

Run-on Sentences

Run-on sentences are sentences that go on and on, joining many complete sentences together incorrectly. To fix a run-on sentence, you have to show your readers the relationships between the ideas you are expressing.

Here is an example of a run-on sentence:

Jenny went to the store and ran into Paul, he made a sandwich, he ate it and then a dinosaur named Steve ate Paul.

How many sentences are in there, anyway? Let's identify them with different fonts:

Jenny went to the store and ran into Paul, he made a sandwich, he ate it and then a dinosaur named Steve ate Paul.

Very pretty, but how did we identify each complete sentence?

A **complete sentence** has a **subject** (a person, place or thing that does something) a **verb** (an action that the subject does) and an **object** (a person, place or thing that the action is done to). A **complete sentence** is also called an **independent clause**, because it can stand alone—one whole, complete idea is expressed in the independent clause, and it doesn't need any more information to make sense.

Jenny (subject) went (verb) to the store (object) and ran (verb) into Paul (object)

Notice here that the subject **Jenny can do many things. Since the subject **Jenny** stays the same, a comma before "and" is not necessary.

he (subject) made (verb) a sandwich (object),

he (subject) ate (verb) it (object)

and then a dinosaur (subject) named Steve ate (verb) Paul (object).

All well and good, but now how do we fix these independent clauses so these sentences are truly complete?

Separating them is the first step. Now that we have four independent clauses to work with, we have **many** different ways we can fix them.

1. Simple sentences:

- Jenny went to the store and ran into Paul. He made a sandwich. He ate it. Then, a dinosaur named Steve ate Paul.
 - i. In these examples, one sentence is made of each subject/verb/object group.
 - ii. Notice we take out "And" when beginning the final sentence. Usually, avoid beginning sentences with conjunctions like "and, but, or, so."

2. Compound sentences:

- Jenny went to the store and ran into Paul. He made a sandwich, ate it, and then a dinosaur named Steve ate Paul.
- Jenny went to the store and ran into Paul, who made a sandwich and ate it. Then, a dinosaur named Steve ate Paul.
- Jenny went to the store and ran into Paul, who made a sandwich and ate it; then, a dinosaur named Steve ate Paul.

Hold up, now: all of these are correct?

Compound sentences come in many forms. To master the art of the compound sentence, we must first familiarize ourselves with **conjunctions**. These are the words that **establish relationships between ideas**, like for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so (remember conjunctions with the acronym **FANBOYS**). There are more conjunctions than the FANBOYS conjunctions, as you'll see below.

- When you join two ideas together using a conjunction, for instance, you have to include the proper punctuation to forge the link between the ideas. Typically, **place a comma before a conjunction that joins two sentences together**.

Ex: He made a sandwich, ate it, **and** then a dinosaur named Steve ate Paul.

- What about **semicolons**? When you want to join **two complete sentences that are closely related, use a semicolon followed by a conjunction, and then a comma**:

Ex: Jenny went to the store and ran into Paul, who made a sandwich and ate it; **then**, a dinosaur named Steve ate Paul.

Ex: We tried to give Steve a laxative; **however**, Steve was busy looking for dessert.

Remember: **semicolon, then conjunction, then comma**. They are the three amigos.

And yes, you may use just a semicolon to join **two complete sentences**; the two sentences you join must each be able to stand on their own as complete sentences, and they must be so closely related that they don't need a conjunction to show how they're related.

Comma Splices: watch out for these!

*Your teacher may write CS on your paper to indicate a comma splice—here is what it means and how to fix it.

A **comma splice** incorrectly joins two complete sentences together, and it's a form of a run-on sentence. **Here's an example of a comma splice error:**

Paul's sandwich must have had a lot of onions on it, Steve the dinosaur has indigestion.

A comma must not stand alone! Commas need friends to make them work correctly, and conjunctions like to hang out with commas. Let's fix this sentence in three different ways:

1. Paul's sandwich must have had a lot of onions on it, **because** Steve the dinosaur has indigestion. **(Adding a conjunction after the comma shows the relationship between the ideas.)**
2. Paul's sandwich must have had a lot of onions on it. Steve the dinosaur has indigestion. **(Changing the comma to a period creates two complete, separate sentences that are not quite as closely related as when you add a comma + conjunction.)**
3. Paul's sandwich must have had a lot of onions on it; Steve the dinosaur has indigestion. **(Changing the comma to a semicolon shows the sentences are so closely related that no explanation of their relationship in the form of a conjunction is needed.)**

For more help understanding comma splices, check out "THE DREADED COMMA SPLICE!" handout, available in the CCC Center for Academic Success.

Questions about run-on sentences or anything else? Come see a tutor or the Writing Specialist in the CAS!