

Commas and Coordinating Conjunctions: Right or wrong? It's my choice. Right?

Mignon Fogarty (Grammar Girl)¹:

People will argue that authors should be allowed to make stylistic choices about writing, and include comma splices or whatever quirks they want as a matter of art. They'll point to best-sellers such as E. E. Cummings who used all lowercase letters or Cormac McCarthy who is known to use as little punctuation as possible, often avoiding commas, apostrophes and quotation marks.

Occasionally, someone brilliant intentionally bucks the rules and still succeeds, but it's much more common for writers to have consistent errors like comma splices in their manuscripts not because they are brilliant renegades, but because they actually don't actually know the rules.

I've talked to many editors who do look at the grammar and usage in manuscripts and don't look kindly on errors. Unless you want to make it more difficult to get your ideas across to editors and readers, stick with traditional punctuation.

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1. Do you agree with Grammar Girl? Should authors be given creative license with their use of punctuation? Should students?
 2. When would taking a creative license with punctuation be appropriate? When would it not be appropriate?
 3. Why do you think ee cummings and Cormac McCarthy are able to ignore rules?

On the following page you'll find an excerpt from John Steinbeck's *The Pearl* that has been changed to include comma splices (bolded and numbered). You will have the opportunity to correct the comma splice using one of three options: 1. Replace the comma with a period; 2. Add a coordinating conjunction (one of the **FANBOYS**) after the comma; 3. Replace the period with a semicolon. After making your correction, please use the space provided to explain your stylistic decision. Remember that these style choices should always be grammatically correct. Read through the entire passage first, and then return to the bolded and numbered comma splices for your revisions.

¹ <http://grammar.quickanddirtytips.com/comma-splice.aspx>

John Steinbeck – *The Pearl*, Chapter 2

Although the morning was young, the hazy mirage was up. The uncertain air that magnified some things and blotted out others hung over the whole Gulf so that all sights were unreal and could not be trusted,¹ that sea and land had the sharp clarities and the vagueness of a dream. Thus it might be that the people of the Gulf trust things of the spirit and things of the imagination,² they do not trust their eyes to show them distance or clear outline or any optical actness. Across the estuary from the town one section of mangroves stood clear and telescopically defined, while another mangrove clump was a hazy black-green blob. Part of the far shore disappeared into a shimmer that looked like water. There was no certainty in seeing, no proof that what you saw was there or was not there. And the people of the Gulf expected all places were that way,³ it was not strange to them. A copper haze hung over the water,⁴ the hot morning sun beat on it and made it vibrate blindingly.

Corrections:

**Punctuation to correct comma splice
#1:**

Why did you choose this mark?

Steinbeck’s actual mark:

**Punctuation to correct comma splice
#2:**

Why did you choose this mark?

Steinbeck’s actual mark:

**Punctuation to correct comma splice
#3:**

Why did you choose this mark?

Steinbeck’s actual mark:

**Punctuation to correct comma splice
#4:**

Why did you choose this mark?

Steinbeck’s actual mark: