



The Writing Center



Comma Splices and Run-ons:

Terms to Know or Review

- 1) **Clause:** a group of words that includes a subject and verb
- 2) **Independent clause:** a group of words that has a subject and verb and can stand alone
- 3) **Dependent clause:** a group of words that has a subject and verb but cannot stand alone because it also has wither a subordinating conjunction or a relative pronoun attached to it

Coordination is the act of connecting two independent clauses in order to show a specific relationship between their respective ideas. In other words, coordinating independent clauses clarifies the relationship to be understood between the ideas of the two different ideas. (Remember that coordination connects two ideas that you want to emphasize equally.)

There are two steps you must remember when you use coordination:

Step One: Show separation between independent clauses by using proper punctuation, such as the comma, semicolon, colon, or period.

Step Two: Show relationship to be understood between independent clauses; with this step, always try to find a conjunctive word that best describes the relationship you wish to show (See "Words that Show Relationships" handout).

Example: He is afraid of spiders, so he ran screaming for a safe place when he saw the shadow of a little spider cast against the wall.

Structural Errors When Coordinating Independent Clauses:

A **run-on** (a.k.a. a fused sentence) occurs when a writer shows no separation between her/his independent clauses; in other words, the writer did not follow step one above. This can be tricky because sometimes a conjunctive word can appear to be enough.

A **comma splice** occurs when a writer shows separation by using a comma but forgets to use one of the coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS) to show the relationship to be understood between the independent clauses. (The writer did not follow step two above.)

Coordinating Clauses

Here are four easy ways to coordinate your independent clauses correctly. It's a good idea to practice using all of the coordination possibilities so that you will be able to vary your sentence types.

1) Comma (,) + a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS)

These are the **coordinating conjunctions**. (The only seven words you can use to connect two independent clauses when using a comma): For And Nor But Or Yet So

The cat jumped, and the dog barked.

(What relationship does the coordinating conjunction "and" show? Once you answer that, go on to the next two sentences and explain the relationship shown with their coordinating conjunctions.)

The cat jumped, so the dog barked.

The cat jumped, for the dog barked.

2) Semicolon (;)

For a more formal, academic approach, use the semicolon in this way when the relationship between the ideas is implicit or understood without a conjunctive word (or words).

When you use the semicolon, you can think of it as a piece of stacked punctuation: the top half acts like a period that stops the first independent clause while the comma in the bottom half tells the reader that the second clause is related to the first. This will help us remember that we are still showing separation and relationship.

The cat jumped; the dog barked.

3) Semicolon (;) + conjunctive adverb + comma (,)

When you use a conjunctive adverb while coordinating, be sure to 1) use a semicolon before the conjunctive adverb 2) choose the conjunctive adverb showing the appropriate relationship 3) place a comma after the conjunctive adverb.

Using a conjunctive adverb makes the formal connection of the semicolon's relationship explicitly (i.e. clearly and specifically) understood. For a list of some of these words and the relationships they show, refer to the "Words That Show Relationships" handout.

The cat jumped; therefore, the dog barked.

4) Colon (:)

The colon works kind of like an equal sign (=): the colon tells the reader that what comes after it is going to explain and/or define what came before it. [NOTE—you do not need any more than two independent clauses to show this kind of relationship.]

The cat jumped; therefore, the dog barked: it was a busy day in the backyard.

In the above example, the clause after the colon explains why the clause (or clauses) before the colon was necessary to understand.