The Hamilton College Writing Center
wants YOU to avoid

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF BAD WRITING

The Second Deadly Sin:
Incorrect Punctuation of Two Independent Clauses
(An independent clause has a subject and a verb and can stand alone as a sentence.)

Good writers know that correct punctuation is important to writing clear sentences. If you misuse a mark of punctuation, you risk confusing your reader and appearing careless. Notice how the placement of commas significantly affects the meaning of these sentences:

Mr. Jones, says Ms. Moore, is a boring old fool.
Mr. Jones says Ms. Moore is a boring old fool.

Writers often combine independent clauses in a single compound sentence to emphasize the relationship between ideas. The punctuation of compound sentences varies depending upon how you connect the clauses.

The rules are

(a) Separate independent clauses with a **comma** when using a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, for, nor, so, yet).

(b) Separate independent clauses with a **semi-colon** when no coordinating conjunction is used.

(c) Separate independent clauses with a **semi-colon** when using a conjunctive adverb (e.g., however, therefore, thus, consequently, finally, nevertheless).

Examples of Correct Punctuation, Rule a:
1. We all looked worse than usual, for we had stayed up studying for the exam.
2. This room is unbelievably hot, and I think that I am going to pass out.

Examples of Correct Punctuation, Rule b:
1. We all looked worse than usual; we had stayed up all night studying for the exam.
2. This room is unbelievably hot; I think I am going to pass out.

Examples of Correct Punctuation, Rule c:
1. We all looked worse than usual; however, we were relieved we had studied.
2. The discussion is really interesting; nevertheless, I think I am going to pass out.