To answer this question we must go back in time. People have been happily splitting infinitives since at least the fourteenth century nobody noticed or cared. Splitting infinitives was never an issue until the early grammar books for English were written in the eighteenth century. These grammar books based their analysis of English on Latin grammars they were the only model of grammar that eighteenth-century grammarians had. In Latin grammar, the infinitive is a single-word construction, unlike English there is no to. Since it is literally impossible to split the one-word infinitive in Latin, these grammarians decreed that it was therefore improper to split an infinitive in English. (3)

Modern grammarians know that there is no valid reason to condemn split infinitives after all, English and Latin are totally different languages. However, since so many people are absolutely convinced that it is wrong to split infinitives, grammarians advise writers to avoid them, not because there is anything actually wrong with split infinitives, but because they bother some people why upset people needlessly? (2)

Applying What You Know

Select fifteen sentences from one of your textbooks, and use the Imaginary Period Tip to determine how many are composed of two or more independent clauses — complete ideas that can stand alone as separate sentences. How many of the fifteen sentences use a comma and a coordinating conjunction to separate independent clauses? How many use a semicolon?

The Bottom Line

See if your sentence has two independent clauses, and make sure they are separated with a period, a semicolon, or a comma and coordinating conjunction.
CORRECTED SENTENCES APPEAR ON PAGE 458.

Correct all run-ons in the following paragraph using the first correction as a model. The number in parentheses at the end of the paragraph indicates how many errors you should find.

At my college, on-campus parking can be extremely difficult the situation will soon be worse. Currently, the college has eight parking lots for students, two of them hold only about a dozen cars. During the summer, construction will begin on a new library, which we certainly need. The construction will last a year, two parking lots will be closed during the construction phase. When the library opens up next year, only one of the two lots will be reopened the other will have vanished because the library will cover it. Almost everyone believes we need a new library, it is too bad that the administration has not made plans about what to do about the parking problem, which is only going to get worse. (4)

Correct all run-ons in the following paragraphs using the first correction as a model. The number in parentheses at the end of each paragraph indicates how many errors you should find.

Most people do not really know what an infinitive is, it is to + the dictionary form of a verb, for example: to work, to sleep, to laugh. However, there is one thing that everybody can tell you about infinitives, it is bad grammar to split them. Here is an example of a sentence with a split infinitive: “He promised to always use good grammar.” This is a split infinitive because the adverb always come in between (i.e., splits) the infinitive to use. So, why is it considered bad grammar to split an infinitive? (1)