

MISPLACED AND DANGLING MODIFIERS

A **modifier** is one or more words that describe other words. Two common errors involving modifiers are misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers.

1. Misplaced Modifiers

When a modifier is in the wrong place, the reader may not know what it is meant to describe. Misplaced modifiers can lead to misunderstandings. To correct a misplaced modifier, place it as close as possible to what it is describing so that its meaning will be clearly understood.

Examples:

- 1) Misplaced Modifier: The Bensons watched the parade of high school bands sitting in the chairs on their lawn.
→ It sounds as if *the high school bands* were sitting in chairs, when really it is the Bensons who are sitting in chairs.

Corrected version: Sitting in chairs on their lawn, the Bensons watched the parade of high school bands.
- 2) Misplaced Modifier: Please take this book to Mrs. Bey's house which she lent me
→ It sounds like Mrs. Bey lent her house to the speaker.

Corrected version: Please take this book, which Mrs. Bey lent to me, to her house.

2. Dangling Modifiers

A modifying word or phrase that starts a sentence must be followed right away by the word it is meant to describe. Otherwise, the meaning of the sentence is changed, and the modifier is said to be dangling.

Examples:

- 1) Dangling Modifier: When pulling out of the driveway, the hedge blocks Tracy's view.
→ This sentence is saying that the hedge is pulling out of the driveway.

Corrected Version: When pulling out of the driveway, Tracy finds that the hedge blocks her view.
- 2) Dangling Modifier: Delighted with the movie, a conversation over coffee ended our evening.
→ Was the conversation delighted with the movie??

Corrected Version: Delighted with the movie, we ended our evening with a conversation over coffee.

SEEING WHAT YOU KNOW

Directions: Underline the word or phrase that is the modifier and circle the word that the modifier is describing. Try to fix the misplaced or dangling modifier in the space provided. There may be more than one correct way to fix a misplaced or dangling modifier.

1. Thrown in a heap on the closet floor, Jean found her son's dirty laundry.
2. Carrying the main course, the roast slid off its platter.
3. We were surprised to hear a siren driving down the country road.
4. While taking a shower, a mouse ran across my bathroom floor.

UNDERSTANDING THE ANSWERS

1. *It sounds as if Jean was thrown on the closet floor in a heap when she found her son's laundry. A better way to word the sentence would be:*

Jean found her son's dirty laundry thrown in a heap on the closet floor

2. *It sounds as if the roast was carrying the main course. A better way to word the sentence would be:*

As the waiter was carrying the main course, the roast slid off its platter.

3. *It sounds as if a siren was driving down the country road. A better way to word the sentence would be:*

While driving down the country road, we were surprised to hear a siren.

4. *It sounds as if a mouse was taking a shower. A better way to word the sentence would be:*

While I was taking a shower, a mouse ran across my bathroom floor.

EXERCISE 1

Directions: Underline the word or phrase that is the modifier and circle the word that the modifier is describing. Fix the misplaced or dangling modifier in the space provided. There may be more than one correct way to fix a misplaced or dangling modifier.

1. The instructor told the students to sit down in a loud voice.
In a loud voice, the instructor told the students to sit down.
2. The children placed their soup on the window sill, which was too hot to eat.
The children placed their soup, which was too hot to eat, on the window sill.
3. After her husband's death, the widow almost refused all invitations to go out.
After her husband's death, the widow refused almost all invitations to go out.
4. Residents of the burning house were carried out by firemen wearing only pajamas.
In only their pajamas, residents of the burning house were carried out by firemen.
5. Involved in a noisy game of Monopoly, the summer evening together was an enjoyable one for us.
The summer evening together was enjoyable as we played a noisy game of Monopoly.
6. Growing thinner every day, Albert's diet is really working.
Growing thinner every day, Albert was happy that his diet was working.
7. Whining and twitching, the dog's dream must have been about chasing rabbits.
Whining and twitching, the dog must have been dreaming about chasing rabbits.
8. Unable to read yet, my mother explained that the sign said, "No children allowed."
Unable to read yet, Sarah had to ask my mother to explain that the sign said, "No children allowed."

EXERCISE 2

Directions: Read each of the passages and fix any misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers in the space provided. There may zero, one, or multiple errors in each passage. There may be more than one correct way to fix a misplaced or dangling modifier.

1. Will was disappointed when he looked in the refrigerator. There had been lots of spaghetti last night. His roommates, however, **almost** had eaten all of it. **Frowning angrily**, nothing but a few strands of spaghetti were left.

1st mistake ***had eaten almost all of it.***

2nd mistake The sentence suggests that the roommates didn't eat the spaghetti. Actually, they did eat most of it.
Frowning angrily, he found nothing left but a few strands of spaghetti.

2. Lani stopped to watch **with amazement** as the sidewalk artist worked on his next masterpiece. He was drawing a pencil portrait of a little girl. **Sketching quickly**, the portrait took shape under the artist's careful hand.

1st mistake ***With amazement, Lani***

2nd mistake ***As he sketched quickly,***

3. I lost my raincoat last fall. I thought I had looked everywhere for it. Then, yesterday, I spotted it stuffed under my bed. Although wrinkled and dusty, the raincoat was still as beautiful as I remembered it.

No mistakes!

4. The sky was blue and clear when we arrived home. Only minutes later though, there was a sudden crash of thunder. **Rushing like mad**, the windows in the bedrooms were closed. Staring out at the downpour, we were glad to be safe inside. Then we remembered our open car windows, **groaning with dismay**.

1st mistake ***Rushing like mad, we closed the windows in the bedroom.***

2nd mistake ***Then, groaning with dismay, we...***

5. Going to camp was a nightmare for me. **Being afraid of water**, swimming was a frightening experience. I got a terrible case of poison ivy all over my legs, **which seemed to be everywhere at the camp**. I will always remember my time at camp as the longest week of my life.

1st mistake ***Being afraid of water, I was frightened of swimming***

2nd mistake ***Poison ivy was everywhere at camp, and I got a terrible...***

EXERCISE 3

Directions: Underline any misplaced and dangling modifiers in the paragraph below. Then, re-write the paragraph in the space provided fixing any misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers. There may be more than one correct way to fix a misplaced or dangling modifier.

Spending the evening together recently, a group of friends were talking about their most embarrassing moments in high school. Pauline volunteered to tell her embarrassing story first. **Bouncing on the trampoline** in gym class, her shorts fell down to her ankles. Lin decided to share her embarrassing moment next. She recalled that she was caught cheating while taking a biology test. She had written the answers to the test **on her fingernails**. As punishment, Lin had to write, "I will never cheat again," one hundred times on the board. **Angry about their daughter's actions**, her punishment continued at home where her parents grounded her for a month. Finally, Karen told a story about a classmate named Greta. Since Greta had just moved from another state, she did not have any friends. **Being taller than any of her classmates**, the class bullies called Greta mean names like "Gawky Greta." **Going out to recess one day**, it began to snow. As usual, the bullies picked on Greta **mercilessly**. They tied her to the swings and left her out in the cold **with evil laughs when the recess bell rang**. The teachers found her a half hour later, and the bullies got in a lot of trouble with the principal. When Karen ran into Greta a couple years ago, she discovered that Greta had become a gorgeous, rich model in New York City. **Looking back on her past**, the bullies are not the ones laughing now.
