Comma Splices

Comma splices are one of the most common punctuation mistakes. In order to spot a comma splice, you need to be able to tell whether something is a complete sentence or not. The simplest kind of complete sentence consists of one independent clause.

Clauses are grammatical units that include at least one subject and one complete verb. Independent clauses express a complete thought and can stand on their own as sentences.

The apple fell.

“The apple fell” is the subject and “fell” is the verb. Comma splices occur when a writer joins two complete sentences by using only a comma.

The apple fell, Newton had an idea.

This is the simplest possible kind of comma splice: Two short independent clauses that are joined only by a comma. There are five options for fixing a comma splice.

Make two separate sentences.

The apple fell. Newton had an idea.

Make one independent clause subordinate.

When the apple fell, Newton had an idea.

Rewrite the sentence with one of the independent clauses as a phrase.

The falling apple gave Newton an idea.

Join the independent clauses with a semi-colon.

The apple fell; Newton had an idea.

Join the independent clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction. The coordinating conjunctions are for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so (FANBOYS is a mnemonic device that will help you remember them).

The apple fell, and Newton had an idea.
Contact
Have questions to ask about commas? Come work with a tutor at the Writing Center! Drop by or use the information below to contact us and set up an appointment.

(972) 883-6736  WritingCenter@UTDallas.edu  www.UTDallas.edu/StudentSuccess/Writing