

Lecturer's Copy

25 Run-Ons



* What Are Run-Ons?

✓ A *run-on* is two complete thoughts that are run together with no adequate sign given to mark the break between them.*

✓ Some run-ons have no punctuation at all to mark the break between the thoughts. Such run-ons are known as *fused sentences*; they are fused, or joined together, as if they were only one thought.



✓ Fused Sentences

Mario told everyone in the room to be quiet his favorite show was on.

My blow-drier shorted out I showed up for work with Harpo Marx hair.

✦ In other run-ons, known as *comma splices*, a comma is used to connect, or “splice” together, the two complete thoughts. However, a comma alone is *not enough* to connect two complete thoughts. Some stronger connection than a comma alone is needed.



* Comma Splices

Mario told everyone in the room to be quiet, his favorite show was on.

My blow-drier shorted out, I showed up for work with Harpo Marx hair.

✓ Comma splices are the most common kind of run-on. Students sense that some kind of connection is needed between two thoughts, and so they often put a comma at the dividing point. But the comma alone is *not sufficient*. A stronger, clearer mark is needed between the two complete thoughts.

*Notes:

- ✦ 1. Some instructors regard all run-ons as fused sentences. A run-on or fused sentence is one kind of error, and a comma splice is another kind of error. The bottom line is that you do not want either fused sentences or comma splices in your writing.
- ✦ 2. Some instructors refer to each complete thought in a run-on as an *independent clause*. A *clause* is simply a group of words having a subject and a verb. A clause may be *independent* (expressing a complete thought and able to stand alone) or *dependent* (not expressing a complete thought and not able to stand alone). Using this terminology, we'd say that a run-on is two independent clauses run together with no adequate sign given to mark the break between them.

also accept fragments including such as especially

* A Warning—Words That Can Lead to Run-Ons: People often write run-ons when the second complete thought begins with one of the following words:

I	we	there	now
you	they	this	then
he, she, it	that	next	



Whenever you use one of these words in writing a paper, remember to be on the alert for run-ons.

* How to Correct Run-Ons

Here are three common methods of correcting a run-on:

- 1 Use a period and a capital letter to break the two complete thoughts into separate sentences:

Mario told everyone in the room to be quiet. His favorite show was on.
My blow-drier shorted out. I showed up for work with Harpo Marx hair.

- 2 Use a comma plus a joining word (*and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet*) to connect the two complete thoughts:

Mario told everyone in the room to be quiet, for his favorite show was on.
My blow-drier shorted out, and I showed up for work with Harpo Marx hair.

- 3 Use a semicolon to connect the two complete thoughts:

Mario told everyone in the room to be quiet; his favorite show was on.
My blow-drier shorted out; I showed up for work with Harpo Marx hair.

* A fourth method of correcting a run-on is to use *subordination*. The following activities will give you practice in the first three methods. Subordination is described fully on page 116, in the section of the book that deals with sentence variety.

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Method 1: Period and a Capital Letter

One way of correcting a run-on is to use a period and a capital letter between the two complete thoughts. Use this method especially if the thoughts are not closely related or if another method would make the sentence too long.

Activity

In each of the following run-ons, locate the point at which one complete thought ends and another begins. Each is a *fused sentence*—that is, each consists of two sentences fused, or joined together, with no punctuation at all between them. Reading each sentence aloud will help you “hear” where a major break or split between the thoughts occurs. At such a point, your voice will probably drop and pause.

Correct the run-on by putting a period at the end of the first thought and a capital letter at the start of the next thought.

Example Bev's clock radio doesn't work anymore, ^S she spilled a glass of soda on it.

1. The men at the door claimed to have paving material left over from another job they wanted to pave our driveway for a “bargain price.”
2. Linh, a paralegal who speaks Vietnamese, helps other people from her country write wills she assists others by going with them when they have to appear in court.
3. Vicky has her own unique style of dressing she wore a man's tuxedo with a red bow tie to her cousin's wedding.
4. In the summer, ants are attracted to water they will often enter a house through the dishwasher.
5. Humans have managed to adapt to any environment they can survive in Arctic wastes, tropical jungles, and barren deserts.
6. A five-year-old child knows over six thousand words he or she has also learned more than one thousand rules of grammar.

7. I rummaged around the crowded drawer looking for a pair of scissors then it suddenly stabbed me in the finger.
8. Squirrels like to jump from trees onto our roof their footsteps sound like ghosts running around our attic.
9. Today I didn't make good time driving to work every traffic light along the way was red.
10. Since I signed up for premium movie channels on cable, I've taped more than forty movies I'll never have time to watch them all.

* Method 2: Comma and a Joining Word - Jump

Another way of correcting a run-on is to use a comma plus a joining word to connect the two complete thoughts. Joining words (also called *conjunctions*) include *and*, *but*, *for*, *or*, *nor*, *so*, and *yet*. Here is what the four most common joining words mean:

and in addition

Teresa works full time for an accounting firm, and she takes evening classes.

