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.