

Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

Modifiers, whether they are single words, phrases, or clauses, should clearly describe and clarify the word(s) they modify. In general, modifiers need to be close and obviously connected to the word(s) they modify.

A **misplaced modifier** is a word or phrase that is associated with, or modifies, another subject than the one intended by the writer.



Misplaced: The soccer player returned to the clinic where he had undergone emergency surgery in 2004 in a limousine sent by Adidas.

The intended subject of the modifier, “in a limousine sent by Adidas,” is not clear – it could be modifying the soccer player or the surgery he underwent.

Revised: Traveling in a limousine sent by Adidas, the soccer player returned to the clinic where he had undergone emergency surgery in 2004.

In the revised sentence, the modifier clearly connects to the writer’s intended subject: “the soccer player.”

Strategies for Revising Misplaced Modifiers

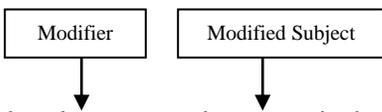
1. Position modifiers close to the words they modify.



Misplaced: Tiered like a wedding cake, Mrs. Deleon unveiled her model for the parade float.

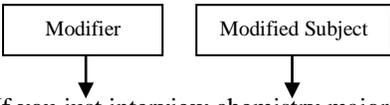
Revised: Mrs. Deleon unveiled her model for the parade float, which was tiered like a wedding cake.

2. Place adverbs such as *only*, *almost*, *nearly*, *just*, *especially*, *even*, and *occasionally* carefully.



Misplaced: The speaker almost angered everyone in the room.

Revised: The speaker angered almost everyone in the room.



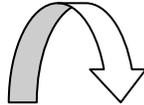
Misplaced: If you just interview chemistry majors, your picture of the student body’s response to the new grading policies will be incomplete.

Revised: If you interview just chemistry majors, your picture of the student body’s response to the new grading policies will be incomplete.

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Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

A **dangling modifier** is a word or phrase that suggests but does not clearly name an actor. A modifying word or phrase at the beginning of a sentence should be followed immediately by the subject it modifies.



This dangling modifier falsely suggests that the recruiter (rather than Joe) decided to join the Navy.

Dangling: Deciding to join the Navy, the recruiter enthusiastically shook Joe's hand.

Revised: When Joe decided to join the Navy, the recruiter enthusiastically shook his hand.

Strategies for Revising Dangling Modifiers

1. Name the appropriate or logical doer of the action as the subject of the main clause.

Dangling: Having arrived late for a date, a good excuse was needed.

Who arrived late? This sentence says that a good excuse arrived late. To revise, decide who actually arrived late. The possible revision might look like this:

Revised: Having arrived late for a date, Margo needed a good excuse.

2. Change the phrase that dangles into a complete introductory clause by naming the doer of the action in that clause.

Dangling: Without knowing the address, it was difficult to find the house.

Who didn't know the address? The sentence says that "it" didn't know the address. To revise, decide who was trying to find the house. The revision might look something like this:

Revised: Because Ted did not know the address, it was difficult to find the house.

3. Combine the phrase and main clause into one.

Dangling: To get good grades, the homework was finished.

Who wanted to get good grades? This sentence says that the homework was trying to get good grades. To revise, combine the phrase and the main clause into one sentence. The revision might look something like this:

Revised: She got good grades by finishing the homework.

The information for this handout was compiled from the following sources:

Hacker, D., & Sommers, N. (2012). *Rules for writers* (7th ed.). New York, NY: Bedford/St. Martin's.

OWL Purdue Online Writing Lab. (2010, April 17). Dangling modifiers and how to correct them. Retrieved from <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/597/1/>

Ruszkiewicz, J. (2009). *How to write anything: A guide and reference*. New York, NY: Bedford/St. Martin's.

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