

Clauses and Commas

Broken Paragraph

Can you re-punctuate the broken paragraph below without leaving any fragments, fused sentences, or comma splices?

What makes a sentence work?

If I leave these words by themselves.

Do they stand alone as a sentence?

We do this all the time in conversation.

Where our tone of voice makes punctuation unnecessary.

But in writing.

Whether it's a text message or a formal essay.

It's easier for readers to misunderstand what's being said.

Especially if the writer uses **fragments**, **fused sentences**, or **comma splices**.

These errors can distract readers and destroy the writer's chance.

Of being heard.

However, knowing what makes a sentence work.

Gives writers the power to not only reach readers.

But also understand complex sentences.

Making reading easier, too.

How do we know where the punctuation goes?

It's hard to identify and remedy these errors in our writing without knowing the differences between independent clauses, dependent clauses, and phrases. See the following sections to learn more.

Clauses and Commas

Independent clauses, dependent clauses, and phrases

A **clause** is a group of words that contains both a subject (noun) and its action (verb). Basically, a clause must contain both a noun and an action that noun is performing. There are two main types of clauses: independent and dependent.

- An independent clause can stand alone as a complete sentence. It contains a subject and a predicate, including a verb (the subject's action).

Example: Jake borrowed a phone. (This stands on its own as a sentence.)

- A dependent clause cannot stand alone as a complete sentence. Dependent clauses also contain a subject and a predicate, but they are accompanied by an additional element that makes their meaning **dependent** on information not included in the clause. Some elements that might indicate dependence are *after, although, as, because, if, even though, since, until, while, whenever*.

Example: Although Jake borrowed a phone. (This does not stand on its own.)

If a group of words *does not* have both a subject and a verb, then it is considered a **phrase**. Phrases can be categorized into three types: noun phrases, verb phrases, and prepositional phrases.

- Noun phrases: *my best friend; the students; the dog*
- Verb phrases: *threw the ball, sold vegetables, needed help*
- Prepositional phrases: *near the tree; with the blue shirt; without mercy*.

Now look through the broken paragraph again, and see if you can label the independent clauses (I), the dependent clauses (D), and the phrases (P).

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Clauses and Commas

The errors we make, and what to do about them:

Fragments

A **fragment** is a group of words that does not contain a subject, an action, or both. It does not form a complete thought. A fragment can be either a phrase or a dependent clause.

Examples:

- Tyana and Heather. (phrase)
- Not okay. (phrase)
- Unless you want to. (dependent clause)

Comma Splices

A **comma splice** is a sentence that attempts to join together two independent clauses with only a comma.

Examples:

- I went to the zoo, it was a lot of fun.
- Connor saw the movie, his friend read the book.
- I knew it was winter, the roads were getting slippery.

Fused Sentences

A **fused sentence** is a sentence that has two or more independent clauses “fused” together *without* appropriate conjunctions or punctuation.

Examples:

- I went to the zoo it was a lot of fun.
- Connor saw the movie his friend read the book.
- I knew it was almost winter the roads were getting slippery.

What to do about them

There are several ways to correct a fused sentence or comma splice:

1. Separate the clauses into two sentences: I went to the zoo. It was a lot of fun.
2. Link the clauses with a semicolon: I went to the zoo; it was a lot of fun.
3. Link the clauses with a comma and a coordinating conjunction: Connor saw the movie, but his friend read the book. (Or you can use a transitional expression such as “however” or anyway, with a semicolon before it and a comma after.)
4. Change one of the independent clauses to a dependent clause: Because it was winter, the roads were getting slippery.
5. Combine the two clauses into one independent clause: It was the time of year when the roads got slippery.

Clauses and Commas

Now use the methods discussed above to join and punctuate the phrases and clauses below. See if you can rewrite the paragraph in the space provided without leaving any fragments, fused sentences, or comma splices.

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