OU Writing Center
The University of Oklahoma

Run-On Sentences

What is a run-on sentence?

Run-on sentences are one of the most common mistakes in English grammar. These happen when two or more clauses are incorrectly combined into one sentence.

- "The knight fought the dragon."
- "The dragon breathed fire."

These are both complete sentences. When you want to combine two sentences, you can usually either use a semicolon, or you can use a comma with a conjunction.

- "The knight fought the dragon; the dragon breathed fire."
    - The semicolon goes between the two sentences.
- "The knight fought the dragon, and the dragon breathed fire."
    - The sentences are connected by a comma and the coordinating conjunction "and."

Run-on sentences are sentences where these clauses are combined incorrectly.

- "I went to the grocery store I bought cereal."
    - These are two complete clauses, but they are combined without any additional words or punctuation. This is incorrect.

Another example of a run-on sentence is when multiple sentences are combined with coordinating conjunctions incorrectly and without punctuation.

- "I went to the grocery store and I bought cereal and there was a discount but I did not have the coupon I needed."

The other most common run-on sentence is due to a comma splice. This is when two independent clauses are combined by only a comma.

- "I went to the grocery store, I bought cereal."

How to fix run-on sentences

There are three easy ways to fix a run-on sentence.

1. Separate the clauses with a period.
    - "I went to the grocery store. I bought cereal."

You can split the run-on sentence into multiple sentences with a period.

2. Separate the clauses with a semicolon.
    - "I went to the grocery store; I bought cereal."
        - Notice how these two sentences contain related information. It is best to use semicolons to connect two sentences that are related to each other. You would not want to use a semicolon to connect unrelated sentences.
        - "Sarah's dog howls at firetrucks; the zoo has a new zebra."
            - This is grammatically correct, but it doesn't make much sense.
3. Separate the clauses with a conjunction.
    - You can combine sentences with either a coordinating conjunction or a subordinating conjunction. Coordinating conjunctions are For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, and So (FANBOYS for short). Subordinating conjunctions are words like Before, Because, While, When, and If (and many more). Coordinating conjunctions require a comma before them. Subordinating conjunctions require a comma *after* but not before.
        - *Coordinating conjunction*: I went to the grocery store, and I bought cereal.
        - *Subordinating conjunction*: I went to the grocery store before I bought cereal.
        - *Subordinating conjunction*: When I went to the grocery store, I bought cereal.

    Note: When the subordinating conjunction is at the start of the sentence, there is a comma after the phrase. When the subordinating conjunction is in the middle of the sentence, no comma is needed.

More examples

1. She didn't know my secret I was actually a superhero.

    - *Split the sentence:* "She didn't know my secret. I was actually a superhero."
    - *Semicolon:* "She didn't know my secret; I was actually a superhero."
    - *Coordinating conjunction:* "She didn't know my secret, but I was actually a superhero."
    - *Subordinating conjunction:* "Although she didn't know my secret, I was actually a superhero."

2. Capybaras are the world's largest rodents, they can run as fast as a horse.

    - *Split the sentence:* Capybaras are the world's largest rodents. They can run as fast as a horse.
    - *Semicolon:* Capybaras are the world's largest rodents; they can run as fast as a horse.
    - *Coordinating conjunction:* Capybaras are the world's largest rodents, and they can run as fast as a horse.

3. An article about Jane Doe was published in the newspaper, it said "Jane Doe is known for her collection of automobiles."

    - *Split the sentence:* An article about Jane Doe was published in the newspaper. It said, "Jane Doe is known for her collection of automobiles."
    - *Semicolon:* An article about Jane Doe was published in the newspaper; it said, "Jane Doe is known for her collection of automobiles."
    - *Coordinating conjunction:* An article about Jane Doe was published in the newspaper, and it said, "Jane Doe is known for her collection of automobiles."
    - *Subordinating conjunction:* An article about Jane Doe was published in the newspaper where it said, "Jane Doe is known for her collection of automobiles."

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