

USAGE

A Workbook for Students of English

by

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VI. Punctuation with Independent Clauses

(picl, run-on, cs)

When you're working with **one** sentence that contains **two or more** independent clauses, each of which could stand alone as a full sentence, what sort of punctuation do you use?

First, let's look at the two most common errors that students make in this situation: the **run-on sentence (run-on)** and the **comma-splice error (cs)**. A run-on sentence is a sentence that contains two independent clauses with no conjunctions and no punctuation between them:

*I went to look for Katya she was gone.
They never told Josh they assumed he already knew.*

Where should those clauses be divided, and how? The comma-splice error tries to splice together two independent clauses with a comma, but a comma is not the right mark for this work:

*Justine has some funny ideas, she thinks that knives are cute.
Roxanne's speech is clear, it's her ideas that are cloudy.*

53. Coordinating conjunctions join independent clauses. Punctuate with a comma before the conjunction. The seven coordinating conjunctions: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so.

*I went to look for Katya, **but** she was gone.
They never told Josh, **for** they assumed he already knew.
They assumed Josh knew, **so** they never told him.
Roxanne's speech is clear, **yet** her ideas are cloudy.*

Just chant: "clause-comma-conjunction-clause."

Make sure that you choose the best conjunction to show the true logical relation of the two clauses:

additional fact :	and	additional negative fact:	nor
alternative fact :	or	opposing/contrasting fact:	but, yet
cause:	for	result:	so

A comma after the conjunction? Never!

54. Do not punctuate with a comma before the coordinating conjunction if it is joining something less than two independent clauses. These conjunctions also join words, phrases, subordinate clauses or predicates. If this is the case, no comma.

*Tiffany **put on her boots and walked out in the mud.***

Both **motorists** and **pedestrians** need to be careful at crosswalks.
 The bottle-rocket **made a loud bang** but **never climbed into the air**.
 Pam left her shoes **under the bed** or **in the bookcase**.

Avoid a common error and chant: “Subject–verb–conjunction–verb.” No comma.

55. A semicolon may join independent clauses. The semicolon tells the reader: “There is a connection between these clauses; you find it.”

*There are three shot-put champions among Olympia’s children; two are girls.
 Justine has some funny ideas; she thinks that knives are cute.*

Don’t overuse the semicolon. Used in moderation, it lends your writing elegance.

56. The semi-colon joining independent clauses may be followed by a transitional adverb. You may put a comma after the adverb, except for the adverbs of time.

The words below are transitional adverbs. These are not conjunctions and may not by themselves join independent clauses; use them after the semi-colon. They are very useful in expressing the logical relation of your two clauses. Placing a comma after a transitional adverb, while not mandatory, distinguishes it from ordinary adverbs and sets it off as indicating a turn in the thought.

additional fact:	moreover, besides, furthermore, likewise, also
opposing/contrasting:	however, nevertheless, still, nonetheless, really, in truth, in reality, in fact
resulting fact:	accordingly, therefore, consequently, hence, as a result, thus, if so, in that case
alternative fact:	otherwise, if not, on the other hand, at the same time
time:	then, now, later, earlier, once, at present, finally, in the end, at last, next, thereafter, previously
example:	for example, for instance
emphasis:	indeed, truly, surely, to be sure

*Natasha hates furs; **moreover**, she hates the people who wear them.
 Bob has not worked for years; **nevertheless**, he always seems to have money.
 Adam is extremely afraid of falling; **accordingly**, he won’t go down stairs.
 Nora has to change her socks; **otherwise**, her sisters will begin to complain.
 Vera worked for hours on her Latin; **finally** she completed one problem.
 George used to fail every Latin quiz; **now** he aces them all.
 Adolf has few redeeming qualities; **indeed**, you could say he has none.*

Wake-up call about *however*: this adverb is sometimes used transitionally, sometimes parenthetically, and sometimes as an essential adverb of extent-to-which:

*Jeff has no shoes; **however**, he doesn't care.*

*Most people consider mice to be vermin; Ella, **however**, makes pets of them.*

*Bismo will never learn to use a handkerchief, **however** hard he tries.*

It is only in the second situation that you will find *however* between two commas.

A note on semicolons: sometimes it makes sense to use a semicolon between two independent clauses if there are other commas elsewhere in the sentence, especially in the first of the two clauses. It's important to show your readers where the first clause ends and the second starts. That place is harder to pick out when those clauses contain a number of other commas.

When Leon is angry, his eyes grow red, large, and tearful, and he starts to curse.

In this case you can upgrade the comma you would normally use to a semicolon:

When Leon is angry, his eyes grow red, large, and tearful; and he starts to curse.

Writer's Reference: THREE GOOD WAYS TO FIX A COMMA-SPLICE ERROR

Remember, you make this error when you put a comma between two independent clauses, like this:

Julie is not happy, she keeps her feelings hidden.

It's not obvious what the connection between the clauses is. Show the connection.

