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!