How to Revise Run-on Sentences

What Is a Run-on?

Bear with me for a minute while I build up to the answer.

A subject and verb showing tense are together called a “clause.” A complete sentence has at least one “independent clause” because it has enough information to make sense on its own, without adding other clauses. When a sentence contains multiple independent clauses, the sentence structure needs punctuation and connecting words to avoid making a run-on sentence.

A run-on sentence is not just a long sentence. If it is punctuated and structured correctly, a sentence can be quite long. However, a run-on can be confusing or even accidentally say something you didn’t mean, so adding punctuation according to the sentence structure can help keep things clear for everyone.

A run-on is two or more independent clauses put together 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 clauses with *no punctuation* between them:
   
   *Ballet is a classical form of dance it has been performed for centuries.* ❌
   
   *I’m going to see my mother’s cat she had kittens.* ❌

2. **Comma Splices**—a comma alone between the complete clauses is not enough:
   
   *Ballet is a classical form of dance, it has been performed for centuries.* ❌
   
   *I’m going to see my mother’s cat, she had kittens.* ❌

So how do we revise a run-on sentence?
Revising Run-ons

Three Main Ways

When two clauses are complete, they can be punctuated in three main ways:

1. **Period [.]**—A period is placed between the two independent clauses to form two sentences. Periods make a hard break between the subjects and may make pronouns harder to understand.

   Ballet is a classical form of dance. It has been performed for centuries. *I'm going to see my mother's cat. She had kittens.*
   - The period goes between the two independent clauses.
   - Remember to capitalize the first word after the period.

2. **Semicolon [;]**—A semicolon goes between two independent clauses that are closely related. It keeps the clauses together as one sentence and can be used with or without a transitional word or phrase:

   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] also known as “coordinating conjunctions” to relate the clauses to each other:

   Ballet is a classical form of dance, **and** it has been performed for centuries. *My mother's cat had kittens, so I'm going to visit and choose one.*
More Ways to Revise Run-ons

Subordinators and Subordinating Clauses

You can turn one of the clauses into background description for the main part of the sentence by adding a subordinator, for example when, as, since, or while:

Since my mother doesn't want to keep the kittens, I'm going to choose one.

- When you add a subordinator to a clause, it becomes a subordinate clause. Now, “since my mother doesn’t want to keep the kittens” needs an independent clause to join with it to make a complete sentence.

Punctuation: Do I add a comma or not?

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

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

If the independent clause comes second, do add a comma:

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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Common Subordinators</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>after</td>
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<tr>
<td>because</td>
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<td>in case</td>
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<td>whenever</td>
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Goal: Be clear

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

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

Here’s an example of this kind of revision:
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 add the eggs. Stir it carefully.

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.

When it comes to writing, there are many possibilities!

General Tips to Avoid Run-Ons:

- If you get lost as you’re reading the sentence, so will your audience.

- Look for each subject and verb, and make sure two or more connected clauses have a subordinator and comma, or a comma and one of the FANBOYS, depending on how you want to connect them.

- If you’re not sure if you have a run-on, play it safe and separate the clauses with a period until you feel more confident about how to revise them.