

Comma Splices

Lesson Objective	(Revising) Students will correct comma splices using a comma plus a “FANBOYS” word, or by replacing the comma with a period and capitalizing the second sentence.	
Vocabulary	<p>comma splice: an error in which two independent clauses are joined by a comma with no connecting word</p> <p>FANBOYS: a mnemonic tool for remembering the conjunctions <i>for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so</i></p>	
Reviewed Vocabulary	subject, verb	
Instructional Materials	Teacher	Student
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher Masters • Demonstrate— <i>FANBOYS Poster</i> • Timer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student Booklet • Practice—Teachers might choose to create their own practice worksheet of five comma splices or provide a paragraph drawn from student writing.

Teacher Note

This lesson presupposes that students can identify subjects and verbs in sentences. If your students have also been taught independent clauses, substitute “independent clause” where the lesson uses “complete idea” or “complete idea that can stand alone.”

Preview

Authors use correct spelling, punctuation, and grammar to help readers understand their writing quickly and easily. When a writer makes mistakes in these areas, readers may have difficulty understanding the ideas the writer is trying to express. Publishing companies hire editors to help correct an author’s mistakes. Today’s lesson will help you be the editor by teaching you how to correct a certain type of error called a comma splice.

Engage Prior/Informal Knowledge

1. Students complete a silent warm-up to review subjects and verbs.

Display *TM#1: Engage Prior Knowledge—Subject and Verb Warm-Up*. Direct students’ attention to their copies, *SB#1: Engage Prior Knowledge—Subject and Verb Warm-Up*.

Look at the silent warm-up. You are going to underline the subject once and the main verb twice in each of the sentences in Part 1 of the warm-up. You have 3 minutes.

Set the timer for 3 minutes. Circulate among the students, check for understanding, and provide corrective feedback as needed.

2. Review student responses.

Display Part 1 of *TM#1: Engage Prior Knowledge—Subject and Verb Warm-Up*. When 3 minutes have passed, ask for one student volunteer to share his or her work on each item. Record correct responses on the display, and have students make corrections or additions to their papers. Refer to *TM#2: Engage Prior Knowledge—Subject and Verb Warm-up Answer Key* as needed.

Demonstrate

1. Show how sentences can be combined using a comma and a FANBOYS conjunction.

Display Part 2 of *TM#1: Engage Prior Knowledge—Subject and Verb Warm-Up*. Direct students' attention to their copies, *SB#1: Engage Prior Knowledge—Subject and Verb Warm-Up*.

Each of the items in Part 1 of the warm-up was a complete sentence. Each had a subject and verb, and was a complete idea that could stand alone.

Sophisticated writing includes longer sentences that contain many ideas. You can improve your writing by learning to combine shorter ideas into longer sentences, but you must follow the rules of grammar.

Look at Part 2 of the warm-up, at the bottom of the page. Pairs of the complete ideas from Part 1 have been combined into single sentences. Each of the sentences in Part 2 uses a comma and a connecting word to join the sentences.

Point to the sentences in Part 1 as you explain.

For example, the first sentence at the top was, "I live in Central Texas," and the second sentences was, "I can't go to the beach very often."

Point to the combined sentences in Part 2.

At the bottom, those two sentences are combined using a comma and the word *so* to make one sentence: "I live in Central Texas, so I can't go to the beach very often." Circle the comma and the word *so*.

Point to the sentences in Part 1 as you explain.

The third sentence at the top was, "My cousins live near the ocean in a small town in New Jersey," and the fourth sentence was, "A beautiful beach is right near their house."

Point to the combined sentences in Part 2.

At the bottom, those two sentences are combined using a comma and the word *and* to make one sentence.

Repeat for sentences 5–10 of Part 2.

2. Introduce the FANBOYS mnemonic.

Display *TM#3: Demonstrate—FANBOYS Poster*.

Teacher Note

For and *yet* can be confusing for students, because they less commonly appear as conjunctions. Because some students may not think of *for* and *yet* as conjunctions, consider providing additional instruction and practice with these words, if needed.

When you join two complete ideas into one sentence, you need to use a connection. One type of connection is a comma plus a FANBOYS conjunction. FANBOYS is a tool for remembering seven conjunctions: For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So.

Call on students to say what each letter stands for.

Look at the poster only if you need to. What does *N* stand for? (*nor*) What does *Y* stand for? (*yet*) What does *F* stand for? (*for*).

Continue until all words are reviewed.

Part 2 of the warm-up shows how a comma and a FANBOYS conjunction join two ideas.

Again, display Part 2 of *TM#1: Engage Prior Knowledge—Subject and Verb Warm-Up* and redirect students' attention to their copies, *SB#1: Engage Prior Knowledge—Subject and Verb Warm-Up*. Have students identify the connecting words they circled in each sentence, and point out that they are all FANBOYS words. Refer to *TM#2: Engage Prior Knowledge—Subject and Verb Warm-up Answer Key* as needed.

