Commas & Comma Splices

The Center

Commas are tricky. Even the Writing Center Super Tutors have to use strategies to find them and fix them!

**Basic Rules of When to Use a Comma**

There are six basic rules of when to use a comma:

1) **Before coordinating conjunctions** *(FANBOYS = for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so)* when they join two full sentences *(independent clauses)*:
   
   The two tutors worked all day, so they slept soundly through the night.

2) **After introductory phrases and introductory adverbial clauses:**
   
   Whenever I’m confused about a writing assignment, I always feel better by going to the Writing Center.

   If you build it, they will come. [After an introductory “if,” there is always a “then,” even if it’s unspoken. The comma comes just before the “then”: If you build it – the Writing Center – then students will come. Yay!]

3) **To separate items in a series:**
   
   You will need pencil, pen, and paper for your grammar exam today.

   You will need a pencil, your flash drive and a hard copy for your tutoring session.

4) **To set off nonrestrictive or parenthetical clauses:**
   
   My grade improved, of course, after going to the Writing Center.

5) **Between places and years:**
   
   The TCC South Campus Writing Center opened on June 1, 2012, on the same day the summer semester began.

6) **To set off introductory transitions and interjections:**
   
   However, he cannot possibly attend his tutoring session today.

   Yes, the Writing Center is open on Saturdays starting in the fall. [Wow, Karen, do we ever have a day off? Do YOU ever have a day off? 😊]
Basic Info about Comma Splices
A comma splice is an error that occurs when two complete sentences (the fancy teacher term for these are independent clauses) are joined (another fancy word teachers use is spliced) with a comma instead of with correct punctuation. Here are five ways to correct comma splices:

1) Divide the independent clauses into two correctly punctuated sentences:
The tutor drank too much coffee. He was jittery all day.
The tutors tutored until dawn. They were exhausted when they left work. [Go Gabby and Jared – you work so hard!]

2) Use a semicolon to join two complete sentences:
The tutor drank too much coffee; he was jittery all day.
The tutors tutored until dawn; they were exhausted when they left work.

3) Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS) to join two equally important complete sentences (independent clauses):
The tutor drank too much coffee, and he was jittery all day.
The tutors tutored until dawn, and they were exhausted when they left work.

4) Use a semicolon and a conjunctive adverb to join related complete sentences (independent clauses):
Some common conjunctive adverbs include: however, therefore, in addition, in conclusion, in fact, meanwhile, on the other hand
The tutor drank too much coffee; therefore, he was jittery all day.
The tutors tutored all day; in conclusion, they were exhausted when they left work.

5) Use a subordinating conjunction to form a dependent clause. However, remember that unless it is joined to a complete sentence (independent clause), a dependent clause is a fragment.
Some common subordinating conjunctions include: after, because, since, though, whenever, whether
Independent clause: The tutor was jittery all day.
Dependent clause: Drank too much coffee.
The tutor was jittery all day because he drank too much coffee.

When you work on your commas, try not to drink too much coffee or work until dawn. Remember what happened to Jared and Gabby!

Created by Gabby Raymond & Jared Landin (2013)