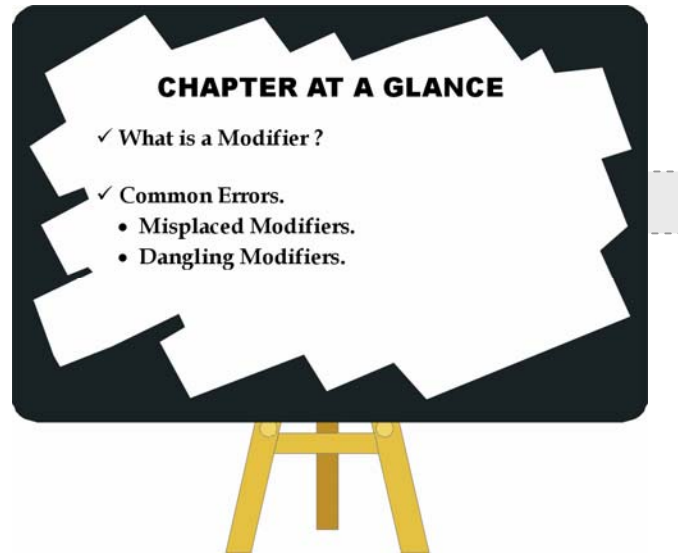


MODIFIER



Basic Principle: Modifiers are like teenagers: they fall in love with whatever they're next to. Make sure they're next to something they ought to modify!

A **modifier** can be an *adjective*, an *adverb*, or a *phrase* or *clause* acting as an adjective or an adverb.

It describes something else.



Eye
Opener

You should place it as close as possible to what it describes. If you don't, your intended meaning may not be clear. This will be clear from the following:

COMMON MODIFIER ERRORS

1. Misplaced Modifiers

2. Dangling Modifiers

Misplaced Modifier

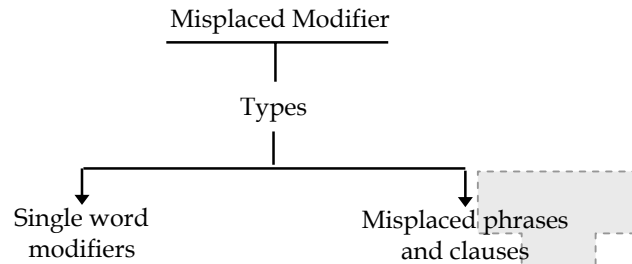
A misplaced modifier is simply a word or phrase describing something but not placed near enough the word it is supposed to modify.

Error: I had to take down the shutters painting the house yesterday.

Analysis: Who is painting the house? It sounds that shutters are painting the house.

Place the modifying phrase - *painting the house* - near or next to the word it intends to modify.

Correction: Painting the house yesterday, I had to take down the shutters.



Single word modifiers

In general, you should place single-word modifiers near the word or words they modify, especially when a reader might think that they modify something different in the sentence.

Error: After our conversation lessons, we could understand the Urdu spoken by our visitors from Karachi easily.

Analysis: Do we *understand* the Urdu easily, or do the visitors *speak* it easily?

Correction: We could easily understand the Urdu spoken by our visitors from Karachi.



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Be careful regarding the placement of modifiers such as *barely*, *almost*, *even*, *hardly*, *nearly*, *often*, and *only*. Called **limiting modifiers**, these words can accidentally change the entire meaning of a sentence if you place these modifiers next to the wrong word:

Error: The athlete *almost* ran around the course ten times.

Analysis: *Almost* is modifying *ran*. Hence “almost ran” means that he was about to run but actually DID NOT RUN. In fact *almost* should have modified “ten times”

Correction: The athlete ran around the course *almost* ten times.

Error: Brian *nearly* ate a whole box of candies.

Analysis: *Nearly* is modifying *ate*. Hence “nearly ate” means that Brian was about to eat but actually DID NOT EAT. In fact *nearly* should modify – a whole box.

Correction: Brian ate *nearly* a whole box of candies.

Error: He *barely* kicked that ball six yards.

Analysis: *Barely* *kicked* means did not kick.

Correction: He kicked that ball *barely* six yards.

Error: You will *only* need to plant two packages of seeds.

Correction: You will need to plant only two packages of seeds.



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In limiting modifiers (discussed above), the modifier should be placed in front of the words they modify.



TIP

Using **Split Infinitives** is a cardinal sin.

Misplaced Phrases and Clauses

It is important that you place the modifying **phrase** or **clause** as close as possible to the word or words it modifies:

Error: By accident, Nathan poked the little boy with his thumb *in the eye*.

Analysis: The sentence implies that Nathan had his thumb in his eye when he poked the little boy.

Correction: By accident, he poked the little girl *in the eye* with his thumb.

Error: Sophia was walking the dog *in a short skirt*.

Analysis: The dog isn't "in a short skirt"

Correction: The young girl *in a short skirt* was walking the dog.

Error: I heard that my friend intended to throw a surprise party for me *while I was outside her bedroom window*.

Correction: *While I was outside her bedroom window*, I heard that my friend intended to throw a surprise party for me.

Infinitives ("to" + verb, such as: "to run," "to sleep") usually should not be split.

Error: The patient should try to, if possible, avoid going up and down stairs.

Correction: If possible, the patient should try to avoid going up and down stairs.

The modifying word or phrase is not dangling; no extra words are needed; the modifier is just in the wrong place.

Dangling Modifiers

A **dangling modifier** is a **phrase** or **clause** which says something different from what is meant because words are left out. The meaning of the sentence, therefore, is left "dangling."

