

Avoiding Run-On Sentences

What is a run-on sentence?

Simply put, a run-on sentence is actually, by definition, two sentences that are “run together” without the proper punctuation to separate them. A run-on sentence, then, is actually two sentences posing as one.

Example: John ate three pieces of cake, he felt very sick afterward.

If you look at this sentence closely, you will see that it has two distinct and complete thoughts: “John ate three pieces of cake” is a complete sentence that can stand alone as an independent thought, and so is “He felt very sick afterward.” Therefore, we can tell that the above “sentence” is actually two sentences. There should be some kind of punctuation between the words “cake” and “he”; however, since there isn’t, it’s a run-on!

Now that you know there should be punctuation at a specific place,
look at the example this way:

John ate three pieces of cake he felt very sick afterward.

Note that this is precisely the same group of words as appears above; the only difference is the box. There must be some kind of punctuation in the box above in order to correct this run-on sentence situation. There are three different ways of correcting situations like these. They are:

1. Use end punctuation (period/question mark/exclamation point) and capitalize the first letter of the next sentence. *This method creates two different sentences and is used most often in writing.*
2. Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (one of the FANBOYS – for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so). *The result of this method is one sentence with two complete thoughts that are separated by a comma and a conjunction.*
3. Use a semicolon (;). *The result of this method is the same result as that of method number 2.*

There is also a fourth method, called *subordination*: you can also use a “dependent word” (or “subordinating conjunction”) to make one of the sentences *dependent* on the other one. In the example above, you can put the word “because” at the start of the sentence and a comma after the word “cake.” Now, the word group “Because John ate three pieces of cake” is *dependent* on the rest of the sentence

("he felt very sick afterward") to make sense. See the box below for a list of common dependent words.

COMMON DEPENDENT WORDS

OH YEAH . . . WHAT IS A "COMMA SPLICE"?

A "comma splice" results when you choose method number 2 above but forget to include the conjunction. In other words, using a comma *alone* is *not* a proper way of separating complete sentences. It is half-way to an acceptable method, but it is not a complete method in itself. You can avoid comma splices as long as you remember that a *comma cannot separate complete sentences by itself*. If you choose to use a comma, don't forget to use of the coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS) too!