

Run-Ons

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

A run-on occurs when two sentences are run together with no adequate sign given to mark the break between them. Shown below are four run-on sentences, each followed by a correct sentence. See if you can complete the statement that explains how each run-on is corrected.

1. A man coughed in the movie theater the result was a chain reaction of copycat coughing.

A man coughed in the movie theater. The result was a chain reaction of copycat coughing.

The run-on has been corrected by using a _____ and a capital letter to separate the two complete thoughts.

2. I heard laughter inside the house, no one answered the bell.

I heard laughter inside the house, but no one answered the bell.

The run-on has been corrected by using a joining word, _____, to connect the two complete thoughts.

3. A car sped around the corner, it sprayed slush all over the pedestrians.

A car sped around the corner; it sprayed slush all over the pedestrians.

The run-on has been corrected by using a _____ to connect the two closely related thoughts.

4. I had a campus map, I still could not find my classroom building.

Although I had a campus map, I still could not find my classroom building.

The run-on has been corrected by using the subordinating word _____ to connect the two closely related thoughts.

Answers are on page 620.

CHAPTER PREVIEW

What Are Run-Ons?

Correcting Run-Ons

Method 1: Period and a Capital Letter

Method 2: Comma and a Joining Word

Method 3: Semicolon

Method 4: Subordination

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. As a result of the run-on, the reader is confused, unsure of where one thought ends and the next one begins. Two types of run-ons are fused sentences and comma splices.

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

Fused Sentence

Rita decided to stop smoking she didn't want to die of lung cancer.

Fused Sentence

The exam was postponed the class was canceled as well.

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 connection stronger than a comma alone is needed.

Comma Splice

Rita decided to stop smoking, she didn't want to die of lung cancer.

Comma Splice

The exam was postponed, the class was canceled as well.

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

TIP

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). A run-on is two independent clauses that are run together with no adequate sign given to mark the break between them.

Some instructors believe that the term *run-ons* should be applied only to fused sentences, not to comma splices. But for many other instructors, and for our purposes in this book, the term *run-on* applies equally to fused sentences and comma splices. The bottom line is that you do not want either fused sentences or comma splices in your writing.

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. Be on the alert for run-ons whenever you use these words:

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

Correcting Run-Ons

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

1. Use a period and a capital letter to separate the two complete thoughts. (In other words, make two separate sentences of the two complete thoughts.)

Rita decided to stop smoking. She didn't want to die of lung cancer.
The exam was postponed. The class was canceled as well.

» OR «

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

Rita decided to stop smoking, for she didn't want to die of lung cancer.

The exam was postponed, and the class was canceled as well.

» OR «

3. Use a semicolon to connect the two complete thoughts.

Rita decided to stop smoking; she didn't want to die of lung cancer.
The exam was postponed; the class was canceled as well.

4. Use subordination.

Because Rita didn't want to die of lung cancer, she decided to stop smoking.

When the exam was postponed, the class was canceled as well.

The following pages will give you practice in all four methods of correcting run-ons. The use of subordination will be explained further on page 202, in a chapter that deals with sentence variety.

Method 1: Period and a Capital Letter

One way of correcting a run-on is to use a period and a capital letter at the break 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.

Correcting Fused Sentences

ACTIVITY 1

Locate the split in each of the following run-ons. 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 in the thought occurs. At such a point, your voice will probably drop and pause.



CONNECT WRITING

Meet Tatiana. She works part-time at a veterinarian's office as a receptionist. Last week the vet asked her to explain what she had written in a phone message. She realized her writing was unclear because she had written run-on sentences. Help Tatiana find and correct the run-on mistakes in her other phone messages.

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HINT

Correct the run-on by putting a period at the end of the first thought and a capital letter at the start of the second thought. In item 1, *The fern hadn't been watered in a month* is a complete thought. *Its leaves looked like frayed brown shoelaces* is also a complete thought.

EXAMPLE

Gary was not a success at his job ^{. H}is mouth moved faster than his hands.

