

MISPLACED AND DANGLING MODIFIER WORKSHEET

"The other day, I shot an elephant in my pajamas. How he got in my pajamas, I'll never know."

Modifiers are important in writing because they help to clarify a situation or the point the author is trying to make. Modifiers can be a word, phrase, or clause that modifies, or describes, something (a noun, situation, or action).

DAY #1

What is a Misplaced Modifier?

A **misplaced modifier** means that there is a _____ between the word, phrase, or clause and the modifier. When a modifier is misplaced, your meaning gets really fuzzy.

Incorrect: On her way to work, Elaine saw the *silver woman's earring* laying on the park bench.

- ✓ This sentence implies that there is a *silver woman* who left her earring on the park bench, not that the earring itself is silver.

Correct: On her way to work, Elaine saw the *woman's silver earring* laying on the park bench.

- ✓ Now the earring is silver instead of the woman.

Let's Try It. Read each sentence, then rewrite the sentence using the modifier(s) correctly. DO NOT DRAW ARROWS.

1. Professor Jones, who was late with another essay, waited for the slacker student.
2. Raymond wore his one collared shirt to the job interview, which was unfortunately stained with yellow mustard.
3. The hunter crouched behind a tree waiting for a bear to come along with a bow and arrow.
4. When we opened the leather woman's purse, we found the missing keys.

After each sentence explain why it may or may not have to be fixed.

5. Andrew told us after the holiday that he intends to stop drinking.
6. I was told that I had been awarded the scholarship by my professor.

DAY #2

Watch Those Adverbs!

Placement of adverbs (many words that _____ are adverbs) can change meanings to funny things.

Incorrect: We drove off in the car we had just bought quickly.

- ✓ Did we *buy* the car quickly or did we *drive* the car quickly?

Correct: We quickly drove off in the car we had just bought.

- ✓ Okay! We must have made a great deal and were afraid the dealership would change its mind!

Let's Try It. Explain the two possible meanings in each sentence.

1. The girl who had been dancing wildly entered the room.
2. We ate the lunch that was brought slowly.

DAY #3

Troublesome Words That Indicate Number

"Almost" and "nearly" mean _____ – nouns _____ be counted; verbs _____ be counted, so these words should be next to the _____.

Incorrect: He *nearly* swam for an hour.

- ✓ How can somebody *nearly swim*? Is he in the water, or is he on dry land?

Correct: He swam *for nearly* an hour.

Incorrect: It *almost* cost me \$800 for my car insurance.

✓ Do you have any car insurance? If it *almost cost* you, did you actually get the policy?

Correct: It cost me almost \$800 for my car insurance.

Let's Try It. Read each sentence, then rewrite the sentence using the modifier(s) correctly. DO NOT DRAW ARROWS.

1. He almost lost \$5,000 in Las Vegas.
2. He nearly kicked the ball twenty yards.
3. He nearly failed all of his classes.
4. The vendor almost sold all of her pottery at the fair.

DAY #4

“Just” Is Just a Pain in the Neck

Placing the word *just* in different places _____ change the meaning completely.

Just Evan was rushed to the hospital from the accident scene to treat his wounds on his neck.

✓ Evan was the only one injured in the accident.

Evan was *just rushed* to the hospital from the accident scene to treat his wounds on his neck.

✓ Evan's ambulance *just* got there!

Evan was rushed to the hospital from the accident scene to treat *just his wounds* on his neck.

✓ Evan has wounds and contusions all over, but only the ones on his neck are really serious.

Let's Try It. Explain how the meaning in each of the sentences is different from the rest.

1. Just John was picked to host the program.
2. John was just picked to host the program.
3. John was picked to host just the program.

DAY #5

Let's Try It. Read each sentence, then rewrite the sentence using the modifier(s) correctly. DO NOT DRAW ARROWS.

1. I nearly made \$100.00 today.
2. The sick cat almost cost me \$300.00 in medical bills.
3. The job scarcely took an hour to complete.
4. I only have five minutes to talk with you.
5. The striking Honda's paint job made everyone gasp.

