

SEM Education Winter Session

Run-ons

Most students think they know what a run-on is based on their 6th grade English class. So when I ask students whether the following is a run-on sentence, almost all students say yes:

I took the SATs, and I scored a 36, and I applied to MIT, and I got in!

Now this sentence may be long, wordy, and awkward, but the sentence is actually NOT a run-on sentence—it's grammatically correct. The reason it's correct is the use of the word *and*, which connects all the parts together.

I took the SATs, I scored a 36, I applied to MIT, I got in!

Now this IS a run-on sentence because several **complete sentences are being mashed together with just commas**.

The basic form of a run-on is this:



A run-on also occurs when there is nothing between the two complete sentences:

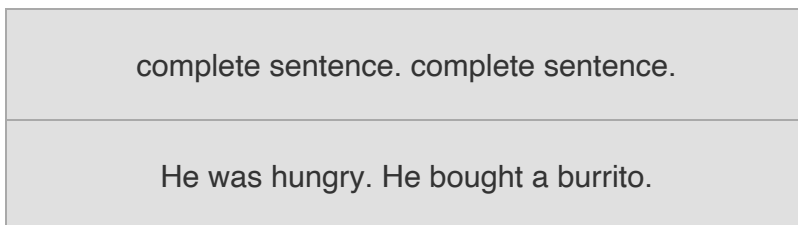


There are four main ways to fix a run-on. Let's go over them one by one with a simple run-on example:

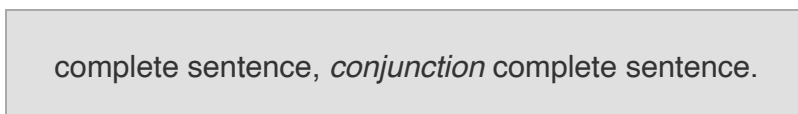
He was hungry, he bought a Chipotle burrito.

Two complete sentences connected only by a comma—definitely a run-on that needs to be fixed.

1. Use periods:



2. Use a conjunction



He was hungry, **so** he bought a burrito.

Note that a comma, if necessary, comes **before** the conjunction (we'll learn more about commas in a future chapter). Most students have learned the acronym FANBOYS to memorize the list of conjunctions:

For	And	Nor	But	Or	Yet	So
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Memorize this list because it's super important.

Now here's a really important point: if two sentences are connected by a word that's not from the FANBOYS list, IT'S STILL A RUN-ON. This is how the SAT tricks you:

He was hungry, **therefore**, he bought a Chipotle burrito.

This sentence is wrong because *therefore* is not a conjunction—it's not a member of FANBOYS. Instead, it's a transition word pretending to be a conjunction. Other words the SAT might use include *however*, *moreover*, *in addition to*, *nevertheless*, and *furthermore*. These words cannot be used as conjunctions.

3. Use the semicolon ;

complete sentence; complete sentence.

He was hungry; he bought a burrito.

Semicolons are the simplest way to edit run-ons, but in everyday speaking and writing, conjunctions are more common because they better express how two connected sentences are related. The SAT will test you on both ways. Note that this is also correct:

He was hungry; therefore, he bought a Chipotle burrito.

But this one is INCORRECT:

He was hungry; and he bought a Chipotle burrito.

Do not use both a conjunction and a semicolon. **Semicolons require complete sentences on either side.** By putting in a conjunction, the second part is no longer a complete sentence.

4. Change the wording so that you no longer have two complete sentences

This last method encompasses a number of run-on fixes. The best way will usually depend on the sentence we're working with. We'll go over the most common ways of revising the wording.

A. Dependent clause

incomplete sentence, complete sentence.

Because he was hungry, he bought a burrito.

By inserting *because* in front, the first half is no longer a complete sentence, and we're no longer mashing two complete sentences together. As a result, we don't need anything more than the comma. *Because he was hungry* is a **dependent clause—it doesn't make sense by itself**. An **independent clause** is just another term for a complete sentence or thought like *he bought a Chipotle burrito*. **It makes sense by itself**. A dependent clause with an independent clause is not a run-on and therefore does not require a conjunction or a semicolon.

When it comes to rewording the burrito example, using a dependent clause turns out to be the best solution, but let's take a look at some examples where other solutions work better.

B. Relative clause (*who, which, that*)

Example 1	
Wrong:	The teacher yelled at Alicia, she had left her homework at home.
Correct:	The teacher yelled at Alicia, who had left her homework at home.
Example 2	
Wrong:	The hackers copied the company's central databases, these contain sensitive data on customers.
Correct:	The hackers copied the company's central databases, which contain sensitive data on customers.

C. A noun phrase set off by commas

Example 3	
Wrong:	Yesterday, Russia deployed troops on the border, this is a clear violation of the peace agreement.

Correct:	Yesterday, Russia deployed troops on the border, a clear violation of the peace agreement.
Example 4	
Wrong:	The Burj Khalifa is the tallest building in the world, it attracts thousands of tourists each year.
Correct:	The Burj Khalifa is the tallest building in the world, attracting thousands of tourists each year.

