

RUN-ON SENTENCES

WHAT IS A RUN-ON SENTENCE?

A run-on sentence is a sentence that contains two or more sets of subjects and verbs with no punctuation marks or misplaced marks used to split them up.

- To understand a run-on sentence, one must understand what a complete sentence is.

WHAT MAKES A COMPLETE SENTENCE?

First, a sentence contains a subject and a verb. The subject is the topic of the sentence, and the verb is the action that the subject is doing. A complete sentence contains a complete thought that can be understood without any extra or added information.

- Look at the examples below. The subject is bolded and the verb is underlined
 - Complete: The **dog** ran across the street.
 - Incomplete: Across the street the **dog**. (no verb = sentence fragment)
 - Incomplete: Ran across the street. (no subject= sentence fragment)
- Sometimes long sentences have more than one subject and verb
 - The **dog** ran across the street, and the cat followed the dog.
- The above sentence is two complete thoughts combined. They could be read separately, and the reader could make sense of each sentence on its own.
 - Full Sentence: The **dog** ran across the street.
 - Full Sentence: The **cat** followed the dog.

COMBINING SENTENCES:

It is almost always acceptable to combine sentences if they make sense read together, as they do in this case (provided the sentences are not unnecessarily long). However, there are incorrect ways to do this that make the sentence become a run-on.

- Incorrect: The **dog** ran across the street, the **cat** followed the dog.
- Incorrect: The **dog** ran across the street the **cat** followed the dog.

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- Incorrect: The **dog** ran across the street and the **cat** followed the dog.
- Correct: The **dog** ran across the street, **and** the **cat** followed the dog. (Notice how the word *and* required a comma before it in order for the sentence to be punctuated correctly.)

This next sentence looks like it should work because it uses a comma; however, to avoid a run-on sentence a comma in combination with any of the words *and*, *but*, *or*, or *so* must be used. Another option is the semicolon, which functions much like a period or a comma without the word *and*.

- Incorrect: The **dog** ran across the street, the **cat** followed the dog.
- Correct: The **dog** ran across the street, **and** the **cat** followed the dog.
- Correct: The **dog** ran across the street; the **cat** followed the dog.

COMPLICATED SENTENCES

Sometimes sentences have more than one complete thought and an incomplete thought adding information to the sentence.

- While I was out walking, a **dog** ran across the street, and a **cat** followed the dog.
- Break it down:
 - While I was out walking.
 - A dog ran across the street.
 - A cat followed the dog.
- Which of these portions of the sentence make sense on their own?

The first does not, but the last two do. Because “While I was out walking” is not a complete thought, it cannot use a semicolon, a period or a comma with *and*, *but*, *or*, or *so*. Instead of treating it as a complete sentence, treat it like a portion of the sentence that is dependent upon the part that is a complete sentence. Establish its dependence by putting a comma after the phrase is finished, as shown below.

- Possible correct options:
 - While I was out walking, a **dog** ran across the street, and a **cat** followed the dog.
 - While I was out walking, a **dog** ran across the street; a **cat** followed the dog.
 - While I was out walking, a **dog** ran across the street. A **cat** followed the dog.