

OWLS Writing Guides:



Comma splices and Run-ons

Comma splices and run-on sentences result when the writer fails to recognize the end of one complete thought and the beginning of the next.

Terms to know:

An **independent clause** (also called a **main clause**) is a group of words that contains a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought. An independent clause is able to stand alone as a sentence.

A **dependent clause** (also called a **subordinate clause**) is a group of words that contains a subject and verb but does *not* express a complete thought. A dependent clause cannot stand alone as a sentence. You can spot a dependent clause by looking for a **dependent marker** at the beginning of the word group. Dependent markers include **subordinating conjunctions** (*after, although, as, as if, because, before, even if, even though, if, in order to, since, though, unless, until, whatever, when, whenever, whether, and while*) and **relative pronouns** (*who, whom, that, which*).

A **run-on sentence** incorrectly joins (*runs together*) two independent clauses *without* a connecting word or punctuation. (This error is sometimes called a **fused sentence** because the clauses are fused together rather than connected properly.)

Writers shouldn't worry about spelling and punctuation when freewriting they shouldn't even worry about making sense.

A **comma splice** incorrectly joins together (*splices*) two independent clauses with *just* a comma.

Writers shouldn't worry about spelling and punctuation when freewriting, they shouldn't even worry about making sense.

Both errors may be corrected in any of these 5 ways:

1. Make two separate sentences.

_____ . _____ .

Writers shouldn't worry about spelling and punctuation when freewriting. They shouldn't even worry about making sense.

2. Use a comma and a **coordinating conjunction** (FANBOYS—for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so).

_____, [coordinating conjunction] _____.

Writers shouldn't worry about spelling and punctuation when freewriting, and they shouldn't even worry about making sense.

3. Use a semicolon. (Use this option when the two clauses express closely related ideas, often in parallel structures.)

_____ ; _____.

Writers shouldn't worry about spelling and punctuation when freewriting; they shouldn't even worry about making sense.

4. Use a semicolon and a **conjunctive adverb** (an independent connector word, such as *also*, *consequently*, *furthermore*, *however*, *moreover*, *nevertheless*, and *therefore*.) This option helps you to express the relationship between the ideas in the two clauses. Note that the connector word may appear *anywhere* in the *second* clause.

_____ ; [conjunctive adverb] , _____.

_____ ; _____ , [conjunctive adverb] , _____.

_____ ; _____ , [conjunctive adverb].

Writers shouldn't worry about spelling and punctuation when freewriting; in fact, they shouldn't even worry about making sense.

5. Make one of the clauses into a dependent clause and place it before or after the independent clause. Use this option if you wish to emphasize one idea over the other. Place the most important idea in the independent clause and the less important idea in the dependent clause.

[dependent word] _____ , _____.

_____ , [dependent word] _____.

Comma splice: There are many good ways to come up with ideas for a paper, one of the most successful is freewriting.

Sentence: While there are many good ways to come up with ideas for a paper, one of the most successful is freewriting.

[updated 11-15 mw]