COMMA SPLICES & RUN-ON SENTENCES

Your instructor or a friend may have marked in the margins of your draft "comma splice" or "run-on," but what do those phrases mean? Simply put, both comma splices and run-ons are mechanical errors in the way parts of a sentence are connected.

Identifying Comma Splices & Run-On Sentences:

- Identifying Independent & Dependent Clauses
  - To understand how to identify comma splices and run-ons, you first need to be able to identify the difference between independent and dependent clauses. An independent clause is a clause (a kind of grammatical unit) that contains the essential parts of a sentence: it has a subject and a verb, and could be a sentence on its own. Consider the following sentence.
    - I went to the store on Friday, but I forgot to buy milk.
      - In this sentence, there are two independent clauses. "I went to the store on Friday" and "I forgot to buy milk" could each be grammatical sentences on their own, so they are independent clauses.
  - Dependent clauses, on the other hand, cannot be sentences by themselves. Dependent clauses contain a subject and a verb, but they become dependent because they are introduced with a subordinating conjunction—a word that makes them dependent. Consider the following two sentences.
    - Because I forgot to buy milk, I had to go back to the store.
    - I miss class whenever I oversleep.
      - The clauses "Because I forgot to buy milk" and "whenever I oversleep" both contain subjects and verbs, but they cannot be sentences on their own: they do not express complete thoughts.

- Identifying Comma Splices & Run-On Sentences
  - Comma splices and run-on sentences occur when independent clauses are not punctuated properly or are not joined by a conjunction. Two independent clauses must either be two separate sentences, be rephrased so that one clause is dependent, or be joined by a) a comma and a conjunction (like *and* or *but*) OR b) a semicolon (;) OR c) a colon.
    - Comma Splice: I went to the store on Friday, I forgot to buy milk.
    - Run-on: I went to the store on Friday and I forgot to buy milk.
    - I went to the store on Friday I forgot to buy milk.
  - If you think you are having trouble with comma splices and run-ons, read through at least one page of your paper with a highlighter or pen and highlight or underline every independent clause. If you aren't sure whether a clause is independent, read it aloud. Ask yourself, "Could this clause be a sentence by itself?"

- o After you have identified the independent clauses, look at how they are joined together. Have you chosen one of the three punctuation options (comma + conjunction, semicolon, or colon) to connect them or made them into two separate sentences? Remember that the comma and conjunction must both be used if you choose that option. Two independent clauses joined with only a comma create a comma splice; two independent clauses joined with only a conjunction or with nothing at all create a run-on.

- Correcting Comma Splices & Run-On Sentences
    - o Once you have identified a comma splice or a run-on sentence, remember that there are five ways to fix it.

Independent Clause 1	Connector	Independent Clause 2	Explanation
I love dogs	.	My friend hates them.	Make the independent clauses into two sentences.
I love dogs	, but	my friend hates them.	Use both a comma and a conjunction to join two independent clauses. Some other conjunction options are *and, or, nor, for, so, yet*.
I love dogs	;	my friend hates them.	Use a semicolon to join two independent clauses.
I love dogs	: *use this option rarely	my friend hates them.	When the content of the second clause is directly related to the first and you want to emphasize the second clause, use a colon to join the two clauses.
Although I love dogs	,	my friend hates them.	Make one independent clause dependent by adding a subordinating conjunction (*although, after, when, if, because, even though, since, while, though, unless, until, whenever*)

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