



Misplaced Modifiers

- A misplaced modifier, also called a “dangling modifier” or a “dangling participle,” may be a single word, a phrase, or a clause that does not point clearly to the word or words it modifies:
 - ◊ Unclear: *Sam Spartan is a mascot with big shoes, a gladiator uniform, and an over-sized head weighing 50 pounds.*
 - ◊ Revised: *The Sam Spartan mascot gladiator uniform weighs 50 pounds and includes big shoes and an over-sized head.*
- When misplaced modifiers are introductory word groups, they may be confusing if they fail to refer logically to the first noun that follows.
 - ◊ *Preparing for my final exam* [descriptive phrase], *my textbook* [following noun] *suddenly disappeared!* This sentence suggests that the textbook was preparing for a final exam.
 - ◊ Revised: *As I was preparing for my final exam, my textbook suddenly disappeared!*
- Rewording a sentence helps to clarify the meaning.
 - ◊ Unclear: *Though only five feet tall, NCC named Henry MVP.* [NCC is not five feet tall; Henry is.]
 - ◊ Revised: *Though Henry was only five feet tall, NCC named him MVP.*

Helpful Tips for Placing Modifiers Correctly:

- Place modifying phrases and clauses so that readers can see at a glance what they modify.
- Sentences should flow from subject to verb to object without lengthy detours along the way. When adverbs separate subject from verb, verb from object, or helping-verb from main-verb, the result can be awkward.
 - ◊ Awkward: **Sam Spartan** [subject], *after trying do a back flip*, **did** [verb] *a somersault instead.*
 - ◊ Revised: *After trying to do a back flip, Sam Spartan did a somersault instead.* [Subject and verb are no longer separated.]
- Avoid splitting infinitives (“to” + verb, such as: “to go,” “to catch,” “to shout”), especially in formal writing.
 - ◊ Awkward: *Students should try to, if possible, avoid writing their papers at the last minute.*
 - ◊ Revised: *If possible, students should try to avoid writing their papers at the last minute.*
- Restructuring the sentence can repair misplaced modifiers, but this restructuring may vary according to the writer’s stylistic preferences.
 - ◊ Unclear: *When driving through our neighborhood, speed bumps are especially irritating.* [Who is driving? For whom are the speed bumps irritating?]
 - a) One option would be to change the subject so that it names the person that the modifier implies:
When driving through our neighborhood, I find speed bumps especially irritating.
 - b) Another option would be to turn the modifier into a word group that includes the person:
Speed bumps are especially irritating for people driving through our neighborhood.
- Be sure pronouns (it, s/he, they, etc.) refer clearly to the nouns they replace.
 - ◊ Unclear: *It is so obvious that he is wrong!* [What is it? Who is he?]
 - ◊ Revised: *The politician’s views on global warming are obviously incorrect!*