(*And* means *in addition*: Teresa works full time for an accounting firm; *in addition*, she takes evening classes.)

but however, on the other hand

I turned to the want ads, but I knew my dream job wouldn't be listed.

(*But* means *however*: I turned to the want ads; *however*, I knew my dream job wouldn't be listed.)

for because

Lizards become sluggish at night, for they need the sun's warmth to maintain an active body temperature.

(*For* means *because*: Lizards become sluggish at night *because* they need the sun's warmth to maintain an active body temperature.)

so as a result, therefore

The canoe touched bottom, so Dave pushed it toward deeper water.

(*So* means *as a result*: The canoe touched bottom; *as a result*, Dave pushed it toward deeper water.)

Activity 1

Insert the joining word (*and*, *but*, *for*, *so*) that logically connects the two thoughts in each sentence.

- ✓ 1. Napoleon may have been a brave general, _____ he was afraid of cats.
2. The large dog was growling at me, _____ there were white bubbles of foam around his mouth.
3. The library had just closed, _____ I couldn't get any of the reserved books.
4. He checked on the new baby every five minutes, _____ he was afraid that something would happen to her.
5. Kate thought the milk was fresh, _____ it broke up into little sour flakes in her coffee.
6. Elephants have no thumbs, _____ baby elephants suck their trunks.
7. Lonnie heard a noise and looked out the window, _____ the only thing there was his reflection.
- ✓ 8. Although I like most creatures, I am not fond of snakes, _____ I like spiders even less.
9. My sister wants to exercise more and use her car less, _____ she walks to the grocery store.
10. A young woman in our neighborhood recently tried to kill herself, _____ her friends are afraid that she will try it again.

Activity 2

Add a complete and closely related thought to go with each of the following statements. Use a comma plus the indicated joining word when you write the second thought.

Example for I decided to leave school an hour early, for I had a pounding headache.

but

for

and

so

but

- but 1. The corner store is convenient _____

- for 2. Leo attended night class _____

- and 3. Aisha studied for an hour before dinner _____

- so 4. Paul can't retrieve his E-mail _____

- but 5. I needed a haircut _____

Activity 3

Correct each run-on with either (1) a period and a capital letter or (2) a comma and a logical joining word. Do not use the same method of correction for every sentence.

Some of the run-ons are fused sentences (there is no punctuation between the two complete thoughts), and some are comma splices (there is only a comma between the two complete thoughts). One sentence is correct.

Example There was a strange odor in the house, ^{so} Burt called the gas company immediately.

1. Luis got a can of soda from the refrigerator, then he walked outside to sit on the porch steps.
2. Cockroaches adapt to any environment they have even been found living inside nuclear reactors.
3. My dog was panting from the heat I decided to wet him down with the garden hose.
4. Our science class is working on a weather project with students from Russia we communicate by computer almost every day.
5. The best-selling items in the zoo gift shop are the stuffed pandas and the polar-bear T-shirts the profits from these items help support the real animals in the zoo.

6. The bristles of the paintbrushes were very stiff, soaking them in turpentine made them soft again.
7. Tri Lee borrows cassettes from the library to listen to on the way to work, some are music, and some are recordings of best-selling books.
8. Last week, Rita's two boys chased the baby-sitter out of the house, now the girl won't come back.
9. We knew a power failure had occurred, for all the clocks in the building were forty-seven minutes slow.
10. I volunteered to run the "Meals on Wheels" service in our city we deliver hot meals to sick or housebound people.

Method 3: Semicolon

A third method of correcting a run-on is to use a semicolon to mark the break between two thoughts. A *semicolon* (;) looks like a period above a comma and is sometimes called a *strong comma*. A semicolon signals more of a pause than a comma alone but not quite the full pause of a period. When it is used to correct run-ons, the semicolon can be used alone or with a transitional word.

Semicolon Alone: Here are some earlier sentences that were connected with a comma plus a joining word. Now they are connected by a semicolon alone. Notice that the semicolon alone—unlike the comma alone—can be used to connect the two complete thoughts in each sentence:

Lonnie heard a noise and looked out the window; the only thing there was his reflection.

He checked on the new baby every five minutes; he was afraid something would happen to her.

Lizards become sluggish at night; they need the sun's warmth to maintain an active body temperature.

The large dog was growling at me; there were white bubbles of foam around his mouth.

We knew a power failure had occurred; all the clocks in the building were forty-seven minutes slow.


Using semicolons can add to sentence variety. For some people, however, the semicolon is a confusing punctuation mark. Keep in mind that if you are not comfortable using it, you can and should use one of the the first two methods of correcting run-ons.

Activity

Insert a semicolon where the break occurs between the two complete thoughts in each of the following sentences.

