



Academic Support Center

Commas, Run-Ons, and Comma Splices

Use a Comma after Introductory Word, Phrase, or Dependent Clause

Introductory words at the beginning of a sentence call for a comma to set them off from the root of the sentence. Common introductory words include:

- However,
- Secondly,
- Quickly,
- Still,
- Generally,
- Unfortunately,
- Furthermore,
- Suddenly,
- Afterwards
- Meanwhile,
- Clearly,
- First,

The coaches reviewed the game strategy. Meanwhile, the athletes trained on the Nautilus equipment.

Most of the evidence seemed convincing. Still, the credibility of some witnesses was in question.

First, you need to put your name on the paper.

Introductory phrases at the beginning of a sentence also require a comma to set them off from the root of the sentence. A phrase is a group of related words without a subject and a verb. A phrase cannot stand alone; its function is to set the scene for the root of the sentence.

After breakfast, I went to my English class.

A popular and well respected teacher, Jerry Barnes is a clear favorite to win the award.

The snow blowing violently, the students began to hope for a snow day.

Dependent clauses at the beginning of a sentence also require a comma to set them off from the root of the sentence. A dependent clause is a group of words that contains a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought. Like a phrase, dependent clauses depend on the root of the sentence to make sense and cannot stand alone.

After I ate breakfast, I went to my English class.

Because Jerry Barnes is a popular and well respected teacher, he is a clear favorite to win the award.

Once the snow started blowing violently, the students began to hope for a snow day.

If you use one of these words at the beginning of your sentence, there is a good chance you are starting your sentence with a phrase or a dependent clause that calls for a comma at the end.

- After . . .
- Although . . .
- As . . .
- Because . . .
- Before . . .
- Even . . .
- If . . .
- Once . . .
- Only . . .
- Since . . .
- Though . . .
- Unless . . .
- Until . . .
- Whatever . . .
- When . . .
- Whenever . . .
- Whether . . .
- While . . .

NOTE: If a phrase or dependent clause comes at the end of a sentence, no comma is necessary.

I went to my English class after I ate breakfast.

He is a clear favorite to win the award because he is a popular and well respected teacher.

The students hoped for a snow day once the snow started blowing violently.

Use a Comma When Combining Independent Clauses

An **independent clause** has a subject and a verb, and it could stand alone as a complete sentence. One way to combine two independent clauses is to use one of the seven coordinating conjunctions preceded by a comma. The seven coordinating conjunctions can be easily memorized by remembering the term **FANBOYS**.

Independent clause _____, **for** independent clause _____.

, **and**
, **nor**
, **but**
, **or**
, **yet**
, **so**

To check to see whether you need to use a comma and a coordinating conjunction, make sure that you are combining two independent clauses that are complete sentences in their own right. Each of the underlined clauses below could be a complete sentence on its own, but the writer has chosen to combine them in a single sentence.

Examples:

This next chapter has a lot of difficult information in it, so you should start studying right away.

Many companies make sugar-free soft drinks, and the drinks usually contain only one or two calories per serving.

Mr. Leyland played the viola professionally for many years, but he now conducts a community orchestra.

As I turned around, I heard a loud thump, for the cat had upset the goldfish bowl.

Perhaps the artist preferred to paint in oils, or maybe he did not like watercolors.

Other Options for Combining Independent Clauses

1. When you do not use a conjunction, use a semicolon (;).

_____ Independent clause _____ ; _____ independent clause _____.

*Mr. Leyland played the viola professionally for years; he now conducts a community orchestra.
This next chapter has a lot of difficult information in it; you should start studying right away.
Some people write with a word processor; others write with a pen or pencil.*

2. Join two independent clauses together with a semi-colon and a conjunctive adverb.

_____ Independent clause _____; conjunctive adverb, _____ independent clause _____.

Common conjunctive adverbs:

- accordingly
- additionally
- again
- almost
- anyway
- as a result
- besides
- certainly
- comparatively
- consequently
- conversely
- elsewhere
- equally
- eventually
- finally
- further
- furthermore
- hence
- henceforth
- however
- in addition
- in comparison
- in contrast
- in fact
- indeed
- instead
- just as
- likewise
- meanwhile
- moreover
- namely
- nevertheless
- next
- nonetheless
- now
- otherwise
- rather
- similarly
- still
- subsequently
- that is
- then
- thereafter
- therefore
- thus
- undoubtedly
- uniquely
- on the other hand

*Mr. Leyland played the viola professionally for years; **as a result**, he now conducts a community orchestra.*

*This next chapter has difficult information in it; **therefore**, you should start studying right away.*

*Some people write with a word processor; **however**, others write with a pen or pencil.*

Run-On Sentences and Comma Splices

A run-on sentence (sometimes called a "fused sentence") is made up of at least two independent clauses without any punctuation. For example:

This next chapter has difficult information in it you should start studying right away. (Run-on)

When two independent clauses are connected by *only* a comma and not one of the seven coordinating conjunctions (remember, FANBOYS?), it is called a **comma-splice**. For example:

*This next chapter has difficult information in it, you should start studying right away.
(comma-splice)*

How do you know if you have a run-on sentence? If you have two or three things going on in a single sentence and you have not used any punctuation, you are probably creating a run-on. Check to make sure you are not packing too much into one sentence and be very careful about using proper punctuation.

How do you correct a run-on sentence or a comma splice? You have several options.

1. Join the two independent clauses with one of the seven coordinating conjunctions and use a comma before the connecting word.

*This next chapter has difficult information in it, **and** you should start studying right away.*

2. When you do not use a conjunction, use a semicolon (;).

Independent clause ; independent clause .

This next chapter has difficult information in it; you should start studying right away.

3. Join two independent clauses together with a semi-colon and a conjunctive adverb.

Independent clause ; conjunctive adverb, independent clause .

*This next chapter has difficult information in it; **therefore**, you should start studying right away.*

4. Separate the run-on into more than one sentence.

This next chapter has difficult information in it. You should start studying right away.

Incorrect:

She enjoys taking hikes she often goes backpacking on her vacations. (run-on)

She enjoys taking hikes, she often goes backpacking on her vacations. (comma-splice)

Correct:

*She enjoys walking through the country, **and** she often goes backpacking on her vacations.*

She enjoys walking through the country; she often goes backpacking on her vacations.

*She enjoys walking through the country; **as a result**, she often goes backpacking on her vacations.*

She enjoys walking through the country. She often goes backpacking on her vacations.