1. The fern hadn't been watered in a month its leaves looked like frayed brown shoelaces.
2. Newspapers are piled up on the neighbors' porch they must be out of town.
3. Joyce's recipe for chocolate fudge is very easy to make it is also very expensive.
4. Watching television gave the old man something to do he didn't have many visitors anymore.
5. Jon accidentally ruined his favorite black shirt a few drops of bleach spilled onto it in the laundry room.
6. The first Olympic Games were held in 776 BC. the only event was a footrace.
7. Gloria decorated her apartment creatively and cheaply she papered her bedroom walls with magazine covers.
8. There were papers scattered all over Lena's desk she spent twenty minutes looking for a missing receipt.
9. Spring rain dripped into the fireplace the room smelled like last winter's fires.
10. The car swerved dangerously through traffic its rear bumper sticker read, "School's Out—Drive Carefully."

ACTIVITY 2

Correcting Run-Ons—Fused Sentences and Comma Splices

Locate the split in each of the following run-ons. Some of the run-ons are fused sentences, and some of them are *comma splices*—run-ons spliced or joined together only with a comma. Correct each run-on by putting a period at the end of the first thought and a capital letter at the start of the next thought.

HINT

In item 1, *My father* is the subject of the first complete thought. *He* is the subject of the second one.

1. My father is a very sentimental man he still has my kindergarten drawings.
2. Sue dropped the letter into the mailbox then she regretted mailing it.
3. Certain street names are very common the most common is "Park."
4. Bacteria are incredibly tiny a drop of liquid may contain fifty million of them.
5. The fastest dog in the world is the greyhound it can run over forty-one miles an hour.
6. Mandy's parents speak only Chinese she speaks Chinese, English, and French.
7. My iPod stopped working its battery needs to be charged.
8. A shadow on the kitchen wall was lovely it had the shape of a plant on the windowsill.
9. The little girl hated seeing her father drink one day, she poured all his liquor down the kitchen drain.
10. Children have been born at odd times for instance, James was born on February 29 during leap year.

Writing the Next Sentence

ACTIVITY 3

Write a second sentence to go with each sentence below. Start the second sentence with the word given in the margin.

EXAMPLE

My wireless all-in-one printer is so convenient. It allows me to print,
scan, copy, and fax documents.

1. The oysters were placed on the grill until their shells popped open. _____

It

Then

2. I need to update the antivirus software on my computer. _____

It

3. Ashlee sent me several urgent text messages last night. _____

She

4. Students who take studio art classes spend hours on their projects. _____

They

5. After the recent sewage spill, people were afraid to swim in the ocean. _____

There

Method 2: Comma and a Joining Word

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 *coordinating conjunctions*) include *and*, *but*, *for*, *or*, *nor*, *so*, and *yet*. Here is what the four most common joining words mean:

and in addition, along with

Lynn was watching *Monday Night Football*, and she was doing her homework.

TIP

And means *in addition*: Lynn was watching *Monday Night Football*; *in addition*, she was doing her homework.

but however, except, on the other hand, just the opposite

I voted for the president two years ago, but I would not vote for him today.

TIP

But means *however*: I voted for the president two years ago; *however*, I would not vote for him today.

for because, the reason why, the cause for something

Saturday is the worst day to shop, for people jam the stores.

TIP

For means *because*: Saturday is the worst day to shop *because* people jam the stores. If you are not comfortable using *for*, you may want to use *because* instead of *for* in the activities that follow. If you do use *because*, omit the comma before it.

so as a result, therefore

Our son misbehaved again, so he was sent upstairs without dessert.

TIP

So means *as a result*: Our son misbehaved again; *as a result*, he was sent upstairs without dessert.

ACTIVITY 4

Connecting Two Thoughts

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

EXAMPLE

A trip to the zoo always depresses me, for I hate to see animals in cages.

1. I want to stop smoking I don't want to gain weight.
2. Packages are flown to distant cities during the night vans deliver them the next morning.

