

## THE COMMA SPLICE

*“Anyone who can improve a sentence of mine by the omission or placement of a comma is looked upon as my dearest friend.” George Moore*

**The grammar outlaw:** The Comma Splice

**The grammar crime:** Comma splices join two complete sentences with a comma.

**Question:** How do we know we have a comma splice?

<b>Outlaw</b>
Joey went to the grocery store, he needed to buy eggs for supper.

This sentence is incorrect because **“Joey went to the grocery store”** and **“he needed to buy eggs for supper”** are both complete sentences. A comma alone cannot join two sentences.

These complete thoughts are also known as independent clauses. For a complete explanation of the anatomy of a correct sentence, please see the glossary. Also try the **“Yes/No Question”** Test.

**Question:** How do we catch comma splice outlaws?

You can look for comma splices by examining the commas in the sentences you see. Compare the clauses it separates; if they can act as complete sentences, you have caught a comma splice outlaw.

**Question:** How do we rehabilitate comma splice outlaws?

We have five main ways to fix commas splices:

**1. We can separate the two clauses into two sentences by replacing the comma with a period.**

<b>Rehabilitated</b>
Joey went to the grocery story. He needed to buy eggs for supper.

**2. We can replace the comma with a semi-colon.**

<b>Rehabilitated</b>
Joey went to the grocery store; he needed to buy eggs for supper.

**3. We can replace the comma with a co-ordinating conjunction (and, but, or, for, yet, nor, or so).** Each of these words implies a relationship, so be careful that you retain the meaning of the sentence when you use these conjunctions. Note also that usually you need to place a comma before the conjunction.

**Rehabilitated**

Joey went to the grocery store, **for** he needed to buy eggs for supper.

4. We can replace the comma with a subordinating conjunction (e.g., after, although, before, unless, as, because, even though, if, since, until, when, while).

By doing this, you change one of the independent clauses into a dependent clause.

**Rehabilitated**

Joey went to the store **because** he needed to buy eggs for supper.

5. Replace the comma with a semi-colon and transitional word (e.g., however, moreover, on the other hand, nevertheless, instead, also, therefore, consequently, otherwise, as a result).

Note: You need to place a semi-colon before the transitional word, and a comma after the word.

**Rehabilitated**

Joey did not go to the store; as a result, he needed to buy eggs for supper.