Run-on Sentences

A run-on sentence is not just any long sentence. A run-on occurs when two complete sentences (independent clauses) are stuck together without appropriate connecting words or punctuation. Run-ons are also known as fused sentences (when there is no punctuation between the clauses) and comma splices (when the two clauses are joined by a comma).

This is a fused sentence: *I worked when I wanted on average I worked 60 hours a week.*

This is a comma splice: *In 1885 immigration from Japan to America was legalized, by 1900 some 10,000 Japanese had arrived in California.*

Detecting Run-Ons

- If you are aware that you have a habit of creating these, make a special point of looking for them as you edit. Scan for commas, and check those sentences: If the comma can be replaced with a period to give you two viable sentences, then you have a comma splice.

- Try reading out loud. You may “hear” the extra pause at the splice point.

- Watch out for the most common situations in which people create run-ons. Try to notice any patterns in your own errors. Then you can watch out for those situations.

Common Situations that Breed Run-Ons:

- The two clauses express contrast.
  
  *Time* magazine presents the facts as they are, *National Inquirer* often distorts them.

- The second clause illustrates or amplifies the first.

  Running backs are unique football players, they withstand the physical punishment that the linemen give out and yet keep going.

- The two clauses have the same subject.

  My mother wasn't mean she just wanted the best for us.

- The second clause comments on something in the first clause.

  My mother is very simple-minded, by this I do not mean less intelligent.

- The second clause begins with words like however, therefore, moreover, thus, or then.

  Money can be beneficial if used properly, however, if not properly used, it can corrupt people.
Correcting Run-ons

- Separate the clauses. This is best if there is no special connection between the two that needs to be indicated. These run-ons are good candidates for separation.

  I had a small two-bedroom apartment downtown, it was great.

  Subwoofers come in many different sizes, choosing one depends on how much bass is preferred.

- Use a comma followed by a coordinating conjunction: and, but, or, nor, for, so, or yet. These words help convey the relationship between the two sentences. Here are some good candidates for coordination:

  It would take years to go over why she is such a wonderful person, I only had an hour.

  I am supposed to get the proper amount of servings from each food group every day, it's hard to stick with it.

  **NOTE:** The comma comes before the conjunction, not after.

  Incorrect: It would take years to go over why she is such a wonderful person but, I only had an hour.

  **NOTE:** These are the only coordinating conjunctions. Other words, even ones that indicate similar types of relationships, cannot do the job of connecting the clauses grammatically.

  Incorrect: It would take years to go over why she is such a wonderful person, however I only had an hour.

- Join the clauses with a semi-colon or colon.

  The semi-colon connects two very closely related clauses that join to express one complicated thought. Run-ons expressing contrast, parallelism, or further explanation are good candidates for a semi-colon.

  I never used a seatbelt before, now I do.

  My mother really needed a new car, her old one was on its last wheels.

  The colon connects one clause to a clause or phrase that illustrates or amplifies something in it. Run-ons containing examples or amplification are good candidates for a colon.

  That one experience gave me something else, it gave me courage.