3. The grass turned brown in the summer's heat the grapes shriveled and died on the vine.
4. Craig wanted to buy his girlfriend a ring he began saving ten dollars a week.
5. I enjoy watching television I feel guilty about spending so much time in front of the tube.
6. It was too hot indoors to study I decided to go down to the shopping center for ice cream.
7. I don't like to go to the doctor's office I'm afraid one of the other patients will make me really sick.
8. This world map was published only three years ago the names of some countries are already out of date.
9. Nate is color-blind his wife lays out his clothes every morning.
10. We knew there had been a power failure all our digital clocks were blinking "12:00."

Using Commas and Joining Words

ACTIVITY 5

Add a complete, closely related thought to each of the following statements. When you write the second thought, use a comma plus the joining word shown at the left.

EXAMPLE

I was sick with the flu, but I still had to study for the test.

but

1. We have the same taste in clothes

but

2. Keisha needed a little break from studying

so

3. I hammered two nails into the wall

and

4. The house was unusually quiet

for

5. Harry meant to stick to his diet

but

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* (;) is made up of a period above a comma and is sometimes called a *strong comma*. The semicolon signals more of a pause than a comma alone but not quite the full pause of a period.

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

Semicolon Alone

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

Lynn was watching *Monday Night Football*; she was doing her homework as well.

I voted for the president two years ago; I would not vote for him today.

Saturday is the worst day to shop; people jam the stores.

ACTIVITY 6

Using Semicolons

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

EXAMPLE

He had hair implants; it looked very natural.

1. I ordered a Grand Slam Breakfast at Denny's the bacon and over-easy eggs were cooked perfectly.
2. Sabina invited me to her wedding it was held in Maui on a beautiful private beach.
3. Professor Williams scowled at the class her facial expression told the story.
4. Remarkably, the crime rates in our neighborhood have decreased auto thefts and burglaries are on the decline.
5. The Grand Canyon is ancient it is millions of years old.

Semicolon with a Transition

A semicolon is sometimes used with a transitional word and a comma to join two complete thoughts:

I figured that the ball game would cost me about fifty dollars; however, I didn't consider the high price of food and drinks.

Fred and Denise have a low-interest mortgage on their house; otherwise, they would move to another neighborhood.

Sharon didn't understand the instructor's point; therefore, she asked him to repeat it.

TIP

Sometimes transitional words do not join complete thoughts but are merely interrupters in a sentence:

My parents, moreover, plan to go on the trip.

I believe, however, that they'll change their minds.

Transitional Words

Here is a list of common transitional words and phrases (also known as *adverbial conjunctions*).

Common Transitional Words

however

moreover

therefore

on the other hand

in addition

as a result

nevertheless

also

consequently

instead

furthermore

otherwise

Using Logical Transitions

ACTIVITY 7

For each item, choose a logical transitional word from the box above and write it in the space provided. In addition, put a semicolon *before* the transition and a comma *after* it.

EXAMPLE

It was raining harder than ever ; however, Bobby was determined to go to the amusement park.

HINT

In item 1, "car" and "payments" are the subjects of the two complete thoughts.

1. A new car is always fun to drive _____ the payments are never fun to make.
2. The fork that fell into our garbage disposal looks like a piece of modern art _____ it is useless.
3. Auto races no longer use gasoline _____ spectators have nothing to fear from exhaust fumes.

4. We got to the stadium two hours before the game started _____ all the parking spaces were already taken.
5. Mice use their sensitive whiskers as feelers _____ they scurry along close to walls.

ACTIVITY 8**Using Semicolons and Commas**

Punctuate each sentence by using a semicolon and a comma.

EXAMPLE

Our tap water has a funny taste; consequently, we buy bottled water to drink.

HINT

To correctly punctuate item 1, first locate the transitional word that joins the two complete thoughts.

