

23 Run-Ons

1. DEFINITION

Frequently writers forget to end a thought and rush on to the next idea with only a comma or no punctuation between them. This kind of error in writing is called the *run-on* because two or more main thoughts run on without suitable punctuation at the end of the thoughts or sentences.

Pointer: The comma is not an end mark. It cannot by itself separate two sentences. **Run-On:** The book was very long, he was unable to finish it within the week. (*The comma cannot separate the two thoughts.*)

Run-On: The book was very long he was unable to finish it within the week. (*There is no end mark to separate the two thoughts.*)

2. HOW TO FIND AND FIX RUN-ONS

- Read your sentences aloud very slowly. Listen for sentence endings.
- If your voice stops and drops, use a period.
- If your voice raises, use a question mark.
- If your voice expresses strong emotion, use an exclamation mark.
- Use a capital letter to start a new sentence. *Examples:*
(1) The book was very long. (←*period*) (*capital letter* →) He was unable to finish it within the week.
(2) Was the book very long? (←*question mark*) (*capital letter* →) He was unable to finish it within the week.
(3) The book was terribly long! (←*exclamation point*) (*capital letter* →) He was unable to finish it within the week.

EXERCISES

Read these word groups aloud using the rules above. Wherever you believe a sentence ends, insert the kind of punctuation you would use and capitalize the next word. One group is correct.

1. My boss never answers the phone he always waits for me to do it.
2. Because I like my job, I do not mind staying late.
3. We rushed out for lunch then we waited ten minutes for an elevator.
4. I waited for my tax refund for several months, finally it came.
5. Did you have any trouble finding a taxi last night, you left rather late.
6. You had better slow down a sharp turn is just ahead.

3. RUN-ONS WITH SOME TROUBLESOME WORDS

- Certain words that indicate time (like *then, finally, soon, now, usually, finally*) are not sentence connectors and often cause students to write run-ons.

- Words like *here* and *there* when they start complete-thought word groups are often responsible for run-on errors.

- Words like *however, therefore, and consequently*, cause run-on problems.

If you remember those words are not sentence connectors, you will be on your guard against run-ons. Whenever you use any of those words in your own sentences, stop for a moment to see if you need a period before it.

Run-On: I waited a long time, finally he arrived.

Correct: I waited a long time. Finally he arrived.

Run-On: He laughed wildly then he stopped suddenly.

Correct: He laughed wildly. Then he stopped suddenly.

Run-On: We tried to catch the train, however, we left too late.

Correct: We tried to catch the train. However, we left too late.

EXERCISES

A. Correct the following run-on sentences by breaking them into two sentences by inserting periods and capitals.

1. There were many people at the play, therefore the actors were very excited.
2. Karen took out her notebook, however she did not use it.
3. May left her seat at the theatre, now she could go home.
4. Joanne knew she had passed the final exam, consequently she doubted that she would flunk the course.
5. She waited patiently for over an hour finally she decided to go home.
6. Kit used to be a waiter at San Marco's Restaurant now he is a successful lawyer.
7. Peter is saving his money to go on a skiing trip soon he will have enough money.
8. I dislike buying Christmas presents for my family usually the stores are crowded then I discover that I don't have enough money for all my gifts.

B. Complete the following assignments on separate paper.

1. Write two complete thoughts about waiting to get a haircut. Open the second one with *finally*.
2. Write two complete thoughts about something you do on a Friday night. Open the second with the word *then*.
3. Tell in two complete thoughts what happens if you don't train a puppy correctly. Open the second one with *therefore*.
4. Write two complete thoughts about what made you happy as a child and what makes you happy as an adult. Use *now* to open the second complete thought.
5. Write two complete thoughts about some sport you enjoy. Use *there is* or *there are* to open the second complete thought.

Run-Ons

4. RUN-ON ERRORS WITH PRONOUNS

Another common mistake is a run-on error with one of these words, all of them pronouns: *it, we, I, he, she, you, they*. If you read aloud slowly the run-ons that follow, you will see that in each run-on a complete thought ends just before the italicized pronoun.

Run-On: We reached the tall building *it* was still closed.

Correct: We reached the tall building. It was still closed.

Run-On: The snow lay thick on the ground, *we* plodded through it.

Correct: The snow lay thick on the ground. We plodded through it.

Run-On: My two brothers work at the pharmacy *they* are saving up for a car.

Correct: My two brothers work at the pharmacy. They are saving up for a car.

Reminder: Whenever you use one of the pronouns listed above, stop for a moment. Does the word start a complete thought? Does your voice stop and drop before it? If so, use a period and start the pronoun with a capital letter.

EXERCISES

A. If you find two or more complete thoughts below, put in a correct end mark and start the second sentence with a capital. If the sentence is correct write C in the margin. Change any incorrect punctuation. Look at Sentence 1.

1. Don't be late for the opening. It is a wonderful show.
2. We saw Mr. Kruger crossing Linden Avenue and called to him he didn't hear us.
3. Because of Bob's high fever, we called Dr. Schloss she came immediately.
4. Do you remember the carnival it was just moved to Seattle last week.
5. If your friends want to leave with us, they should be here before noon.

B. Complete the following on separate paper.

1. Write two complete thoughts about your favorite actress. Open the second one with *she*.
2. Write two complete thoughts about smoking cigarettes. Open the second one with *it*.
3. Write two complete thoughts about some food you like to eat. Open the second one with *I*.
4. Tell in two complete thoughts what you and your friends would do if you won a million dollars. Open the second one with *we*.
5. Explain in two complete thoughts how two eggs got broken. Open the second thought with *they*.

5. TWO OTHER WAYS TO FIX RUN-ONS

• When two thoughts are very closely related in meaning, you can use a semicolon (;) to correct the error. Do not use a capital letter for the word after the semicolon.

Run-On: We tried to catch the train, however, we left too late. **Correct:** We tried to catch the train; however, we left too late.

Run-On: He laughed wildly then he stopped suddenly.

Correct: He laughed wildly; then he stopped suddenly.

• You can join two run-ons by using one of these connectors—*and, but, for, or, nor*—if the two sentences are equal in importance.

Pointer: If you use one of the connectors to correct the run-on, *always use a comma* before the connector.

Run-On: David rushed into the park he bought a balloon for his brother. **Correct:** David rushed into the park, and he bought a balloon for his brother.

Run-On: The instructors may visit Albany they may go to Schenectady. **Correct:** The instructors may visit Albany, or they may go to Schenectady.

EXERCISES

A. Using a semicolon (if the two complete thoughts are very closely related) or one of the connectors listed above with a comma, correct these run-on errors. If the word group is correct, put a C in the margin.

1. He argued long and with feeling, the jury was not convinced.
2. The fire fighters rushed bravely into the burning tenement finally they emerged with the two crying children.
3. Everything had to be all right the sun shone through the trees giving a happy glow to the whole world.
4. The professor was not interested in my opinion, he collected his notes and hurried from the room.
5. The camera broke consequently, no pictures of the engagement party are available.

B. In the following paragraph, correct all run-on errors by any of the methods you have learned. Use each of the three methods at least once. Read the paragraph aloud and listen for sentence endings. If any word group is correct, mark it C.

Work Can Be Rewarding

- (1) One of my most rewarding jobs was working at Midway Hospital I was assigned to the children's wing.
- (2) The children ranged in age from four months to fourteen years however sometimes we also got adults when other wings were crowded.
- (3) I enjoyed feeding the younger children they were the ones who seemed so helpless.
- (4) Some of the children were eager to play some, of course, were too ill to do so.
- (5) What I liked best was getting them to laugh or at least smile that was often better for them than any other medicine.

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