

## Recognizing and revising run-on sentences

Run-on sentences are independent clauses that have not been joined correctly. An independent clause is a word group that can stand alone as a sentence. When two independent clauses appear in one sentence, they must be joined in one of these ways:

- with a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*)
- with a semicolon (or occasionally with a colon or a dash)

### Recognizing run-on sentences

There are two types of run-on sentences. When a writer puts no mark of punctuation and no coordinating conjunction between independent clauses, the result is called a *fused sentence*.

**FUSED** INDEPENDENT CLAUSE Gestures are a means of communication for everyone

INDEPENDENT CLAUSE they are essential for the hearing-impaired.

A far more common type of run-on sentence is the *comma splice* — two or more independent clauses joined by a comma without a coordinating conjunction. In some comma splices, the comma appears alone.

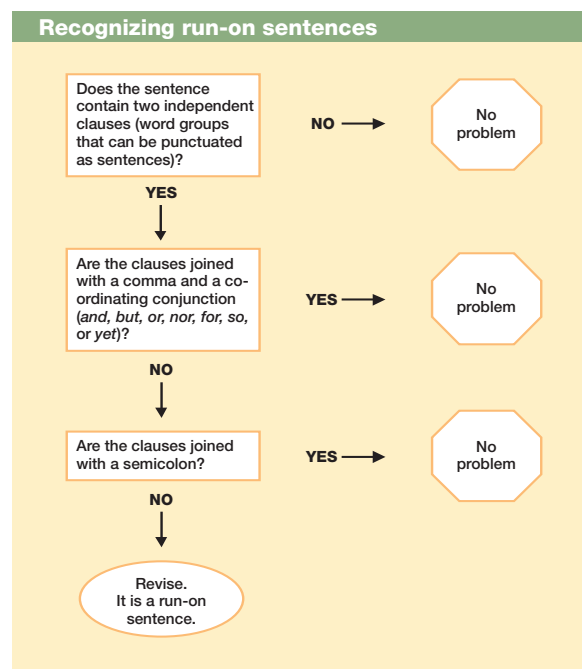
**COMMA** Gestures are a means of communication for everyone,  
**SPLICE** they are essential for the hearing-impaired.

In other comma splices, the comma is accompanied by a joining word that is *not* a coordinating conjunction. There are only seven coordinating conjunctions in English: *and, but, or, nor, for, so, and yet*. Notice that all of these words are short — only two or three letters long.

**COMMA** Gestures are a means of communication for everyone,  
**SPLICE** however, they are essential for the hearing-impaired.

*However* is a transitional expression, not a coordinating conjunction.

To review your writing for possible run-on sentences, use the flowchart below.



(continued)

## Revising run-on sentences

To revise a run-on sentence, you have four choices.

1. Use a comma and a coordinating conjunction (*and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet*).

▶ Gestures are a means of communication for everyone, <sup>but</sup> they  
are essential for the hearing-impaired.

2. Use a semicolon (or, if appropriate, a colon or a dash). A semicolon may be used alone; it can also be accompanied by a transitional expression.

▶ Gestures are a means of communication for everyone; they  
are essential for the hearing-impaired.

▶ Gestures are a means of communication for everyone; <sup>however,</sup> they  
are essential for the hearing-impaired.

3. Make the clauses into separate sentences.

▶ Gestures are a means of communication for everyone. <sup>They</sup> they  
are essential for the hearing-impaired.

4. Restructure the sentence, perhaps by subordinating one of the clauses.

▶ <sup>Although gestures</sup> ~~Gestures~~ are a means of communication for everyone, they  
are essential for the hearing-impaired.

One of these revision techniques usually works better than the others for a particular sentence. The fourth technique, the one requiring the most extensive revision, is often the most effective.