1. Nora lives two blocks from the grocery store nevertheless she always drives there.
2. The little boy ate too much Halloween candy as a result he got a stomachache.
3. Our dog protects us by barking at strangers however he also barks at our friends.
4. Jeff cut back a few hours on his work schedule otherwise he would have had very little time for studying.
5. My sister invited her ex-husband over to celebrate the holiday with the children furthermore she bought a gift for him from the children.

Method 4: 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. Here are three sentences where one idea is subordinated to (made less emphatic than) the other idea:

Because Rita didn't want to die of lung cancer, she decided to stop smoking.

The wedding reception began to get out of hand when the guests started to throw food at each other.

Although my brothers wanted to watch a *Lost* rerun, the rest of the family insisted on turning to the network news.

Dependent Words

Notice that when we subordinate, we use dependent words such as *because*, *when*, and *although*. Following is a brief list of common dependent words (see also the list on page 197). Subordination is explained in full on page 202.

Common Dependent Words

after	before	unless
although	even though	until
as	if	when
because	since	while

Using Dependent Words**ACTIVITY 9**

Choose a logical dependent word from the preceding box and write it in the space provided.

EXAMPLE

_____ I was six, I thought chocolate milk came from brown cows.

HINT

In item 1, which dependent word best signals that something extends from the past (July 4, 2008) to the present?

1. Will hasn't had a cigarette _____ July 4, 2008.
2. _____ you're willing to work hard, don't sign up for Professor Dunn's class.
3. The lines at that supermarket are so long _____ there are too few cashiers.
4. _____ reading the scary novel, my sister had nightmares for days.
5. My boss gave me smoked salmon for my birthday _____ he knows I'm a vegetarian.

Using Subordination**ACTIVITY 10**

Rewrite the five sentences that follow (all taken from this chapter) so that one idea is subordinate to the other. Use one of the dependent words from the box "Common Dependent Words."

EXAMPLE

Auto races no longer use gasoline; spectators have nothing to fear from exhaust fumes.

Since auto races no longer use gasoline, spectators have nothing to fear from exhaust fumes.

HINT

For item 1, select a dependent word that logically connects the two ideas (a wish to stop smoking and a wish not to gain weight).

1. I want to stop smoking; I don't want to gain weight.
-
-

2. It was too hot indoors to study; I decided to go down to the shopping center for ice cream.
-
-

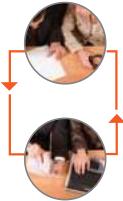
3. He had hair implants; it looked very natural.
-
-

4. Professor Williams scowled at the class; her facial expression told the story.
-
-

5. This world map was published only three years ago; the names of some countries are already out of date.
-
-

ACTIVITY 11

Editing and Rewriting



Working with a partner, read carefully the short paragraph that follows and underline the five run-ons. Then use the space provided to correct the five run-ons. Feel free to discuss the rewrite quietly with your partner and refer back to the chapter when necessary.

1When Mark began his first full-time job, he immediately got a credit card, a used sports car was his first purchase. **2**Then he began to buy expensive clothes that he could not afford he also bought impressive gifts for his parents and his girlfriend. **3**Several months passed before Mark realized that he owed an enormous amount of money. **4**To make matters worse, his car broke down, a stack of bills suddenly seemed to be due at once. **5**Mark tried to cut back on his purchases, he soon realized he had to cut up his credit card to prevent himself from using it. **6**He also began keeping a careful record of his spending he had no idea where his money had gone till then. **7**He hated to admit to his family and friends that he had to get his budget under control. **8**However, his girlfriend said she did not mind inexpensive dates, and his parents were proud of his growing maturity.

Creating Sentences

ACTIVITY 12

Working with a partner, make up your own short run-ons test as directed.

1. Write a run-on sentence. Then rewrite it, using a period and a capital letter to separate the thoughts into two sentences.

Run-on

Rewrite

2. Write a sentence that has two complete thoughts. Then rewrite it, using a comma and a joining word to correctly join the complete thoughts.

Two complete thoughts

Rewrite

3. Write a sentence that has two complete thoughts. Then rewrite it, using a semicolon to correctly join the complete thoughts.

