



UNIVERSITY OF
**DETROIT
MERCY**

Punctuating Clauses:

Avoiding Comma Splices and Run-on Sentences

<https://writingcenter.udmercy.edu/> (for resources)

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The Writing Center
DETROIT MERCY

What Is an Independent Clause?

- It can stand alone and could otherwise have a period as end punctuation.
- It has a subject, a verb, and other important sentence components (like a direct object, a prepositional phrase, etc.) that make it a *complete thought*.
Example: I play soccer for UDM.

What Is a Dependent Clause?

- A dependent clause may look like an independent clause because it has a subject + verb + object, etc., but it needs to be combined with a dependent clause.
- The clause is “dependent” because it starts with a *subordinating conjunction* (see conjunctions handout), and the presence of that subordinating conjunction means it is dependent on an independent clause for its full meaning to be clear.
Example: *Because* I play soccer for UDM.

Important Note: A stand-alone dependent clause is a sentence fragment because it is not a complete thought.

What Is a Comma Splice?

- A comma splice is when two independent clauses are joined (or spliced together) incorrectly using only a comma.
Example: I play soccer, I am the team captain.

What Is a Run-On Sentence?

- A run-on sentence is when two independent clauses are joined incorrectly using nothing.
Example: I play soccer I am the team captain.

How to Fix the Errors

Use a period between independent clauses

⇒ I play soccer. I am the team captain.

Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction to join the independent clauses

⇒ I play soccer, and I am the team captain.

Use a semi-colon to separate the independent clauses

⇒ I play soccer; I am the team captain.

Use a subordinating conjunction to join independent clause with a dependent clause

⇒ I received a scholarship because I play soccer for UDM.

⇒ Because I play soccer for UDM, I received a scholarship.

(note placement of comma after the introductory dependent clause)

Use a semicolon, conjunctive adverb and a comma to join the independent clauses

⇒ I received a scholarship to play soccer for UDM; *therefore*, I am here majoring in Business.