15 Minute Grammar: Week 5 – Run-On Sentences

What is it?

A run on sentence strings together two or more independent clauses (sentences) without punctuation.

What does it look like?

"I have a cat she has a dog."

"She has a dog her mom has a gerbil."

"The dog is named Spot, he is a Dalmatian."

When does it happen?

For schoolwork, you might use run-ons in your first drafts, free writes or notes. They also probably pop up in personal emails, blogs/posts/comments, or texts.

What's wrong with it?

By stringing two strong thoughts together, both sentences become weaker you are confusing the reader. (See?) Your exact idea is clearer with specific, complete sentences.

Why does it happen?

Sometimes we know what we are going to say and need to write it down before we forget. When we do this, we don't always pay attention to what's correct. It's more important for us to keep the thought, and we write it the same way we heard it in our head or the way we would speak it out loud.

Other times we don't realize that the two independent clauses we're putting together can stand on their own. We might have also chosen to put two thoughts together because they are related and we wanted the reader to make that connection.

How do I fix it?

1) Make two separate sentences. This makes each independent clause stand separately from the other, and each are as important.

   "I have a cat. She has a dog."

2) Join the independent clauses with a coordinating conjunction (For/And/Nor/But/Or/Yet/So). The coordinating conjunction directs the relationship between the two independent clauses.

   "She has a dog and her mom has a gerbil."

   "She has a dog but her mom has a gerbil."

3) Join the independent clauses with punctuation. Use a semicolon (;) dash (-) or colon (:). The punctuation will affect how your sentence is read.

   "The dog is named Spot; he is a Dalmatian."

   "The dog is named Spot – he is a Dalmatian."

4) Join the independent thoughts with a comma (,) AND a coordinating conjunction (For/And/Nor/But/Or/Yet/So). Never use a comma by itself; it isn't strong enough.

   "Never use a comma by itself, for it isn't strong enough."