STANDARD ENGLISH CONVENTIONS / 01 UNDERSTAND

Sentence boundaries

An illustrated lesson ▪ Theory, reasoning and worked examples

A sentence needs a complete main clause

An independent clause contains a subject and a finite verb and expresses a complete thought. The researcher recorded the result can stand alone. Although the researcher recorded the result cannot stand alone because although makes it dependent. Sentence-boundary decisions begin by identifying complete clauses, not by listening for a pause.

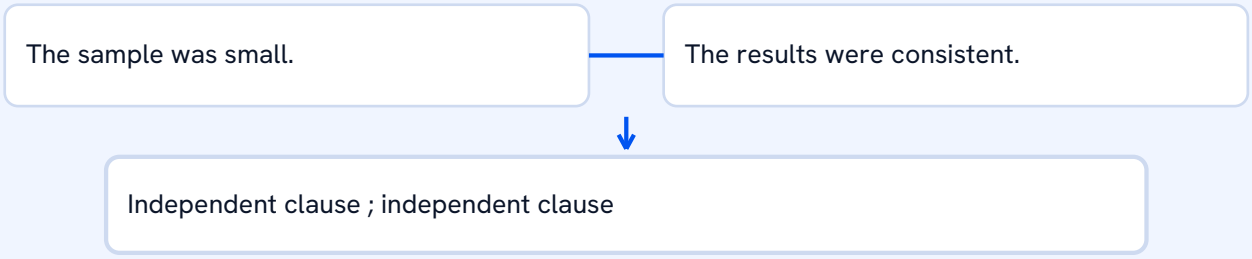
Different marks have different jobs

A period ends a sentence. A semicolon can join two closely related independent clauses. A comma plus a coordinating conjunction such as and or but can also join independent clauses. A comma alone cannot perform that job; joining complete clauses with only a comma creates a comma splice.

A longer phrase is not necessarily a clause

Working late in the laboratory describes an action but lacks a finite main verb and an explicit subject, so it is not a complete sentence. A long noun phrase can also look substantial without being independent. Check grammatical structure rather than judging completeness from length.

TEST EACH SIDE OF THE BOUNDARY



Both statements are complete. A comma alone cannot join them.

Illustrative teaching diagram. Values and examples are explained in the lesson.

THE ESSENTIAL IDEA

Two independent clauses need appropriate punctuation or a coordinating conjunction.

STANDARD ENGLISH CONVENTIONS / 02 BUILD THE METHOD

From idea to method

Use the two-sided clause test

Cover the punctuation and read each side separately. If both sides can stand alone, choose an appropriate independent-clause boundary. If one side is dependent or only a phrase, do not automatically insert a semicolon. Determine how that unit attaches to the main clause.

Understand colons and explanations

A colon can introduce an explanation, example or list after a complete independent clause. The material following it need not be another full clause. In She packed three tools: a ruler, a compass and a pencil, the words before the colon are complete. A colon should not split a verb from its required object.

Handle introductory dependent clauses

A dependent clause placed before the main clause is generally followed by a comma: Although the sample was small, the pattern was clear. That comma is not joining two independent clauses; it marks the boundary between an introductory dependent clause and the main statement.

WORKED EXAMPLE / REPAIR A COMMA SPLICE

The sample was small, the results were consistent.

01 Set up the reasoning

The sample was small is an independent clause. The results were consistent is also independent.

02 Apply the relationship

Replace the comma with a period or semicolon, or use a comma followed by a suitable coordinating conjunction.

03 Interpret and check

The sample was small, but the results were consistent highlights contrast. The sample was small; the results were consistent joins the related statements without adding that explicit conjunction.

STANDARD ENGLISH CONVENTIONS / 03 CONNECT & REMEMBER

See the deeper pattern

However does not replace but grammatically

Compare The sample was small, but the results were consistent with The sample was small; however, the results were consistent. But can join independent clauses after a comma. However is an adverbial transition and needs a proper clause boundary before it in this construction. Meaning and grammatical category both matter.

ONE MORE WORKED APPLICATION

Correct the comma splice: "Nora inspected the mineral specimens, the assistant recorded the results."

1. Both sides can stand as complete sentences.

2. A semicolon joins these related independent clauses without a comma splice. A period is also valid.

Answer: Replace the comma with a semicolon.

Mistakes to recognize

- A pause in speech does not automatically require a comma.
- A semicolon requires an independent clause on both sides in its sentence-joining use.
- Do not place a colon directly between a verb and its required complement.

A quick understanding check

What makes a comma splice?

Explanation: Two independent clauses joined only by a comma.

MORE PRACTICE IN YOUR DASHBOARD

Open prepvora.com/app/ and use the SAT question bank. Work on Standard English Conventions, then look for sentence boundaries questions. Solve independently before reviewing the explanation. Use this guide for the theory; use the dashboard for a longer practice session.

Open your dashboard → | Explore the resource library →

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