THE COMMA SPLICE

One of the most common—and most serious—punctuation errors is the comma splice. A comma splice occurs when the writer "splices" together two independent clauses with simply a comma. The correct use of the comma is to separate parts of a sentence, such as a modifier from the word it modifies. That is, the comma is internal punctuation and thus is not strong enough to separate two independent clauses. (An independent clause is a unit of words that could be a sentence by itself.)

Here are examples of comma splices:

(a) Bones and Ichabod don’t really love Katrina, instead she is a prize to be won in a contest.

(b) Jim wasn’t excited about the invitation, he wasn’t sure if a Tom Petty concert was worth $13.50.

The semicolon—half comma and half period—is an appropriate mark of punctuation between independent clauses joined as one sentence:

(a) Bones and Ichabod don’t really love Katrina; instead, she is a prize to be won in a contest.

(b) Jim wasn’t excited about the invitation; he wasn’t sure if a Tom Petty concert was worth $13.50.

Though the comma alone cannot stand between two independent clauses, it can (and should) separate two such clauses if the second is joined to the first by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, for, yet, nor, so, or).

Examples:

(a) Jim wasn’t excited about the invitation to the concert at first, but he became excited once he found out who was playing.

(b) As time went on, we built and used machines, and with these machines, we learned to build newer and better ones.

— e.m.
What is the comma splice? A comma splice consists of two (or more) independent clauses joined simply by a comma.

Example: Power tends to corrupt, absolute power corrupts completely.

Ways to fix the comma splice:

1. Connect the main clauses with a coordinating conjunction and a comma.
   (Coordinating conjunctions are: And, But, For, Or, Nor, So, Yet.)
   Ex: Power tends to corrupt, but absolute power corrupts completely.

2. Replace the comma with a semicolon.
   Ex: Power tends to corrupt; absolute power corrupts completely.

3. Make each independent clause a separate sentence.
   Ex: Power tends to corrupt. Absolute power corrupts completely.

4. Change one clause to a subordinate clause.
   Ex: Because power corrupts, absolute power corrupts completely.

Comma Splices

1. Our country observed its bicentennial in 1976; my hometown celebrated its fiftieth anniversary the same year.

2. Initially my work seems fine, however, the more time I spend on it, the less comfortable I feel with it.

3. These people were always looked down upon by whites, they were afraid to venture outside of their own neighborhoods and if they did, police seemed to always be suspicious of them.