DAY #6

Misplaced Phrases

When you place a phrase in the wrong place, all sorts of funny things can happen. Be careful!

Incorrect: Christine made the brownies for her aunt *with chocolate icing*.

✓ What is a woman doing running around covered in chocolate icing?

Correct: Christine made brownies *with chocolate icing* for her aunt.

Let's Try It. Read each sentence, then rewrite the sentence using the modifier(s) correctly. DO NOT DRAW ARROWS.

1. The dealer sold the Cadillac to the customer with leather seats.
2. The three bankers stood on the corner smoking pipes.
3. They saw a fence behind the house made of barbed wire.
4. We hiked through the forest wearing only light shirts and shorts.
5. The enthusiasts stood in line to buy tickets to the game for a half hour.

DAY #7

Let's Try It. Read each sentence, then rewrite the sentence using the modifier(s) correctly. DO NOT DRAW ARROWS.

6. Susan saw a depressing show on television about the families living in poverty.
7. The gallery owner sold the painting to the old man behind glass.
8. Michelle whistled to the dog on the way to the movies.
9. My friend uses a pen to write his essays with a gold cap.
10. Farmers in Ohio were spraying their crops wearing protective masks.
11. Ted could see the airplane using binoculars.

DAY #8

Watch out for Verbals!

Most verbals are verbs that end in _____ or that have the word _____ before them.

Incorrect: Laila and Rachel talked about dancing in the kitchen *making grilled tuna*. (I wish my kitchen could make grilled tuna!)

Correct: Laila and Rachel, making grilled tuna, talked about dancing in the kitchen. (I guess Rachel Ray had Laila Ali as a guest.)

Incorrect: John and Alex drew pictures for Mom to show. (Is Mom showing the pictures, or are they showing the pictures to Mom?)

Correct: John and Alex drew pictures to show to Mom. (That makes more sense, doesn't it? Or is Mom a braggart?)

Let's Try It. Read each sentence, then rewrite the sentence using the modifier(s) correctly. DO NOT DRAW ARROWS.

1. Moving from flower to flower, I watched the honeybee.
2. I was late to class running through the doorway at the last minute.
3. Riding the Ferris wheel, my mom waved to me when I was at the top.
4. I petted my cat reading a book.
5. Scoring a touchdown, the cheerleaders yelled for the player.
6. To fill out the application form, a pen was needed.

DAY #9

Don't Forget Those Clumsy Clauses.

Make sure that clauses modify (describe) the noun you want them to modify.

Incorrect: The mechanic drove out the car to Joe *that was washed*. (Was Joe just in the shower?)

Correct: The mechanic drove out the car *that was washed* to Joe.

Incorrect: Next to the lamp, Dawn piled the books *that she turned on*. (Are these audio books? How did Dawn turn on a book?)

Correct: Dawn piled the books next to the lamp *that she had turned on*.

Let's Try It. Read each sentence, then rewrite the sentence using the modifier(s) correctly. DO NOT DRAW ARROWS.

1. The waiter served a dinner roll to the woman who was well buttered.
2. Ralph piled all the clothes in the hamper that he had worn.
3. We ate Mexican food after the movie that was very spicy.
4. I got a watch for my graduation that has a solar clock.

DAY #10

Let's Try It. Read each sentence, then rewrite the sentence using the modifier(s) correctly. DO NOT DRAW ARROWS.

5. My wife found a photograph in the attic that Smith had given to Jones.
6. I used a pen for the test that contained orange ink.
7. I returned the tuna to the fish market that was spoiled.
8. Marion received a ticket from the police officer who was speeding.

DAY #11

Don't Play "Monkey in the Middle"

When you move a phrase or clause that is a problem, _____ plop it in between two _____!

The teacher said *on Monday* she would return our essays.

✓ Did the teacher tell the class on Monday or did she promise them for Monday?

The teacher said she would return our essays *on Monday*. -or- *On Monday*, the teacher said she would return our essays.

Let's Try It. Read each sentence, then rewrite the sentence using the modifier(s) correctly. DO NOT DRAW ARROWS.

