimes possible, outside academic writing, to use a comma splice with very short phrases, either to show contrast (“It’s not you, it’s me”) or to provide a brief list of sequential actions (“He came, he saw, he conquered”), but generally, comma splices should be avoided in formal writing.

To fix these sentences, you need to do one of the following:

- a) add an appropriate conjunction: *For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, and So*, which you can remember with the acronym FANBOYS. Keep the comma! You can also use a subordinating conjunction like “though,” “although,” “since,” etc.
- b) change the comma to a semi-colon or period, and add an appropriate adverb, to make the relationship between clauses clear. These can include conjunctive adverbs, such as “however,” “also,” “furthermore,” or “therefore.” We can also possibly use conjunctive adverbials such as “as a result,” “following from this,” or “due to these considerations.” There are many different conjunctive adverbs to choose from; ask a tutor in the Learning Centre to show you more.
- c) If we are describing events in sequence – happening one after the other - you could use sequence adverbs, such as “then,” “next,” or “after that.”
- d) if the relationship between the two independent clauses is clear, and they have a strong relationship, just use a semicolon, with no conjunctions whatsoever.
- e) If the two independent clauses do not have a strong relationship, just use a period between sentences.

Possible fixes (all of these are correct; there may be other correct options, as well):

***I bought the book, I haven't read it.**

I bought the book, **but** I haven't read it. (*Add a conjunction*).

I bought the **book**; **however**, I haven't read it. (*Add a semicolon and conjunctive adverb*)

I bought the **book**; I haven't read it. (*Add a semicolon only, since the relationship is clear*)

I bought the **book**. I haven't read it. (*Add a period*)



***The forest fires last year were terrible, the sky was smoky and red all summer.**

The forest fires last year were terrible, **so** the sky was smoky and red all summer. (*Add a conjunction*).

The forest fires last year were **terrible; as a result**, the sky was smoky and red all summer. (*Add a semicolon and conjunctive adverbial; you could also use “thus,” “therefore,” “consequently,” “because of this,” or “due to this,” all of which should be followed by a comma.*)

The forest fires last year were **terrible; the sky** was smoky and red all summer. (*Add a semicolon only, since the relationship is clear*)

The forest fires last year were **terrible. The** sky was smoky and red all summer. (*Add a period*).

***She parked the car, she went into the store.**

She parked the **car and she** went into the store. (*Add a conjunction. Note, this would also read even better as a compound verb structure: “She parked the car and went into the store.”*).

She parked the **car, then** she went into the store. (*Add a sequence adverb; you could also use “next,” “after which,” “subsequently,” etc; all of these require commas after them, except “then”*).

She parked the **car. She** went into the store. (*Add a period – but this feels a bit clunky, here!*)

Find and fix the errors! Some sentences may be okay. More than one answer may be possible.

1. The pizza in that restaurant is great, the lasagna is terrible, if you want lasagna, I suggest we go somewhere else.
2. When the bell rang, hundreds of students emerged into the hallways, walked to their lockers, put away their books, and ran out the exits, they could start their vacations.
3. The controversy over the practice, which dates back to ancient times, has been particularly potent in recent years, the government is considering banning it.
4. Candidates wishing to be contacted about their applications should include a cell phone number, we can call you, it might take a few days.
5. In order to fix the mistakes, you should carefully read the examples, you should go over the questions one by one.
6. Instant noodles are convenient and tasty, they are not very good for you.
7. The prices are high, I still want to buy them, they are very rare.
8. I know the answer, I am not going to tell you, I am mean.

Sample Answers: 1. “The pizza in that restaurant is great, **but** the lasagna is terrible, **so** if you want lasagna, I suggest we go somewhere else.” (You could also say: “The pizza in that restaurant is great! **However**, the lasagna is terrible; (**so**) if... 2. (“...exits, **so** they could start their vacations,” or else change the comma to a semicolon; all other commas in the sentence are fine) 3. Either add “**so**” after the comma after “recent years”, or change the comma to a semi-colon, followed by some connective phrase: “recent years; **as a result/ because of this/ due to this/ therefore**,” the government is considering banning it.” 4. “**number, so** we can call you; **however**, it might...” 5. “read the examples, **and** go over” or “read the examples, **then** go over” or “read the examples; **after that**, go over” (you can omit the second “you should” from all of these, though it is not wrong if you include it.) 6. “**(Al)though** instant noodles are convenient and tasty, they are not very good for you” OR “Instant noodles are convenient and tasty, **but** they...” OR “Instant noodles are convenient and **tasty; however**, they...” or “**on the other hand**, they...” 7. “The prices are high, **but** I still want to buy them, **as/ since/ because/ for** they are very rare” OR “The prices are **high; however**, I still...” 8. I know the answer, **but** I am not going to tell you, **because**...

