Identifying Run-Ons and Comma Splices

A run-on, or fused, sentence is actually two or more sentences all crammed together without the proper connective punctuation. Note: There is a difference between a sentence that is grammatically a run-on and a complex sentence that is correctly punctuated, but long and unwieldy nevertheless. A comma splice is basically a run-on sentence that is improperly connected with only a comma.

- **Example One:** I had watched the news. I knew what I was up against on the morning of September 24, 2002.
  - *Unlinked, simple sentences*

- **Example Two:** Peer tutoring relies on this fundamental principle sometimes learning to fix comma splices and awkward sentences "clicks" when explained one-on-one by someone who isn't the teacher.
  - *Run-on*

- **Example Three:** Perl makes interesting observations about recursiveness and its tendency to interrupt the writing process; her notes on the implications of a tabula rasa approach to teaching students with deeply internalized (but nevertheless problematic) processes seem very perceptive.
  - *Correctly punctuated, but this complex sentence may seem unwieldy*

- **Example Four:** Peer tutors are not trained counselors; they generally have no experience with psychology and are not equipped to offer therapy to their students.
  - *Comma splice*

**Strategy for Identifying Run-On Sentences and Comma Splices**

Make up a "yes/no" question about the questionable sentence--that is, either put "do/did" in front of the sentence or move "is/was" to the front. An acceptable sentence will yield one yes/no question. Run-on sentences or comma splices will create two yes/no questions. If your sentence creates two yes/no questions, you should split the sentence into two.

*Examples:*

- **Malcolm X was arrested for robbery in 1961.**
  - Was Malcolm X arrested for robbery in 1961?
  - *Can be answered yes/no, and therefore an independent clause*

- **The children in Camden are forced to go to schools that most Americans would never want to send their children they are over-populated and understaffed.**
  - Are the children in Camden forced to go to schools that most Americans would never want to send their children?
  - Are they over-populated and understaffed?
  - *(Creates two yes/no questions, and therefore a run-on)*

Once you have determined how many independent clauses you are working with, then you can choose proper punctuation to link those clauses together.