

# Preventing Sentence Errors



Writing Center

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Every sentence contains one or more clauses (a **clause** is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb); preventing sentence errors requires understanding of clauses.

There are two types of clauses:

Independent Clause	An <b>independent clause</b> can stand alone as a complete idea (thus it is a sentence)	Example: <i>Heights make me dizzy.</i>
Dependent Clause	A <b>dependent clause</b> cannot stand alone as a complete idea (thus it is not a sentence)	Example: <i>Although heights make me dizzy.</i>  <b>Dependent clauses are often introduced by subordinating conjunctions</b> , such as <i>after before until although if unless when since while because as</i>  <b>or relative pronouns</b> , such as: <i>who which that whom</i>

There are **3 types** of sentence errors: sentence fragments, fused sentences, and comma splices.

1. A **sentence fragment** lacks a subject or a verb or fails to express a complete thought. A sentence fragment occurs when a portion of a sentence (a dependent clause or a phrase) is punctuated as a complete sentence.

Examples:     Finishing the most difficult part of the exam.  
                  If I had known then what I know now.

**A sentence fragment may be corrected in two ways:**

- Provide the missing element (subject or verb):  
Example: I finished the most difficult part of the exam.
- Connect the dependent clause with an independent clause to make a complete sentence:  
Example: Finishing the most difficult part of the exam, I went on to easier sections.  
           If I had known then what I know now, I would have made a different decision.

2. A **fused sentence** incorrectly runs together two independent clauses without using a conjunction or punctuation. One sentence is fused into another.

Example: John wrote a very powerful essay it made me want to change how I think about college.

**A fused sentence may be corrected using various strategies:**

- Separate the two independent clauses with a period, creating two separate sentences:  
Example: John wrote a very powerful essay. It made me want to change the way I think about college.
- Connect the independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction:  
Example: I took the test and I got the highest grade.
- Use a subordinating conjunction to make one clause dependent:  
Example: When I took the test, I got the highest grade.
- Separate the two independent clauses with a semicolon:  
Example: John wrote a very powerful essay; it made me want to change the way I think about college.
- Separate the two independent clauses with a colon and a conjunctive adverb:  
Example: John wrote a very powerful essay: in fact, it made me want to change the way I think about college.

3. A **comma splice** incorrectly joins two independent clauses with a comma. The writer has tried to *splice* two sentences into one by placing a comma between them.

Example: I worked hard in class, I learned a lot.

**A comma splice may be corrected using these strategies** (similar to those listed under fused sentences above):

- Replace the comma with a period, creating two separate sentences:  
Example: I worked hard in class. I learned a lot.
- Follow the comma with a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet*):  
Example: I worked hard in class, and I learned a lot.
- Use a subordinating conjunction (see list above) to make one clause dependent:  
Example: Because I worked hard in class, I learned a lot.
- Replace a comma with a semicolon:  
Example: Reaching a goal is satisfying; I'm proud of my work.
- Replace a comma with a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb (*consequently, in fact, indeed, then, furthermore, however, moreover, nevertheless, therefore*):  
Example: Reaching a goal is satisfying; consequently, I'm proud of my work.