

## Joining or Separating Independent Clauses while Editing

Many students know that an **independent clause** is a **complete thought** that **can stand on its own** as a sentence, but **WHY** can it stand on its own as a sentence?

**An independent clause must have something and what it does.**

1. The **something** is the noun (or pronoun): **the subject**.
2. **What it does** is the verb: **the predicate**.

**Notes:**

- The subject can also be a pronoun like he, she, or it.
- The verb can be a “to be” verb like is, was, be, or were. (These are the verbs that express existence.)

Because an independent clause has both a **subject** and a **verb**, it is a **complete thought** and can stand on its own as a **complete sentence**. **Every sentence must have an independent clause**. Sometimes we want sentences with two independent clauses, and at other times we want to keep clauses separate. When there are two independent clauses in a row, we must either:

1. Separate them with a period ( . ),
2. Link them with a semicolon ( ; ), or
3. Link them with a comma ( , ) **AND** a coordinate conjunction. (**A comma is not enough!**) What is a coordinate conjunction? Remember the **FANBOYS**:

**F**or **A**nd **N**or **B**ut **O**r **Y**et **S**o

**Notes:**

A verb ending in “ing” cannot be the main verb in a clause without a helping (auxiliary) verb.

**Wrong:** The **man** running across the street.

**Right:** The **man was running** across the street.

We can use more than one helping verb to make the “ing” verb into the main verb:

The man **had been running** across the street.

Two independent clauses with nothing in between is an error called a run-on sentence. (R-O)

**Wrong:** The **man ran** across the street **he was laughing**.

Two independent clauses with only a comma in between is an error called a comma splice. (CS)

**Wrong:** The **man ran** across the street, **he was laughing**.

**Right:** The **man ran** across the street. **He was laughing**.

**Right:** The **man ran** across the street; **he was laughing**. (Do **not** capitalize the first letter of the second clause when you use a semicolon.)

**Right:** The **man ran** across the street, and **he was laughing**.

We do not need a comma when there is only one independent clause:

**Example:** The man ran across the street and was laughing. (There is no second subject after the conjunction.)

There is one more way to join independent clauses; we may start with a subordinate conjunction: “**Although** the man was sad, he was laughing.” However, when editing, the first three methods will usually do. See the subordinate clause handout.