1. The fans stood in line to buy tickets for the show for twenty minutes.
2. Marian read a chilling article in *The New York Times* about the effects of mercury poisoning.
3. The salesman sold the picture to that woman in the silver frame.
4. We gave the old clothes to a local charity that had been piled up in the basement.
5. The grass that was covered by the snow was creating a lush carpet of green.
6. The terrified patient spoke to the doctor with a terminal disease.
7. The student pleaded with the instructor who cheated on the test.

DAY #12

Dangling Modifiers

Live things and machines _____ – if there is an action verb in your sentence, there must also be a living thing or a machine that does the action.

Whenever you have a dangling modifier, you must _____ to the sentence. Simply rearranging the sentence will _____ fix the problem.

Examples of Dangling Modifiers

Incorrect: Staring out over the ocean, the hurricane force winds were daunting.

✓ The hurricane is not alive, and it is not a machine. It cannot stare anywhere. Add a person.

Correct: Staring out over the ocean, *Matt saw* the daunting hurricane force winds.

Incorrect: When in third grade, my mother went back to college.

✓ This is a matter of logic – my mother could not have gone back to college in 3rd grade.

Correct: When */was* in third grade, my mother went back to college.

Fixing Dangling Modifiers

Change the main part of the sentence so it **begins** with the term **actually modified**. This change will put the modifier **next to** the term it modifies.

Incorrect: Looking toward the west, a funnel shaped cloud stirred up dust.

Correct: Looking toward the west, */saw* a funnel shaped cloud stir up dust.

Incorrect: Walking to the movies, the cloudburst drenched Jim.

Correct: Walking to the movies, *Jim was drenched* by the cloudburst.

Another Way to Fix Dangling Modifiers

Change the dangling modifier phrase to a subordinate clause, creating a subject and verb. Leave the rest of the sentence as it is.

Incorrect: When nine years old, my father enrolled in medical school.

Correct: When */was* nine years old, my father enrolled in medical school.

Incorrect: Having been fixed the night before, Priscilla could use the car.

Correct: *Since the car had been* fixed the night before, Priscilla could use it.

Let's Fix It. Eliminate the dangling modifier by adding the necessary words.

1. Leaving quickly, my car lights were left on.
2. After explaining that I had lost my wallet, the waiter allowed me to pay by check.
3. To complete a degree in anthropology, at least two history courses must be taken.
4. Once filled with ink, Gina can write for hours before the pen runs dry.
5. In selecting her next car, cost was determined by Linda's paycheck.

DAY #13

1. Growing wild in the forest, we picked the tiny blossoms.
2. She flew in a small aircraft trembling with fear.
3. Deciding to join the navy, the recruiter happily shook Joe's hand.
4. Though only sixteen, Illinois State University accepted Martha's application.
5. She fearfully pointed to the spider over her head that hung from a transparent web.

DAY #14

6. The lake attracted many birds with gentle waves.
7. Balanced on one leg, the boys stared at the flamingo.
8. I like to listen to rock music doing my homework.
9. Swinging wildly through the trees, the children were delighted by the monkeys.
10. Gazing upwards at the bats, the spelunkers shone their flashlights that hung by the thousands from the roof of the cave.

DAY #15

11. The watch was his favorite gift that broke.
12. Leaving the party at midnight, we waved farewell to our happy guests.
13. Walking to college on a subzero morning, my left ear became frozen.
14. A small book sat on the desk that Sarah had read.
15. The fish was photographed at the pier that we caught.

DAY #16

16. Ted ordered a steak and a salad cooked rare.
17. Brenda put oranges into the punch that came from California.
18. The professor posted the notes for the students covered in class.
19. The young girl was walking the dog in a short skirt.
20. Sauced with lumpy gravy, the waitress served Gilbert a plate of gray meatloaf.

DAY #17

21. After painting all day, the bright new watercolor was drying in the sunshine.
22. Hoping it would rain, the umbrella was brought.
23. While reading email, the cat jumped onto the computer keyboard and tried to stretch out for a nap.
24. Gazing out the open hotel window, the ocean's gentle lapping as waves hit the shore was both relaxing and mesmerizing.
25. Having learned Spanish in just three months, the stay in Mexico was a success.