

## Run-on Sentences

This resource is designed for English Language Learners (ELLs) who require assistance in a particular academic skill. Each handout provides brief explanations related to different core skills (reading, writing, listening, and/or speaking), and it offers some simple examples of mistakes and how these might be corrected.

While these handouts are designed primarily for ELL students, anyone seeking to improve their writing may find these documents useful. Check out the links at the end of the handout for more resources.

### What is a Run-on Sentence?

A **run-on sentence** is incorrectly joined by two or more independent clauses without any punctuation or conjunction.

<https://writingcenter.gmu.edu/guides/run-on-sentences>

#### Example:

✗ I finished washing the dishes it was too late to cook a meal I just reheated a frozen pizza in the oven I left it inside the oven for too long it got burnt I was hungry I ate it anyway.

This run-on sentence connects a series of ideas badly. The sentence is too long, difficult to understand and lacks logic. It is confusing as readers do not know where one sentence starts and another one ends.

The run-on sentence is actually many short sentences run together. The term “**independent clauses**” is used to refer to those short sentences.

An **independent clause** (also known as **main clause**) is a complete sentence, containing a subject and a verb and expresses a complete thought.

<https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/Students/Writing-Speaking-Guides/Alphabetical-List-of-Guides/Punctuation/Sentence-Types-Clauses>

#### Example:

Mary was sick

**Independent clause**

she did not go to her friend’s party yesterday.

**Independent clause**

The run-on sentences can be fixed by using punctuation and **coordinating conjunctions**.

**Coordinating conjunctions** join two equally important parts of the sentence. You can use the coordinating conjunctions, such as *so, yet, but, and, or, nor, for*.  
<https://www.bbc.com/bitesize/articles/z9wvqhv>

**Example:**

I finished washing the dishes, **and** it was too late to cook a meal. I just reheated a frozen pizza in the oven **but** I left it inside the oven for too long. It got burnt **but** I was hungry, so I ate it anyway.

**Four ways to fix a run-on sentence**

**1. Separate the independent clauses with a period**

- ✗ Mary was sick she did not go to her friend’s party yesterday.
- ✓ Mary was sick. She did not go to her friend’s party yesterday.

**2. Separate the independent clauses with a semicolon**

A semicolon is used to connect two independent clauses that have very similar topics. It works similarly to a period.

- ✗ Mary was sick she did not go to her friend’s party yesterday.
- ✓ Mary was sick; she did not go to her friend’s party yesterday.

**3. Insert a comma and add a coordinating conjunction**

- ✗ Mary was sick she did not go to her friend’s party yesterday.
- ✓ Mary was sick, so she did not go to her friend’s party yesterday.

**Turn one of the independent clauses into a subordinate one**

To turn the independent clause into a **subordinate clause** (also known as **dependent clause**), it needs to begin with a **subordinate conjunction**.

A **subordinate clause** (also known as **dependent clause**) is a group of words that contains a subject and a verb but does not express a complete thought. A subordinate clause cannot be an independent sentence. For example, "**because** he does not travel" is not a complete sentence. Often a subordinate clause is marked by a **subordinating conjunction** such as the marker “because” in the above example.

<https://www.nmu.edu/writingcenter/independentdependent-clauses>

**Examples:**

- ✗ Mary was sick she did not go to her friend's party yesterday.
- ✓ **Since** Mary was sick, she did not go to her friend's party yesterday.

A **subordinating conjunction** is a word that connects a dependent clause to an independent clause, such as *when*, *while*, *before*, *after*, *although*, *as*, *since*.

<https://www.bbc.com/bitesize/articles/zqk37p3>

## Practice Exercises:

**Fix each of the following run-on sentences by separating the independent clauses with a period:**

1. Gary found the old coin in a far corner of the park it was hidden beneath a bench.
2. I was so surprised at the weather in Canada I expected it to be hot by the month of May.

**Fix each of the following run-on sentences by separating the independent clauses with a semicolon:**

3. The movie we saw was too boring I fell asleep after the first half hour.
4. Reading is a skill you can learn practice every day and you can get faster.

**Fix each of the following run-on sentences by adding a comma and a coordinating conjunction.**

5. We walked to the coffee shop we drank one of the best lattes I've ever had.
6. I hurt my hand at the gym I had to stop typing for a few days.

**Fix the run-on sentence by turning one of the independent clauses into a subordinate one and separating them with a comma.**

7. The bicycle was too big the little girl had trouble riding it.
8. The days are so short in the winter I have to get up earlier to see more daylight.

**Fix these run-on sentences by using some of the techniques above:**

9. The volleyball player caught the volleyball he threw it to another player. The player missed it and the ball bounced the referee did not see it so the game continued. The referee shouted the player was so startled that he fell over.
10. I did not get a haircut for months my hair was really long I made an appointment at the hair salon. I gave the hair stylist my phone with a photo of the hair style I wanted she began looking through all of my photos I was so embarrassed!

**Answers:**

1. Gary found the old coin in a far corner of the park. It was hidden beneath a bench.
2. I was so surprised at the weather in Canada. I expected it to be hot by the month of May.
3. The movie we saw was too boring; I fell asleep after the first half hour.
4. Reading is a skill you can learn; practice every day and you can get faster.
5. We walked to the coffee shop, **and** we drank one of the best lattes I've ever had.
6. I hurt my hand at the gym, **so** I had to stop typing for a few days.
7. **Since** the bicycle was too big, the little girl had trouble riding it.
8. **When** the days are so short in the winter, I have to get up earlier to see more daylight.
9. The volleyball player caught the volleyball, **and** he threw it to another player. The player missed it and the ball bounced, **but** the referee did not see it, so the game continued. **When** the referee shouted, the player was so startled that he fell over.
10. **Since** I did not get a haircut for months, my hair was really long. I made an appointment at the hair salon. I gave the hair stylist my phone with a photo of the hair style I wanted, **and** she began looking through all of my photos. I was so embarrassed!

**More resources for run-on sentences****Run-on sentences – Writing Centre, Missouri State University**

<https://writingcenter.missouristate.edu/assets/WritingCenter/runonsentences.pdf>

**Grammar handbook: Fused sentences, run-ons, and comma splices – Writing Centre, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign**

<http://www.cws.illinois.edu/workshop/writers/fusedsentences/>

**Run-on sentences – Faculty of Arts, Bristol University**

[http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar\\_tutorial/page\\_37.htm](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/arts/exercises/grammar/grammar_tutorial/page_37.htm)

Develop your academic language, improve your academic skills, and get a Co-Curricular Record notation. Attend the Professional English Language Skills (PELS) workshops:

<https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/professional-english-language-skills-pels>

Get feedback on your writing and discuss your thought process. Book an appointment with an instructor: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/appointments-undergraduate>.

**Looking for more learning strategies?** Visit us at: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/>.