Error: While driving on Fifth Avenue Sunday afternoon, a tree began to fall toward Bill Whitney's car.



TIP

When a modifier "dangles" so that the sentence is meaningless (or means something other than your intent), restate it and add the words it needs in order to make sense.



Analysis: It sounds as if the tree was driving. Adding a word or two makes the sentence clear.

Correction: *While Bill Whitney was driving on Fifth Avenue Sunday afternoon, a tree began to fall toward her car.*

The dangling error is often (though not always) located at the beginning of a sentence and does not modify any specific word in the sentence, or (worse) modifies the *wrong* word.

Error: *Raised in Bhutan, it is natural to miss the smell of the sea.*

Analysis: The phrase “Raised in Bhutan” automatically modifies the first noun or pronoun that follows the phrase -- in this case, “it.” The connection in this case is illogical because “it” was not raised in Bhutan. You could revise the sentence in a number of ways.

Correction: *For a person raised in Bhutan, it is natural to miss the smell of the sea.*

OR

Raised in Bhutan, I often miss the smell of the sea.

Error: *Smashed flat by a passing car, Black Cat sniffed at what was left of a half-eaten hamburger.*

Analysis: Black Cat was not smashed flat by the car. Instead it must be the hamburger that the writer intends here.



But before we go ahead, let's check the steps used in finding and rectifying the problem of a dangling modifier:

1. Check for modifying phrases at the beginning of your sentences.
2. If you find one, underline *the first noun that follows it*. (That's the one that is being modified.)
3. Make sure the modifier and noun go together *logically*. If they don't, chances are you have a dangling modifier.

Let's go back to the sentences and see how this works:

Error: *Smashed flat by a passing car, Black Cat sniffed at what was left of a half-eaten hamburger.*

Analysis: This sentence begins with a modifying phrase. Black Cat is the noun that follows it. It does not go logically with the modifier, so we need to rewrite the sentence.

Correction: *Black Cat sniffed at what was left of a half-eaten burger that had been smashed by a passing truck.*

Error: *When watching films, commercials are especially irritating.*

Correction: When watching films, I find commercials especially irritating.

OR

When I am watching films, commercials are especially irritating.

From what you have seen, dangling modifiers appear in the beginning of the sentence. But in some cases, these can also appear in the end of the sentence.

Example

Error: The experiment was a failure, not having studied the lab manual carefully.

Correction: They failed the experiment, not having studied the lab manual carefully.

PARALLELISM



Parallelism or Parallel Structure means using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. This can happen at the word, phrase, or clause level.

I am interested in molecular biology, to play cricket, and going to the shopping mall.



TIP

The usual way to join parallel structures is with the use of coordinating conjunctions such as "and" or "or."

In the above sentence, each of the three elements of the series is in a different grammatical form:

A noun, an infinitive, and a gerund phrase.

To make the series parallel, one would use any one of the forms three times.

**I am interested in molecular biology, cricket and the shopping mall.
(Three nouns)**

I am interested in studying molecular biology, playing cricket, and going to the shopping mall. (Three gerunds)

I like to study molecular biology, to play cricket, and to go to the shopping mall. (Three infinitives)

COMMON PARALLELISM ERRORS

Unnecessary Shifts in Verb Tenses

Error: Britney *bought* her ticket at the box office and *sits* in the front row.

Correction: Britney *bought* her ticket at the box office and *sat* in the front row.

Unnecessary Shifts from an Active to a Passive Voice

Error: Bruce *plays* cricket well, but football is *played* even better by him

Correction: Bruce *plays* cricket well, but he *plays* football even better.

Unnecessary Shifts in Person

Error: *One* should drive slowly and *you* should keep *your* eyes on the road.

Correction: *One* should drive slowly and *one* should keep *one's* eyes on the road.

Correction: *You* should drive slowly and *you* should keep *your* eyes on the road.

Parallelism errors can occur in

- list/series

Error: I talked on, trying to be *charming*, *gracious*, and *to keep* the conversation going.

Correction: I talked on, trying *to be* gracious and charming and *to keep* the conversation going.

Correlatives are coordinating conjunctions used in pairs to express similarity or equality in thought. Examples of correlatives:

Both.....and	not only.....but also	either.....or
Neither...nor	first....second	not merely...but



TIP

If the series begins with the infinitive using 'to' and no other verb is followed by 'to' then it is understood in the other parts as well. But if the 'to' is used with two verbs in a series of three then the third verb should also be followed by 'to'.



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Similar grammatical constructions should be used in case of correlatives. For instance: In a sentence with *not only*..... *but also*, the grammar that is immediately after *not only* should be the same as the structure following *but also*.

Error: He *not only* went to Australia *but also* New Zealand

Correction: He *not only* went to Australia *but also* went to New Zealand.

Not only (verb) (preposition) (noun) *but also* (verb) (preposition) (noun)

Correction: He went *not only* to Australia *but also* to New Zealand.

Not only (preposition) (noun) *but also* (preposition) (noun)



TIPS

Spotting the Parallelism Errors

- Skim your paper, pausing at the words “and” and “or”. Check on each side of the words to see whether the items joined are parallel.
- If you have several items in a list, put them in a column to see if they are parallel.
- Listen to the sound of the items being compared. Do you hear the same kinds of sounds? For example, is there a series of “ing” words beginning each item? or do you hear a rhythm being repeated? If something is breaking that rhythm or repetition of sound, check to see if it needs to be made parallel.

