

[Transcript]**Run-on sentences**

What's a really good way to throw people off-track?

Well, a great way is to not make it clear to them where your sentences stop.

These are technically known as run-on sentences (though we like to think of them as runaway sentences.)

The term sounds like it means a sentence that just goes on and on and on - and sometimes they do.

But length isn't actually the issue.

No.

A run-on sentence is a common grammatical error you make one by not using the right punctuation. **X**

Whoops - there's one now.

Specifically, a run-on sentence is where two or more main clauses are joined together without the right punctuation or joining word.

You can tell we actually have two main clauses here because each part could stand alone as a separate sentence.

So, what's the big deal?

Well, like any grammatical mistake, they don't look good ... and that means, if you write them, you don't look good.

It's sad, but true: your reader may just judge you harshly if they think you can't keep your sentences under control.

And run-on sentences can lead astray even the most forgiving readers.

That's because we all rely on cues within writing to smoothly take in what it means.

When we read, we build up meaning one section at a time: each word affects how we understand the ones that come after it.

And punctuation marks also act as signals that tell you where the sentence is going.

Think of them like railway signals: they keep your reader on the right track.

But when one main clause comes straight after another without these signs, then your reader could easily be derailed.

When you need to fix a run-on sentence, a comma on its own won't help.

A comma can do many, many things, but joining together two main clauses? Uh-uh. It's not strong enough.

In fact, doing this creates a particular kind of run-on sentence called a comma splice.

But never fear. Here are three easy ways to fix any run-on sentence.

The first is the good old full stop (or period). You simply put one after the first main clause and start the next main clause with a capital letter. Done.

This approach works best when the sentences are not closely related in meaning. But it can sound a bit choppy and disjointed, especially if you use it too often.

Maybe you want to show that there is some connection between the two parts. In that case, you could go with option two: the semicolon.

A semicolon shows the two parts are linked in some way.

But you might want to make it clear exactly how they relate to each other.

This brings us to option 3: a comma plus a coordinating conjunction.

Hang on a second. What the heck is a 'coordinating conjunction'?!

Although this could be an unfamiliar and scary-sounding grammar term, the words it refers to are more like old friends. They're a set of joining words.

You can remember them using the acronym FANBOYS.

This stands for FOR, AND, NOR, BUT, OR, YET and SO.

The joining word you pick will make the relationship between the main clauses clear.

So, now you know how to spot AND fix a run-on sentence, you can be sure of always keeping your writing on the right track.