bellevuecollege.edu/asc | asc@bellevuecollege.edu |

(425) 564-2200

How to Revise Run-on Sentences

What Is a Run-on?

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

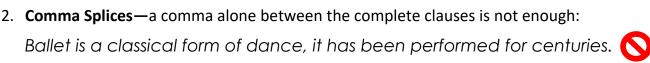
A subject and verb showing tense are together called a "clause." A complete sentence has at least one "independent clause" because it has enough information to make sense on its own, without adding other clauses. When a sentence contains multiple independent clauses, the sentence structure needs punctuation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

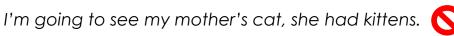
A run-on sentence is **not** just a long sentence. If it is punctuated and structured correctly, a sentence can be quite long. However, a run-on can be confusing or even accidentally say something you didn't mean, so adding punctuation according to the sentence structure can help keep things clear for 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 \bigcirc What Not to Do! \bigcirc):

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.







So how do we revise a run-on sentence?

Bellevue College does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, language, ethnicity, religion, veteran status, sex, sexual orientation, including gender identity or expression, disability, or age in its programs and activities. Please see policy 4150 at www.bellevuecollege.edu/policies/. The following people have been designated to handle inquiries regarding non-discrimination policies: Title IX Coordinator, 425-564-2641, Office C227, and EEOC/504 Compliance Officer, 425-564-2178, Office B126.

Revising Run-ons

Three Main Ways

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

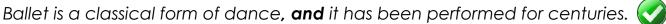
1. **Period** [.]—A period is placed between the two independent clauses to form two sentences. Periods make a hard break between the subjects and may make pronouns harder to understand.

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. Comma + FANBOYS [For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So] also known as "coordinating conjunctions" to relate the clauses to each other:





My mother's cat had kittens, **so** I'm going to visit and choose one.

3. **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.



I'm going to see my mother's cat; she had kittens.



- 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.

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.

independent clause

subordinate clause

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

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

subordinate clause

independent clause

Common Subordinators					
after	although	as long as	as soon as	as though	as/as if
because	before	even if	even though	hence	if
in case	since	so that	unless	until	when
whenever	where	wherever	whether	which	while

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; [A]fter preheating the oven, empty the mix into the bowl and crack two add the 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.

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.