A **comma splice** is an error that occurs when two independent clauses are joined using only a comma instead of the required semicolon or period. To understand comma splices and how to correct them, first you must understand the difference between an independent and dependent clause. Let’s review some basic sentence structure.

### Sentence Structure Review

An **independent clause** includes a subject and a verb, and expresses a complete thought. Here is an example of an independent clause:

**Gabby** loves **zombie movies**.

In this independent clause, “Gabby” is the subject, “loves” is the verb, and “movies” is the object. An independent clause can stand on its own because, in terms of sentence structure, it contains all the necessary parts.

A **dependent clause** is a group of words that contains a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought. Here is an example of a dependent clause:

When students left the Horror Film Fest.

Because we do not know what happened when the students left, the thought is incomplete. The above is, therefore, a dependent clause.

### Comma Splices

Two independent clauses cannot be joined with only a comma; a comma alone is not strong enough to hold them together. Here is an example of a **comma splice**:

The **students left** the **Horror Film Fest, they went** to the **Haunted House**.
Notice that an independent clause comes both before and after the comma. The result is a comma splice because these are joined with only a comma.

**Find and Fix Strategies**

**To Find**
Here are the steps to follow when you proofread your paper for comma splices.

1) Pause when you find a comma.
2) Read what comes before the comma and identify the subject and verb. Ask yourself: Does this express a complete thought?
3) Read what comes after the comma and do the same.
4) If you identify two independent clauses with only a comma joining them, you have a comma splice!

**To Fix**
Here are the methods to correct comma splices.

**Use a period after each independent clause:**

The students left the Horror Film Fest. They went to the Haunted House.

**Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction:**

Coordinating conjunctions join groups of words of equal grammatical rank. The seven coordinating conjunctions are: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so. To remember these, think of FANBOYS.

Here is an example of this method of correction:

The students left the Horror Film Fest, and then they went to the Haunted House.

Because each part is an independent clause, they are of equal grammatical rank, so you can use a coordinating conjunction.

**Add a subordinating conjunction to change one independent clause into a dependent clause:**

Subordinating conjunctions can be used to link dependent clauses to independent clauses. Some common subordinating conjunctions are: after, although, because, before, since, so, though, unless, until, what, when, where, whether, which, and while.

Here is an example of this method of correction:
After the students left the Horror Film Fest, they went to the Haunted House.

Because the group of words before the comma is now a dependent clause, the clause can be joined to the independent clause using the comma.

**Use a semicolon:**

Semicolons can be tricky, so use them in moderation. Not every comma splice can be corrected with this method. Only use a semicolon IF the independent clauses are of equal grammatical rank and closely related in thought.

**Correct use of semicolon:**

Gabby loves zombie movies; Angela loves vampire movies.

Since both independent clauses describe film preferences, they are closely related in thought.

**Incorrect use of semicolon:**

Gabby went to the Haunted House; it is cold outside.

These two independent clauses are only loosely related, so a semicolon is not the best method of correction.