

Commas: Finding and fixing COMMA SPLICES (CS)

Even good writers have trouble with comma splices (CS). They are one of the most common errors college and professional writers struggle with. Comma splices cause ideas to run together with no sense of the relationship between them. They create confusion and can make the writing seem careless or too casual, so you'll definitely want to practice finding and fixing them.

What's a "comma splice"? When **two independent clauses are separated (or joined) by only a comma**, it's a comma splice (CS):

Five other coalitions were involved, that means both must be prepared in advance.

Both agents are applied in tandem, there must be an immediate mixing of the compounds.

First, a word about clauses... A clause is a group of words that includes a subject-verb pair and additional words or phrases that "complete" the idea. An **independent clause** can stand by itself:

- The colonies declared their independence.
- Both agents are applied in tandem.

If a clause begins with a **dependent word** that makes it unable to stand alone, it's a **dependent clause**.

- **After** the colonies declared their independence...
- **If** both agents are applied in tandem...

There are **at least five ways to fix a comma splice**. *Use the one that makes the writing clearest for the reader.*

Fixes #1 & 2: Use a **period** or a **semicolon**

#1 Period

The easiest way to fix a comma splice is simply to **turn the comma into a period** and capitalize the second sentence.

CS: The colonies declared their **independence**, **this** ended their political relationship with Great Britain.

Fix #1: The colonies declared their **independence**. **This** ended their political relationship with Great Britain.

Caution! *If this doesn't create a clear relationship, it can make writing seem choppy.*

#2 Semicolon

If the information in the two ICs is very closely related, a comma splice can be fixed by **replacing the comma with a semicolon**.

Fix #2: The colonies declared their **independence**; **this** ended their political relationship with Great Britain.

For more support, see the SVCWC Writing Guide "Semicolons."

Fixes #3 & #4: Use a connector word: coordinating conjunctions or dependent words

#3 Coordinating conjunctions: FANBOYS

Another way to fix a comma splice is to **keep the comma and ADD a coordinating conjunction**—so-called because they coordinate (make sense of) the relationship between the clauses.

Remember these by using the mnemonic FANBOYS →

*For
And
Not
But
Or
Yet
So*

CS: Five other coalitions were **involved**, **they** agreed to begin by establishing common goals.

Fix #3: Five other coalitions were **involved**, **but they** agreed to begin by establishing common goals.

Fix #3: Five other coalitions were **involved**, **so they** agreed to begin by establishing common goals.

Note: The coordinating conjunctions create different relationships. *Use the one that makes best sense.*

#4 Dependent words: Make one independent clause a dependent clause

Adding a dependent word in front of one independent clause will make it a **dependent clause**. This helps make the relationship between the two clauses clear—AND it fixes the comma splice!

There are many dependent words; *for a list, see the SVCWC Writing Guide “Dependent words.”*

CS: Both agents are applied in **tandem**, **there** must be an immediate mixing of the compounds.

Fix #4: Both agents are applied in **tandem**, **because there** must be an immediate mixing of the compounds.

Fix #4: Both agents are applied in **tandem**, **so there** must be an immediate mixing of the compounds.

CAUTION: Some words that seem like dependent words are NOT; using them this way will NOT fix a comma splice! These are called **conjunctive adverbs**; the most common are *however, therefore, subsequently, besides*, etc.

✗ Five other coalitions were **involved**, **therefore they** agreed to begin by establishing common goals.

✓ Five other coalitions were **involved**. **Therefore, they** agreed to begin by establishing common goals.

For more support, see the SVCWC Writing Guide, “Dependent words” and look for the section about conjunctive adverbs.

Fix #5: Rewrite the sentence!

Finally, if one of the four “fixes” above don’t make the best sense of your sentence, consider rewriting it altogether. Sometimes there’s a better way to express the ideas that will make things clearer.

CS: Five other coalitions were **involved**, **they** agreed to begin by establishing common goals.

Fix #5: **The five other coalitions involved agreed** to begin by establishing common goals.