



Comma Splices

The slip-up students get caught on all the time!

A comma splice happens when two complete sentences (independent clauses) are joined with just a comma.

For example:

She reads every evening, she prefers detective stories.

Each part could stand alone but a single comma isn't enough to join them.

An **independent clause** is a group of words with a subject and a verb that expresses a complete thought. It can stand alone as a sentence. **For example:**

- *She reads every evening.*
- *The results surprised the research team.*
- *I finished my essay.*

Examples of comma splices:

- *She reads every evening, she prefers detective stories.*
- *The results surprised the research team, they weren't expecting such high scores.*
- *I finished my essay, I forgot to save it.*

Why is this a problem?

In **academic writing**: comma splices make your sentences look unpolished or confusing. They blur the line between separate ideas and suggest you're not in control of your sentence structure. They often happen when writers want to connect ideas but aren't sure how to punctuate.

In **professional, formal writing**: comma splices are always wrong.

Are they ever okay?

In **informal writing** (casual texts or novels): they sometimes appear as a stylistic choice.

How to spot comma splices

Ask yourself:

- Does each part of the sentence have a subject + verb + complete thought?
- Could each part stand as a sentence on its own?

If yes, you need more than just a comma.

Comma splice (incorrect): *I finished my essay, I forgot to save it.*

How to fix it:

- Use a full stop (.)
I finished my essay. I forgot to save it.
- Use a semicolon (;)
I finished my essay; I forgot to save it.
- Add a conjunction (and, but, so, because, etc.)
I finished my essay but I forgot to save it.
- Restructure into one sentence
After finishing my essay, I forgot to save it.
- Use a dash for emphasis
The deadline was tight – everyone had to work late.

Before & after examples

Academic style

Before: The experiment was a success, the results were published in a leading journal.

After: *The experiment was a success, and the results were published in a leading journal.*

→ The second version shows a clear relationship between the two ideas instead of letting them blur together.

Essay argument

Before: The Industrial Revolution began in Britain, it later spread to other parts of Europe.

After: *The Industrial Revolution began in Britain. It later spread to other parts of Europe.*

→ Splitting into two sentences gives the writing more authority and makes the timeline easier to follow.

Student life context

Before: I studied all night, I still wasn't ready for the exam.

After: *I studied all night but I still wasn't ready for the exam.*

→ Adding a conjunction (but) makes the contrast clear and the sentence more polished.

Scrib.tip:

If both parts can stand alone as sentences, don't join them with only a comma.

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