Run-on Sentences

A run-on sentence is also known as a fused sentence. Think of these terms as synonyms. The simplest definition of this grammatical error is that it is a sentence that doesn’t stop where it should. A sentence can “stop” in various ways. The most common type of stop is a period, but semicolons and commas are also punctuation marks that signal a stop. Keeping this mind, we can now further develop our definition of a run-on / fused sentence to be that it is a sentence that lacks a period, semicolon, or comma and because of that it doesn’t stop where it should.

Here’s an example: The hurricane intensified it turned toward land. The place where this sentence doesn’t stop, or runs-on and is fused, is between the words “intensified” and “it.” The way to correct this error is to place a period, or semicolon between those two words:

The hurricane intensified. It turned toward land.

The hurricane intensified; it turned toward land.

You can also correct the sentence by adding a comma and a conjunction, but before we move onto that let’s define a run-on/ fused sentence in a more technical manner. Let’s define it as a grammatical error that results when two independent clauses are not separated by punctuation or the use of a conjunction. Let’s quickly review three terms from the above definition, independent clause, punctuation, and conjunction.

An independent clause is a complete sentence. Think of it as a sentence that can stand on its own. So in our example we have two independent clauses: The hurricane intensified and It turned toward land. Both of these clauses have a subject—“hurricane” and “it”—and verbs that clearly express an action—“intensified” and “turned.”

Punctuation simply means the marks—periods, semicolons, and commas—that separate sentences and clauses. Notice how in our example—The hurricane intensified it turned toward land.—punctuation is missing in the middle of the sentence.

Before we move on and correct our sentence using a comma we have to define a conjunction. A conjunction is a word that connect clauses, phrases, and other words to each other. If you identify a run-on / fused sentence in your own writing and you decide to correct it using a comma, you must also use, along with the comma, a conjunction. Using a conjunction is necessary because without it your sentence will contain a new error, a comma splice. A comma splice occurs when a comma by itself joins two independent clauses. If we place a comma between the two independent clauses of our example sentence, we will have a comma splice: The hurricane intensified, it turned toward land. If, however, along with the comma, we add the coordinating conjunction “and”, we will have corrected the run-on and avoided the comma splice. The hurricane intensified, and it turned toward land.

Quick Review of ways to correct a run-on / fused sentence, while avoiding a comma splice:

The hurricane intensified. It turned toward land. [period]
The hurricane intensified; it turned toward land. [semicolon]
The hurricane intensified, and it turned toward land. [comma and coordinating conjunction]
As the hurricane intensified, it turned toward land. [the first independent clause revised into a dependent clause.]

The hurricane intensified as it turned toward land. [the second independent clause revised into a dependent clause]

The hurricane intensified; then it turned toward land. [semicolon and conjunctive adverb]

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Practice 1

*Revise any comma splices or fused sentences by using a period, a semicolon, or a comma and coordinating conjunction. If an item is correct, mark a “C” next to it.*

Today cattle rustling remain a thriving business, it does not depend on horses and cowboys.

Modern rustlers are a far cry from their Old West predecessors they use helicopters instead of horses.

Some cattle thieves even use computers, this modern technology helps them steal more than $30 million worth of livestock per year.

Ranchers try to fight back, often by offering money for information, they also hire guards to patrol grazing land from airplanes.

Like the rustlers, ranchers take advantage of modern technology, some of them “brand” their cattle by implanting electronic computer chips which can be detected by portable sensors.

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Practice 2

*Revise any comma splices or fused sentences.*

Some legendary creatures such as leprechauns and vampires are strictly imaginary they cannot be accounted for by science. One fabled creature likely can be explained by reality, however, the facts have been distorted through the centuries. Unicorns are probably based on mountain goats viewed from far away. Goats sometimes lose a horn during a fight or in an accident, from a distance, the remaining horn appears to centered on the goat’s head/ Another creature, the zombie, has origins in the old West Indian superstitions, it can be explained by recent research on a fish common to West Indian waters. A zombie is supposedly a human corpse it roams around in a trance-like state ready to do the will of someone who has the power over it. Pufferfish, also known as blowfish, contain a potent toxin that paralyzes nerves if the fish is cooked improperly, then a person who eats the fish act like the traditional “living dead.”