3. Define *comma splice*, and demonstrate using a comma plus a FANBOYS word to join complete ideas.

Each of the sentences in the warm-up had two complete ideas, each with a subject and a verb. Each complete idea can stand on its own. Therefore, it is not enough to join them with just a comma. An error in which two complete ideas are joined with a comma and no connecting word is called a comma splice.

Display *TM#4: Demonstrate and Practice—Fixing Comma Splices*. Direct students' attention to their copies, *SB#2: Demonstrate and Practice—Fixing Comma Splices*.

The sentences in numbers 1–6 on this page are all comma splices. They are incorrect, and you must correct them.

In order to join two complete ideas that can stand alone, you must use a connection.

Look at the first sentence. “Salsas are an important part of Mexican cooking” is a complete idea that can stand on its own. It makes sense and has a subject—*salsas*—and a verb—*are*. The second part is, “most Mexican foods are eaten with some kind of salsa.” That is also a complete idea and can stand on its own. So just using a comma to join them is not enough. We can add a FANBOYS word. I’m going to use the word “and.” After I choose a FANBOYS word, I want to make sure it makes sense. “Salsas are an important part of Mexican cooking, and most Mexican foods are eaten with some kind of salsa” makes sense, so I will write it down.

Add the word “and” after the comma. Direct students to write the same on their copies.

4. Demonstrate using a period and a capital letter to correct a comma splice.

Another way to connect two complete ideas that stand alone is by changing the comma to a period and capitalizing the first letter of the second sentence.

Look at the fourth sentence. “One type of brown salsa is called *mole*” is a complete idea that can stand on its own. It makes

sense and has a subject—*salsa*—and a verb—*is*. The second part is, “mole is not made with brown tomatoes!” That is also a complete idea and can stand on its own. So just using a comma to join them is not enough. In the previous example, we added a word from FANBOYS to make a grammatically correct sentence. But we can also make two grammatically correct sentences by adding a period and capitalizing the word “mole.”

Add the period and capitalize the word “mole.” Direct students to do the same on their copies.

Teacher Note

Depending on the level of your students, you may choose to teach the use of semicolons in addition to teaching usage of a comma plus a FANBOYS word.

Practice

1. Practice correcting comma splice errors with whole-class input. Refer to *TM#5: Demonstrate and Practice—Fixing Comma Splices Answer Key* as needed.

Display *TM#4: Demonstrate and Practice—Fixing Comma Splices*. Direct students’ attention to their copies, *SB#2: Demonstrate and Practice—Fixing Comma Splices*.

Complete numbers 2 and 3. Read each part, and ask students whether or not it is a complete idea that can stand on its own. Then, point out that a comma is not enough to join the parts together and that they must add a FANBOYS word. Ask students to provide a FANBOYS word that could be added to correct the error. Remind students to read the sentence again with the FANBOYS word to make sure it makes sense. Record student responses on the display, and have students make corrections on their own papers.

**Watch
For**



Students might be confused by the list with commas in number 3. For example, they might think that there are comma splice errors in the list. Explain that commas have many different roles and that in that case, they are used to separate a list of items.

Next, complete numbers 5 and 6. Read each part, and ask students whether or not it is a complete idea that can stand on its own. Then, point out that a comma is not enough to join the parts together and that they must make this example into two complete ideas or sentences. Ask students to explain where the period would go and what they must do to correct the second sentence (capitalize the first word). Record student responses on the display, and have students make corrections on their own papers.

2. Students work in pairs to correct the comma splices in the paragraph at the bottom of *SB#2: Demonstrate and Practice—Fixing Comma Splices*.

Remind students that not all sentences will contain comma splices and that they must check to make sure the FANBOYS word they choose makes sense by rereading the sentence. Have students restate the instructions, and check for understanding. Set the timer for 8 minutes.

Circulate among the students, check for understanding, and provide corrective feedback as needed.

3. Review student responses.

When 8 minutes have passed, ask for volunteers to share their responses. Have students make corrections or additions to their own papers. Refer to the *TM#5: Demonstrate and Practice—Fixing Comma Splices Answer Key* as needed.

Choosing whether to correct a comma splice by creating two sentences or combining two sentences with a comma and a FANBOYS word is the choice of the writer. An important part of writing is creating varied sentences with different lengths.

Teacher Note

In addition to this partner practice, or as an alternative option, teachers may choose to use a sample paragraph from a student essay to edit for comma splices.

Independent Practice

1. Have students complete *SB#3: Independent Practice*.
2. Collect the materials, score the work using *TM#6: Independent Practice Answer Key*, and check for mastery.

Teacher Note

Extend this lesson by having students apply taught concepts to their own writing. Once this skill is introduced, teachers should refer back to it (and call attention to the *FANBOYS Poster*) frequently.