

Combining Sentences (to avoid sentence boundary errors)

Some of the most common and problematic mechanical errors are known as sentence boundary errors. Sentence boundary errors are also commonly known as *run-on sentences*, *comma splices*, and *fused sentences*. These errors are all variations of the same problem—two sentences or independent clauses that are joined together incorrectly.

Three Sentence Boundary Errors

Review the three brief descriptions and examples of the three common sentence boundary errors.

1. **The Run-On:** A run-on sentence, contrary to common belief, is NOT simply a sentence that is unnecessarily long or one that seems to go on and on. In fact, a run-on can be quite short and an extremely long sentence can be mechanically sound. Simply, a run on sentence is when two or more simple sentences (independent clauses) are joined with only a short connector work (i.e., a coordinating conjunction) and without the necessary punctuation.

Example Run-On: I was watching TV and the doorbell rang.

2. **The Comma Splice:** Like the run-on sentence, the comma splice is two or more simple sentences joined together incorrectly. In the case of the comma splice, the sentences are joined with only a comma. The comma, while a useful piece of punctuation, cannot properly join two sentences.

Example Comma Splice: I was watching TV, the doorbell rang.

3. **The Fused Sentence:** The fused sentence also is the incorrect joining of two or more simple sentences, but unlike the run-on and the comma splice there is no attempt to use joining words or punctuation to connect the two sentences. They are just jammed (or fused) together.

Example Fused Sentence: I was watching TV the doorbell rang.

Five Correct Ways to Join Sentences Together

There are five basic ways to correctly join together two or more simple sentences (independent clauses) and to avoid a sentence boundary error like the ones described above.

1. **period + capital letter**

This is not really a “joining” but it can be used to correct a sentence boundary error. Just form two sentences.

Example: I was watching TV. The doorbell rang.

2. **comma + short connector word**

Short connector words (three letters or less) are known as coordinating conjunctions and include *for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*. (The acronym FANBOYS can help you remember these.) When using this method remember that you need BOTH the short connector word and the comma. Just using one or the other would result in a sentence boundary error.

Example: I was watching TV, and the doorbell rang.

3. **semicolon alone**

The semicolon is a powerful piece of punctuation. It can properly joint two sentences all by itself. Typically this piece of punctuation is used to join sentences that are closely related to one another.

Example: I was watching TV; the doorbell rang.

4. **semicolon + a long connector + a comma**

This method is useful in that it not only joins the two sentences together, but it also clearly shows the relationship between the ideas of those two sentences. Long connector words (four or more letters) are also known as adverbial conjunctions and include words and phrases like *however, therefore, furthermore, as a result of, consequently, moreover*, and so forth.

Example: I was watching TV; however, the doorbell rang.

5. **make one of the sentences a subordinate clause**

This is the most sophisticated and most useful of the five methods. Joining sentences in this way creates what’s known as a complex sentence. It is especially useful because it communicates the relationship between ideas and the importance of one idea relative to another. To subordinate one sentence (making it a dependent clause), place a dependent clause marker in front of the sentence. Dependent clause markers include words like *when, because, after, since, while, until, although*, and so forth.

Examples: While I was watching TV, the doorbell rang.
The doorbell rang while I was watching TV.