Two complete thoughts

Rewrite



REFLECTIVE ACTIVITY



1. Look at the paragraph that you revised in Activity 11. Explain how run-ons affect the paragraph.
2. In your own written work, which type of run-on are you most likely to write: comma splices or fused sentences? Why do you tend to make this kind of mistake?
3. Which method for correcting run-ons are you most likely to use in your own writing? Which are you least likely to use? Why?

REVIEW TEST 1

In the space provided, write *R-O* beside run-on sentences. Write *C* beside the one sentence that is punctuated correctly. Some of the run-ons have no punctuation between the two complete thoughts; others have only a comma.

Correct each run-on by using (1) a period and a capital letter; (2) a comma and a joining word *and*, *but*, *for*, *so*; or (3) a semicolon. Do not use the same method of correction for every sentence.

EXAMPLE

R-O Sam never saved his work,^{, so} he lost his paper when his computer crashed.

- _____ 1. Americans spend millions of dollars each year on bottled water critics argue that tap water is equally safe to drink.
- _____ 2. Isaiah is confident that the trucking company will hire him he has a valid CDL license and a clean traffic abstract.
- _____ 3. The mechanic said that many hybrid cars have transmission problems I am glad that I purchased a gasoline-powered subcompact car, which is equally fuel efficient.
- _____ 4. This summer brought record-breaking drought conditions many farmers are being forced to plant fewer crops or irrigate water into their fields.
- _____ 5. Sydney decided to use recycled plastic to build an outdoor deck her children asked her to build a doghouse with the extra lumber.
- _____ 6. Mark worried that the canned chili sauce he ate while on his camping trip was recalled for botulism he did not experience any symptoms of food poisoning.
- _____ 7. Parents who sign up their children for mixed martial arts hope that the sport will provide physical exercise, self-confidence, and personal discipline their children, however, say that they are simply having fun.

-
8. The Ladies Professional Golf Association (LPGA) was founded in 1950, making it the oldest female professional sports organization in the United States.
 9. Witnesses reported that the bank robber was a woman security cameras revealed that the thief was a man carrying a handbag and wearing a wig and lipstick.
 10. Today, the average American teenager works 16 hours per week parents and educators are concerned that these part-time jobs leave little time for homework or sleep.
-

REVIEW TEST 2

Correct each run-on by using subordination. Choose from among the following dependent words.

after	before	unless
although	even though	until
as	if	when
because	since	while

EXAMPLE

Tony hated going to a new barber, he was afraid of butchered hair.

Because Tony was afraid of butchered hair, he hated going to a new barber.

1. Mom was frying potatoes, the heat set off the smoke alarm.

2. I love animals I'm not ready to take on the responsibility of a pet.

3. Lani leaves a lecture class, she reviews and clarifies her notes.

4. Matthew jogs, he thinks over his day's activities.

5. My mother puts apples in the fruit bowl she first washes the wax off them.

6. I began to shake on the examining table the nurse reached out and held my hand.

7. Some pets are easy to care for, others require patience and lots of hard work.

8. Molly forgot to turn the oven off her homemade bread looked like burned toast.

9. A wheel hit a crack in the sidewalk the skateboard shot out from under Dan.

10. John Grisham and Stephen King make huge fortunes with their novels most writers barely make a living.

REVIEW TEST 3

On a separate piece of paper, write six sentences, each of which has two complete thoughts. In two of the sentences, use a period and a capital letter between the thoughts. In another two sentences, use a comma and a joining word (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*) to join the thoughts. In the final two sentences, use a semicolon to join the thoughts.

REVIEW TEST 4

Write for five minutes about something that makes you angry. Don't worry about spelling, punctuation, finding exact words, or organizing your thoughts. Just focus on writing as many words as you can without stopping.

After you have finished, go back and make whatever changes are needed to correct any run-on sentences in your writing.



For additional materials on Chapter 8, visit www.mhhe.com/langan.