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Run-on Sentences

Run-on sentences do just what the words say: they "run on" from one independent clause to another, without the necessary punctuation or coordinating conjunction that signals the reader how, or whether, they're related.

Anatomy of a Sentence:

Independent Clause	a clause that can stand alone syntactically as a complete sentence; contains at least a subject and a verb	She ate an apple.
Subordinate Clause	a clause that cannot stand alone as a sentence, but functions as either a noun, adjective or adverb in a sentence	when she ate an apple
Coordinating Conjunction	a conjunction, such as "and," "but," or "or," that joins two grammatical elements of the same sentence or construction	She ate an apple, *but* she did not like it.

In order to identify a clause, look for:

Subject	The "doer" of the sentence: *He* caught the ball.
Verb	What is "done": He *caught* the ball.
Object	What the action is "done to": He caught the *ball.*

Follow these three steps to find and fix run-ons:

1. Does the sentence contain more than one independent clause? Independent clauses are like mini-sentences, because they can stand alone as grammatically complete expressions. Subordinate clauses cannot stand by themselves; they require an independent clause to form a sentence.
   a. Two independent clauses in run-on sentence:
      I cannot remain silent any longer, the roads have become clogged with bicyclists.
   b. Subordinate clause in correct sentence:
      Although more commuters are using bicycles, there are still too many cars downtown.

2. Look for sentence boundaries; can you identify where one clause ends and the next begins based on the subjects and verbs? Draw an imaginary line between the independent clauses:
   a. I cannot remain silent any longer, | the roads have become clogged with bicyclists.

3. Fix the run-on in one of these ways:
   a. Separate the independent clauses with a period or a semicolon.
      i. I cannot remain silent any longer; the roads have become clogged with bicyclists.

b. Use a comma before a coordinating conjunction: *and, or, nor, because, but, for, so, yet.* This remedies a comma splice; Comma splices are two independent clauses that are incorrectly joined by a comma.
    i. I cannot remain silent any longer because the roads have become clogged with bicyclists.

Practice Sentences

First read each sentence and underline all the subjects and circle all the verbs. Then follow the steps in each example to determine whether the sentence is a run-on or not.

1. Humans have been fascinated by time travel at least since the days of H. G. Wells, Einstein's theories took the notion out of the realm of science fiction.

    Step 1. The sentence contains more than one independent clause.
    Step 2. The independent clauses are as follows: Humans have been fascinated by time travel at least since the days of H. G. Wells, | Einstein's theories took the notion out of the realm of science fiction.
    Step 3. Fix the run-on by changing the punctuation or the conjunction: *Humans have been fascinated by time travel at least since the days of H. G. Wells. Einstein's theories took the notion out the realm of science fiction.*

2. One of Wells's most famous novels was *The Time Machine* it introduced Victorian society to the fascination of time travel.

    Step 1. The sentence contains more than one independent clause.
    Step 2. The independent clauses are as follows: One of Wells's most famous novels was *The Time Machine* | it introduced Victorian society to the fascination of time travel.
    Step 3. Fix the run-on by changing the punctuation or the conjunction: *One of Wells's most famous novels was The Time Machine; it introduced Victorian society to the fascination of time travel.*

3. Einstein declared time to be the fourth dimension, suddenly physicists began to think of traveling in time as they thought of traveling through space.

    Step 1. The sentence contains more than one independent clause.
    Step 2. The independent clauses are as follows: Einstein declared time to be the fourth dimension, | suddenly physicists began to think of traveling in time as they thought of traveling through space.
    Step 3. Fix the run-on by changing the punctuation or the conjunction: *Einstein declared time to be the fourth dimension, and suddenly physicists began to think of traveling in time as they thought of traveling through space.*