

Modifiers are describing words. In order for a modifier to work, it should come directly before or after the word (or words) it is describing. Problems with modifiers occur when they are displaced or dangling.

It is extremely important for modifiers to be as close as possible to whatever they are modifying. This is because the meaning of a sentence can differ greatly depending on where the modifier is placed.

For example:

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| • I told Mr. Jones what I had only done. | I did not tell him what I forgot to do. |
| • I told Mr. Jones what only I had done. | (No one else did it) |
| • I told Mr. Jones only what I had done. | (I did not tell him what anyone else did) |
| • I told only Mr. Jones what I had done. | (I did not tell anybody else) |
| • I only told Mr. Jones what I had done. | (I did not show him) |
| • Only I told Mr. Jones what I had done. | (Nobody else told Mr. Jones) |

Misplaced modifiers

When a modifier is misplaced, it does not describe the word it is intended to describe. To avoid misplaced modifiers, or to correct them, simply ensure that the modifier is as close as possible to the word it wishes to describe.

Example:

Misplaced modifier: The man climbed a hill *with a backpack*.

- This sentence is saying that the hill has a backpack.

Correct modifier: The man *with a backpack* climbed a hill.

- By moving the modifier, 'the man' now has a backpack rather than the hill.

Dangling modifiers

Modifiers that come at the beginning of a sentence must directly follow the word it describes or your sentence will take on unintended meaning. To correct and avoid dangling modifiers, put the subject by the word being described directly after the modifier. Alternatively, the subject can also be put among the opening words.

Example:

Dangling modifier: I bought a pair of pants at the store, which I found a hole in.

- This sentence is saying that there is a hole in the store.

Correct modifier: I bought a pair of pants at the store and found a hole in them.

- In this sentence it is clear that the hole is in the pants.

Modifiers

Practice

Circle the modifiers and underline the words that they currently describe. Correct the sentences to rid of any misplaced or dangling modifiers. Then circle the corrected modifiers and underline the new words they describe.

1. I read that a girl was killed in the newspaper.

2. I almost ate the whole burger.

3. Standing on the sidewalk, the ice cream melted.

4. I heard that there was a war on the news.

5. I was caught by security in the process of super-gluing a chair to the roof.

6. The jacket was just too small in the store.

7. The professor told us to expect to do a lot of work on the first day.

8. For my craft project, I need some superglue but the store is all sold out.
