The Compound Sentence:
Correcting Run-ons and Comma Splices

Run-on sentences and comma splices confuse readers by eliminating natural pauses and necessary words. By turning your run-ons and comma splices into compound sentences, you will greatly improve the readability of your writing.

Understanding Clauses

A **clause** is comprised of at least one subject and one verb. An **independent clause** makes a statement or asks a question that can act as a complete sentence; it does not begin with a subordinating word, such as *when*, *if*, *because*, *whoever*, etc. Run-ons and comma splices combine these independent clauses incorrectly by eliminating the necessary coordinating conjunction (*for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, or, *yet*, or *so*) and/or punctuation mark.

Identifying Run-Ons and Comma Splices

Run-On Sentences

A run-on sentence occurs when two independent clauses are joined without a conjunction or punctuation mark to separate them:

> The solution exploded the student rushed to the emergency eye wash station.
>
> > *Clause #1: The solution exploded*
> > *Clause #2: The student rushed to the emergency eye wash station*
>
> Sam yanked the cord the lawnmower growled to life.
>
> > *Clause #1: Sam yanked the cord*
> > *Clause #2: The lawnmower growled to life*

Comma Splices

A comma splice occurs when two independent clauses are joined only by a comma:

> The anthropologist typed her field notes, she lost her laptop to the piranhas.
>
> > *Clause #1: The anthropologist typed her field notes*
> > *Clause #2: She lost her computer to the piranhas*
>
> The chef winced as he sampled his gazpacho, it was too bland.
>
> > *Clause #1: The chef winced as he sampled his gazpacho*
> > *Clause #2: It was too bland*

Identifying Compound Sentences

A compound sentence is made up of two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction (*for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, or *so*) and a comma or by a semicolon alone:

> The solution exploded**, *so*** the student rushed to the emergency eye wash station.
>
> Sam yanked the cord**;** the lawnmower growled to life.
>
> The anthropologist typed her field notes**, *but*** she lost her laptop to the piranhas.
>
> The chef winced as he sampled his gazpacho**;** it was too bland.

Exercise

Part One Read the following example paragraph. Note all run-ons and comma splices, and use what you know about compound sentences to revise them.

Pirates of the ancient Greco-Roman world are rarely romanticized. In fact, they are usually forgotten altogether they did pose a serious threat to ancient Mediterranean cultures. Most Greco-Roman pirates were not employed solely as pirates. They were merchants, farmers, and fishermen, they often sailed on day trips to pillage neighboring villages. In short, they were opportunistic sailors who used piracy as a means of supporting their families. However, piracy was not highly regarded in the Greco-Roman world, and many rulers tried to eliminate all piratical activity in the Mediterranean. Most attempts were futile in 67 B.C.E., the Roman general Pompey led a sweeping campaign against a bevy of active pirate bases and nearly wiped out Mediterranean piracy entirely. However, pirates remained. Eradicating piracy in the Greco-Roman world was a top priority for many rulers; nevertheless, pirates endured, they plundered, pillaged, and continued to terrorize towns and villages.

Part Two Now, pair up the independent clauses below with a coordinating conjunction and a comma--or a semicolon alone--to make five compound sentences.

My elephant has the flu   Frida wanders aimlessly in the garden

The woods are very peaceful   The local zookeeper is sickly

She enjoys identifying insects   The black rain clouds look menacing

They dropped the table   A malicious badger is hiding in the trees

Gordon and I are planning a picnic   The movers tripped over the dog's leash