Method 1: add the right coordinating conjunction:

*Julie is not happy, **yet** she keeps her feelings hidden. [So might work here too.]*

Method 2: change the comma to a semicolon and add the right transitional adverb:

*Julie is not happy; **still**, she keeps her feelings hidden.*

Method 3: subordinate one clause to the other with the right subordinating conjunction:

***Although** Julie is not happy, she keeps her feelings hidden.*

VI. Punctuation with Independent Clauses: Guided Exercise

Some of the sentences below are correct, and some have an error in punctuation. If the sentence is correct, write “C.” If the sentence contains an error, correct the punctuation. The number in parentheses at the end of each sentence refers you to a rule you have just learned.

1. The renowned physicist spoke at great length and in great detail to the undergraduates, however, despite her careful notes, Rita was confused. (56)
2. Ellen knew everybody at the party, but the boy standing near the band. (54)
3. Apologizing over and over again, Magda picked the fuzz balls off the clean clothes, and then put the clothes in the basket. (54)
4. Bagelina, though grumpier than anyone else on the team, is by far the best tennis player, furthermore she has a degree from Cal Tech. (56)
5. Borzoi has very bad breath, unfortunately neither Magda nor his fellow Siberian chefs have the courage to present him with a bottle of mouthwash. (56)
6. He’s a well educated man, however he has no common sense. (56)
7. Maria ran from the cafeteria into the field, and watched the lunch table smolder. (54)
8. According to Pachydermia, a credit card is valuable it pays the bills. (55)
9. Rahma did everything for her mother was very permissive. (53)
10. The rattlesnake bit her; the botanist was soon searching wildly for anti-venom. (55)
11. I have no idea whose diesel powered loom this is; nevertheless, I will return it to the garage as soon as I have finished weaving. (56)
12. He found a pie on top of the refrigerator but his wife was not the baker. (53)
13. It could be that he is yelling at the spectators, and limping with pain at the same time. (54)
14. Harriet hasn’t had trouble with the car yet when I drove it, I could barely turn the steering wheel. (53)
15. The pizza festival was a gigantic success, no fewer than 500 kids participated. (55)
16. Life suddenly seems very bleak to Nelson but Howard will soon cheer him up. (53)
17. Don’t blame everything on me; it was Jake, not I, who spilled the beans. (55)

Words to Watch Out For 25-28

W.25 is another pair of sound-alikes. With W.26-8 we get into a different sort of problem, the misuse of the preposition *like*. So, like, study these carefully.

W.25 Lead and Led

The verb *lead* (opposite of *follow*) forms its past tense and past participle in *led* (unlike *read*, whose past tense and participle are also spelt *read*). The noun *lead* is the name for the famously heavy metal whose symbol in the periodic table is Pb.

*That tyrant is being tried in The Hague for war crimes because he **led** his country into disastrous wars for what he claimed were patriotic reasons.*

*The cake looked good but weighed in her stomach like **lead**.*

W.26 Like and As

The use of *like* in place of *as* is a very common error. *Like* is a preposition meaning *resembling, similar to*. It is used to introduce an adjective phrase that asserts a likeness between two nouns or pronouns.

*She wore a hat **like** a basket of flowers.*

*There's no business **like** show business.*

The phrase “like a basket of flowers” is an adjective modifying “hat.” “Like show business” modifies “business.” Whenever you are tempted to use *like*, try substituting *resembling* and see if your sentence still works. What about these?

*She dances **like** a bomb exploding.*

*He breathes **like** a galloping horse.*

Here we're in tricky territory. It might seem that the phrases really modify the verb, in which case they should be adverbial clauses of comparison: “as a galloping horse [breathes].” But in fact the phrases are best seen as predicate adjectives (even though “dances” and “breathes” don't seem like linking verbs), because they are meant to describe the subject. So when can't you use *like*?

*I wish I could speak correctly, **like** my friend does.*

Like never introduces a clause; only a phrase. *As* is what we want here. *As* is a subordinating conjunction used to introduce a clause of comparison, with the meaning *in the way that*.

*I wish I could speak correctly, **as** my friend does.*

W.27 Like and As if, As though

This error is even more common than *like/as*.

*Mr. Severe the overseer looked **like** he was going to whip us.*

Like is a preposition, remember; it can't introduce a clause. Use *as if* (or *as though*).

*Mr. Severe the overseer looked **as if** he were going to whip us.*

Note: After *as if* and *as though* you will also find the verb form *were* where you might expect *was*, as in the last example. This usage is the contrary-to-fact subjunctive, discussed in Chapter X, Rule 80.

W.28 Like and Such as

What's wrong with this statement?

*Julie won't eat meats **like** pork, lamb, veal, and beef.*

Try plugging in “resembling” for *like* and you'll see the problem. Pork, lamb, veal, and beef are not meats *similar to* the ones Julie won't eat; they are *examples of* the kinds of meat she won't eat. *Such as* is a handy preposition for this situation.

*Julie won't eat meats **such as** pork, lamb, veal, and beef.*

*The number of explosions in action movies **such as** Mission Impossible 2 often seems excessive.*

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