

Run-Ons

It is important to realize that the length of a sentence really has nothing to do with whether a sentence is a run-on or not; being a run-on is a structural flaw that can plague even a very short sentence:

The sun is high, put on some sun block.

An extremely long sentence, on the other hand, might be a "run-off-at-the-mouth" sentence, but it can be otherwise sound, structurally.

Here's a sample of a good 239-word sentence. It's not the kind of thing you'd want to read very often, but it does work. Remember, this is not a run-on sentence.

Knowing that millions of people around the world would be watching in person and on television and expecting great things from him — at least one more gold medal for America, if not another world record — during this, his fourth and surely his last appearance in the World Olympics, and realizing that his legs could no longer carry him down the runway with the same blazing speed and confidence in making a huge, eye-popping leap that they were capable of a few years ago when he set world records in the 100-meter dash and in the 400-meter relay and won a silver medal in the long jump, the renowned sprinter and track-and-field personality Carl Lewis, who had known pressure from fans and media before but never, even as a professional runner, this kind of pressure, made only a few appearances in races during the few months before the Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, partly because he was afraid of raising expectations even higher and he did not want to be distracted by interviews and adoring fans who would follow him into stores and restaurants demanding autographs and photo-opportunities, but mostly because he wanted to conserve his energies and concentrate, like a martial arts expert, on the job at hand: winning his favorite competition, the long jump, and bringing home another Gold Medal for the United States, the most fitting conclusion to his brilliant career in track and field.

(1) A Fused Sentence has at least two parts, either one of which can stand by itself (in other words, two independent clauses), but the two parts have been smooshed together instead of being properly connected.

ex: My cat likes to play with bubbles I bought some for him.

A correction: My cat likes to play with bubbles, so I bought some for him.

(2) When two independent clauses are connected by *only* a comma, they constitute a run-on sentence that is called a **comma-splice. The example just above (about the**

sunscreen) is a comma-splice. When you use a comma to connect two independent clauses, it must be accompanied by a little conjunction (*and, but, for, nor, yet, or, so*).

ex: The sun is high put on some sun block.

A correction: The sun is high, so put on some sun block.

Run-on sentences happen typically under the following circumstances*:

- a. **When an independent clause gives an order or directive based on what was said in the prior independent clause:**

This next chapter has a lot of difficult information in it, you should start studying right away.

(We could put a period where that comma is and start a new sentence. A semicolon might also work there.)

- b. **When two independent clauses are connected by a transitional expression (conjunctive adverb) such as *however, moreover, nevertheless*.**

Mr. Nguyen has sent his four children to ivy-league colleges, however, he has sacrificed his health working day and night in that dusty bakery.

(Again, where that first comma appears, we could have used either a period — and started a new sentence — or a semicolon.)

- c. **When the second of two independent clauses contains a pronoun that connects it to the first independent clause.**

This computer doesn't make sense to me, it came without a manual.

(Although these two clauses are quite brief, and the ideas are closely related, this is a run-on sentence. We need a period where that comma now stands.)

Most of those computers in the Learning Assistance Center are broken already, this proves my point about American computer manufacturers.

Again, two nicely related clauses, incorrectly connected — a run-on. Use a period to cure this sentence.

*This list of situations in which run- on sentences are apt to happen can be found in *Sentence Sense: A Writer's Guide* by Evelyn Farbman. Houghton Mifflin, 1989. Examples our own. This information is from <http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/runons.htm>.

Run-ons - Comma Splices - Fused Sentences

Brought to you by http://owl.english.purdue.edu/handouts/grammar/g_sentpr.html

The above (Run-ons, Comma Splices, and Fused Sentences) are all names given to compound sentences that are not punctuated correctly. The best way to avoid such errors is to punctuate compound sentences correctly by using one or the other of these rules.

1. Join the two **independent clauses** with one of the coordinating conjunctions (and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet), and use a comma before the connecting word.

_____, and _____.

(He enjoys walking through the country, and he often goes backpacking on his vacations.)

2. When you do not have a connecting word (or when you use a connecting word other than and, but, for, or nor, so, or yet between the two independent clauses) use a semicolon (;).

_____;

(He often watched TV when there were only reruns; she preferred to read instead.)

or

_____ ; however, _____.

(He often watched TV when there were only reruns; however, she preferred to read instead.)

So, run-ons and fused sentences are terms describing two independent clauses which are joined together with no connecting word or punctuation to separate the clauses.

Incorrect: They weren't dangerous criminals they were detectives in disguise.

Correct: *They weren't dangerous criminals; they were detectives in disguise.*

Incorrect: I didn't know which job I wanted I was too confused to decide.

Correct: *I didn't know which job I wanted, so I was too confused to decide.*