Rules for Avoiding Comma Splices and Fused Sentences

Two common errors in writing are fused sentences and comma splices.

A fused sentence is really two sentences joined with no punctuation. Example: Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age he is now the world's greatest golfer.

This sentence should be divided between the words age and he. Some students try to correct the error by putting a comma between these two words. But a comma alone cannot correct a fused sentence. It creates another sentence error, the comma splice.

A comma splice is two sentences joined with a comma and no conjunction. Example: Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age, he is now the world's greatest golfer.

A comma splice is incorrect because two sentences cannot be joined with a comma alone. They must be separated by something stronger.

There are five ways to correct a fused sentence or a comma splice.

1. Use a period and a capital letter to separate the two sentences. Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age. He is now the world's greatest golfer.

2. Use a semicolon to separate. Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age; he is now the world's greatest golfer.

3. Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction: and, but, or, nor, for, so, and yet. Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age, and he is now the world's greatest golfer.

4. Use a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb. The most common conjunctive adverbs are listed below. (When a conjunctive adverb joins two sentences, use a semicolon before it and a comma after it.)

   however in fact
   therefore moreover
   consequently nevertheless
   then thus

Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age; therefore, he is now a great golfer.
5. Make the two sentences into one sentence with a subordinating conjunction. The most common subordinating conjunctions are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>after</th>
<th>since</th>
<th>when</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>although</td>
<td>so that</td>
<td>whenever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as</td>
<td>than</td>
<td>where</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>because</td>
<td>though</td>
<td>wherever</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>before</td>
<td>unless</td>
<td>while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if</td>
<td>until</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When a subordinating conjunction begins a sentence, use a comma to connect the two clauses. Otherwise, use no comma.

Because Tiger Woods began playing golf at an early age, he is now a great golfer.

Tiger Woods is now a great golfer because he began playing golf at an early age.

This handout is adapted from *The World Book Encyclopedia.*