Example The plumber gave me an estimate of \$60; I decided to repair the faucet myself.

1. The children stared at the artichokes on their plates they didn't know how to eat the strange vegetable.
2. I changed that lightbulb just last week now it's blown again.
3. The Great Wall of China is immense it's the only man-made structure visible from the Moon.
4. Elaine woke up at 3 A.M. to the smell of sizzling bacon her husband was having another insomnia attack.
5. Jamie curled up under the covers she tried to get warm by grasping her icy feet with her chilly hands.
6. Three single mothers rent one house they share bills and help each other out.
7. Ice had formed on the inside edge of our window Joey scratched a J in it with his finger.
8. Charles peered into the microscope he saw only his own eyelashes.
9. A man in a bear suit walked slowly down the street the children stopped their play to stare at him.
10. I angrily punched a hole in the wall with my fist later I covered the hole with a picture.

 **Semicolon with a Transitional Word:** A semicolon can be used with a transitional word and a comma to join two complete thoughts. Here are some examples:

Larry believes in being prepared for emergencies; therefore, he stockpiles canned goods in his basement.

I tried to cash my paycheck; however, I had forgotten to bring identification.

Athletic shoes must fit perfectly; otherwise, wearers may injure their feet or ankles.

A short nap at the end of the day relaxes me; in addition, it gives me the energy to spend the evening on my homework.

Some zoo animals have not learned how to be good parents; as a result, baby animals are sometimes brought up in zoo nurseries and even in private homes.

People use seventeen muscles when they smile; on the other hand, they use forty-three muscles when they frown.

Following is a list of common transitional words (also known as *adverbial conjunctions*), with brief meanings.

<i>Transitional Word</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
however	but
nevertheless	however
on the other hand	however
instead	as a substitute
meanwhile	in the intervening time
otherwise	under other conditions
indeed	in fact
in addition	also, and
also	in addition
moreover	in addition
furthermore	in addition
as a result	thus, therefore
thus	as a result
consequently	as a result
therefore	as a result

Very
important
in writing

learn to use
them - they make
your writing
matured,



Activity ^{- Jump}

For each sentence, choose a logical transitional word from the box above, and write it in the space provided. Use a semicolon *before* the connector and a comma *after* it.

Example: I dread going to parties; however, my husband loves meeting new people.

1. Jackie suffers from migraine headaches _____ her doctor has advised her to avoid caffeine and alcohol.
2. Ray's apartment is always neat and clean _____ the interior of his car looks like the aftermath of a tornado.
3. I try to attend all my math classes _____ I'll get too far behind to pass the weekly quizzes.
4. B. J. was singing Fiona Apple tunes in the shower _____ his toast was burning in the kitchen.
5. The reporter was tough and experienced _____ even he was stunned by the tragic events.

~~X~~ A Note on Subordination

A fourth method of joining related thoughts is to use subordination. Subordination is a way of showing that one thought in a sentence is not as important as another thought. (Subordination is explained in full on page 116.) Below are three earlier sentences, recast so that one idea is subordinated to (made less important than) the other idea. In each case, the subordinate (or less important) thought is underlined. Note that each subordinate clause begins with a dependent word.

Because the library had just closed, I couldn't get any of the reserved books.

When the canoe touched bottom, Dave pushed the craft toward deeper water.

I didn't make good time driving to work today because every traffic light was red.

↳ review your 2 sentences and just add a subordinator to it, or to the sentence head you deem fit. Remember this is a last resort for correcting run-ons.

* --- After ~~the~~ end.

A Review: How to Check for Run-Ons

- 1 To see if a sentence is a run-on, read it aloud and listen for a break marking two complete thoughts. Your voice will probably drop and pause at the break.
- 2 To check an entire paper, read it aloud from the *last* sentence to the *first*. Doing so will help you hear and see each complete thought.
- 3 Be on the lookout for words that can lead to run-on sentences:

I	he, she, it	they	this	then	now
you	we	there	that	next	

- 4 Correct run-ons by using one of the following methods:

Period and a capital letter

Comma and a joining word (*and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet*)

Semicolon, alone or with a transitional word

Subordination

■ Review Test 1

Correct each run-on with either (1) a period and a capital letter or (2) a comma (if needed) and the joining word *and, but, for, or, so*. Do not use the same method of correction for every sentence.

Some of the run-ons are fused sentences (there is no punctuation between the two complete thoughts), and some are comma splices (there is only a comma between the two complete thoughts). One sentence is correct.

1. Our boss expects us to work four hours without a break, he wanders off to a vending machine at least once an hour.
2. The children in the next car were making faces at other drivers, when I made a face back, they giggled and sank out of sight.
3. Chuck bent over and lifted the heavy tray then he heard an ominous crack in his back.
4. The branches of the tree were bare they made a dark feathery pattern against the orange-pink sunset.