

MAJOR GRAMMATICAL ERRORS: RUN-ON SENTENCES

According to Diana Hacker, author of the best-selling *A Pocket Style Manual*, “An independent clause is a word group that does or could stand alone as a sentence.”

Usually, an independent clause can be recognized by its three major components:

- 1) Subject: the noun (person, place, or thing) that is doing the action of the verb
- 2) Verb: the word that shows action *or* a state of being (in the second type, verbs related to the verb “to be,” e.g. “is,” “are,” “am,” “will be,” etc.)
- 3) Completed thought or action.

In a well-crafted sentence, these three components appear in the 1 2 3 order.

Sample sentence #1: The dog jumped through the hoop.

In sample sentence #1, “The dog” is the subject, “jumped” is the verb, and “through the hoop” is the completed action.

Sample sentence #2: We are in the lobby of the West Side Terminal.

In sample sentence #2, “We” is the subject, “are” is the verb (state of being), and “in the lobby of the West Side Terminal” is the completed thought.

Now let’s look at two types of **run-on** sentences. The first type is the comma splice.

Comma Splice: Two independent clauses joined by a comma

Sample sentence #1: Three professors came to the conference, they spent their time reading the *Daily News*.

In sample sentence #1, there are two independent clauses. In the first one, “Professors” is the subject, “came” is the verb, and “to the conference” is the completed action. In the second independent clause, “they” is the subject, “spent” is the verb, and “their time reading the *Daily News*” is the completed action.

Because this sentence contains two independent clauses joined by a comma, there is a comma splice. This is a major grammatical error which can be corrected in four different ways:

Put a period between the two independent clauses: Three professors came to the conference. They spent their time reading the *Daily News*.

Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction: Three professors came to the conference, and they spent their time reading the *Daily News*.

Use a semicolon if the two independent clauses are *closely related*: Three professors came to the conference; they spent their time reading the *Daily News*.

Restructure the sentence (in this case, by making the first clause dependent): After the three professors came to the conference, they spent their time reading the *Daily News*.

Sample sentence #2: The bar owner has lost money because of the smoking ban, he hopes to recoup his losses by next month.

In sample sentence #2, there are two independent clauses. In the first one, “The bar owner” is the subject, “has lost” is the verb, and “money because of the smoking ban” is the completed thought. In the second independent clause, “he” is the subject, “hopes” is the verb, and “to recoup his losses by next month” is the completed thought.

As in the first sample sentence, this comma splice can be corrected using any one of the above four strategies.

The second type of run-on sentence is the fused sentence.

Fused Sentence: Two independent clauses without any coordinating conjunction or punctuation between them

Sample sentence #1: Three professors came to the conference they spent their time reading the *Daily News*.

Because this sentence contains two independent clauses without any coordinating conjunction or punctuation between them, it is a fused sentence. This is a major grammatical error which can be corrected in four different ways:

Put a period between the two independent clauses: Three professors came to the conference. They spent their time reading the *Daily News*.

Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction: Three professors came to the conference, and they spent their time reading the *Daily News*.

Use a semicolon if the two independent clauses are *closely related*: Three professors came to the conference; they spent their time reading the *Daily News*.

Restructure the sentence (in this case, by making the first clause dependent): After the three professors came to the conference, they spent their time reading the *Daily News*.

Sample sentence #2: The bar owner has lost money because of the smoking ban he hopes to recoup his losses by next month .

As in the first sample sentence, this fused sentence can be corrected using any one of the above four strategies.

NOTE: For more writing resources, see the forum "Writing: Tools & Strategies" at <http://www.iDiscourse.com>.