D. Modifier

Example 5	
Wrong:	People named it after inventor Nikola Tesla, the tesla coil is used in radio transmitters and electrotherapy.
Correct:	Named after inventor Nikola Tesla, the tesla coil is used in radio transmitters and electrotherapy.
Example 6	
Wrong:	He is reflecting on the meaning of life, Henry tried to find philosophical answers to life's problems.
Correct:	Reflecting on the meaning of life, Henry tried to find philosophical answers to life's problems.

E. Use *and* to join verbs

Example 7	
Wrong:	James turned up the music, he danced like there was no tomorrow.
Correct:	James turned up the music and danced like there was no tomorrow.

Let's recap what we've learned so far with some examples that are revised in several different ways.

Example 8	
Wrong:	You should memorize the list of conjunctions, it will help immensely on the SAT.
Correct:	You should memorize the list of conjunctions, for it will help immensely on the SAT.
Correct:	You should memorize the list of conjunctions; it will help immensely on the SAT.
Correct:	You should memorize the list of conjunctions because it will help immensely on the SAT.

As a side note, the conjunction *for* is rarely used in conversation.

Example 9	
Wrong:	I love the game of basketball, however, I don't play it myself.
Correct:	I love the game of basketball, but I don't play it myself.
Correct:	I love the game of basketball; however, I don't play it myself.
Correct:	I love the game of basketball, even though I don't play it myself.

After reading the third correct version, you might be wondering why *even though* is correct and *however* is incorrect. What's the difference? Well, with *however*, you still have two independent clauses on either side of the comma. With *even though*, you have an independent clause with a dependent clause, which is not a run-on:

Wrong:	I love the game of basketball,	however, I don't play it myself.
	Independent clause	Independent clause
Fine:	I love the game of basketball,	even though I don't play it myself.
	Independent clause	Dependent clause

Example 10	
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Wrong:	Nightmares keep me awake at night; yet I oddly feel energized in the morning.
Correct:	Nightmares keep me awake at night; however, I oddly feel energized in the morning.
Correct:	Nightmares keep me awake at night, yet I oddly feel energized in the morning.
Correct:	Although nightmares keep me awake at night, I oddly feel energized in the morning.

Again, don't use semicolons and conjunctions (like *yet* in this example) together. Semicolons require two complete sentences on either side.

Example 11	
Wrong:	One of my idols is Michael Jackson, he was one of the best performers of his time.
Correct:	One of my idols is Michael Jackson, who was one of the best performers of his time.
Correct:	One of my idols is Michael Jackson, one of the best performers of his time.

The first correct version uses a relative clause. The second uses a noun phrase.

Example 12	
Wrong:	When I try to go to sleep, nightmares keep me awake at night, after brushing my teeth, I oddly feel energized in the morning.
Correct:	When I try to go to sleep, nightmares keep me awake at night, yet after brushing my teeth, I oddly feel energized in the morning.
Correct:	When I try to go to sleep, nightmares keep me awake at night; after brushing my teeth, however, I oddly feel energized in the morning.

Despite all the clauses in example 12, we have two complete thoughts being mashed together:

1. When I try to go to sleep, nightmares keep me awake at night.
2. After brushing my teeth, I oddly feel energized in the morning.

The SAT will try to trick you in this way by putting in a lot of relative clauses and comma phrases to keep you from realizing something's a run-on. When that happens, read carefully and look for where a complete thought ends and where another one begins.

Reminder 1

If there's already a conjunction or if we're not connecting two complete sentences in the first place, then there's NO error. For example:

Although the plan was perfect, the clumsy criminals, who by now would have been millionaires, are locked in jail cells, slowly waiting out their sentences.

Looking at where the commas are, at no point are we trying to combine two complete sentences on either side, so the sentence is perfectly fine.

Reminder 2

Never use more than one way of correcting a run-on within the same sentence. Don't use a semicolon with a conjunction. Don't use a conjunction with a dependent clause, etc. The following examples are all incorrect:

- Jerry ran away last summer; and I haven't seen him since.
- Even though the coffee in Rome is amazing, but I still like Starbucks coffee more.
- Every year my brother visits New York City; which he considers the greatest city in the world.
- Henry tripped over the rock, and falling head first into the water.
- Running through the finish line, and Donna leaped for joy.

1. The idea of a "global village" is fast becoming a reality in the 21st century, it is vital that we enlarge our worldview and understand the cultures of other nations.
A) NO CHANGE
B) century, with it being vital
C) century, making it vital
D) century, with the result being vital
2. However, developed biomedical methods such as cloning are controversial, in fact, 93% of all Americans op- pose cloning.
A) NO CHANGE
B) controversial, and in fact,
C) controversial, which shows that
D) controversial, indeed,
3. Environmentalists have worked hard to rid the river of toxic chemicals, but the population of fish still hasn't recovered to previous levels.
A) NO CHANGE
B) chemicals; but
C) chemicals,
D) chemicals, however,
4. One of the foods Korea is famous for is bibimbap, this is a mix of vegetables over rice served in a hot stone bowl.
A) NO CHANGE
B) which is
C) it is
D) that being

5. It is praised as Tarantino's greatest accomplishment, the movie *Pulp Fiction* interlaces several stories of seemingly unrelated incidents.
- A) NO CHANGE
 - B) Praised as
 - C) People praise it as
 - D) It is

- 1. C
- 2. B
- 3. A
- 4. B
- 5. B