How to Correct Run-on Sentences

What Is a Run-On?
A correct complete sentence or thought has both a subject and a verb. A thought that contains both a subject and verb is called a “clause.” Sentences may have multiple clauses, but they need correct punctuation to have correct sentence structure.

A run-on is two or more complete sentences written as one sentence. It has too much information for a single sentence!

A run-on is not a fragment!
A fragment is an incomplete thought (a phrase) missing either a subject or a verb.
A run-on has too many complete thoughts without effective punctuation.

Types of Run-on Sentences (What to Look for and What Not to Do!):
1. Classic run-ons: two or more complete thoughts with no punctuation between them
   Ballet is a classical form of dance it has been performed for centuries.

2. Comma Splices: a comma between the complete thoughts, but a comma alone is not strong enough:
   Ballet is a classical form of dance, it has been performed for centuries.

Fixing Run-ons

Three Main Ways
The two thoughts are complete, and they can be properly punctuated in three main ways:

1. Period [.]—A period is placed between the two complete thoughts to form two sentences:
   Ballet is a classical form of dance. It has been performed for centuries.
   • The period goes between the two complete thoughts.
   • Remember to capitalize the first word after the period.
   • Do not add any other words to either sentence.
2. **Semicolon** [;]—The semicolon goes between the two complete thoughts that are closely related in content:

*Ballet is a classical form of dance; it has been performed for centuries. Ballet has been performed for centuries; as a result, it is called a “classical” form of dance.*

- DO NOT capitalize the next word after the semicolon.
- A transition word or phrase is possible, but not required.
- Use semicolons sparingly – only once or twice per page.

3. **Comma + FANBOYS** [For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So] a.k.a. “Coordinating Conjunctions” to relate the thoughts to each other:

*Ballet is a classical form of dance, and it has been performed for centuries.*

*I’m out of dishwasher soap, so I need to go to the store.*

**General Tips to Avoid Run-Ons:**

- Look at the sentence length. If it is more than three lines, it could be a run-on.
- Read your sentence out loud. If you run out of breath before the end, it might be a run-on.
- If you get lost as you’re reading the sentence, so will your audience.
- If you’re not sure if you have a run-on, play it safe and try to make it more concise.

**More Ways to Fix Run-ons**

**Subordinators and Subordinating Clauses**

Add an appropriate subordinator to one of the thoughts so that it cannot stand alone but clarifies the relationship between the ideas. Then attach it to the remaining complete thought (clause) to complete the sentence:

*Since I’m out of dishwasher soap, I need to go to the store.*

- When you add a subordinator to one of the thoughts, it becomes a subordinate clause. “Since I’m out of dishwasher soap . . .” needs more information to be a complete sentence. Subordinate clauses need more information in order to make sense.
- The remaining complete thought becomes the main clause that completes the meaning of the sentence.
Punctuation: Do I add a comma or not?

If the *main clause* comes first, **do not** add a comma:

I need to go to the store since I’m out of dishwasher soap.

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If the main clause comes *second*, **do** add a comma:

Since I’m out of dishwasher soap, I need to go to the store.

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Goal: Be clear and concise

Sometimes it’s better to make sentences shorter, rather than adding more words or punctuation.

- Break up the run-on into smaller, simpler sentences.
- Eliminate repetitive or unnecessary words.
- Try to say it in fewer words.

1st Draft: To make brownies, first get a bowl out of the cupboard and a wooden spoon and two eggs, and the brownie mix and preheat the oven; after preheating the oven, empty the mix into the bowl and crack two eggs and stir it carefully, not too fast.

Revision: To make brownies, first get a bowl out of the cupboard and a wooden spoon and two eggs, and the brownie mix and preheat the oven; after preheating the oven, empty the mix into the bowl and crack two eggs and stir it carefully, not too fast.

Final: To make brownies, first get a bowl, a wooden spoon, two eggs, and the brownie mix. After preheating the oven, empty the mix into the bowl and add the eggs. Stir it carefully.

*Note: these revisions may be different from yours, and that’s okay. Be creative!*