

Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers



Note: This document should only be used as a reference and should not replace assignment guidelines.

A modifier is a word or phrase that describes another word or phrase. The most frequent mistakes that occur with modifiers are misplaced modifiers and dangling modifiers.

Misplaced Modifiers

A modifier that is placed too far away from the word it describes is called a **misplaced modifier**.

EXAMPLE: *I shot an elephant in my pajamas.*
Who was wearing the pajamas: the elephant or the shooter?

Modifiers should be placed as close as possible to the word or words they describe in order to avoid confusion. There are three simple steps to correcting a misplaced modifier:

STEP 1: Find the modifier: *in my pajamas*

STEP 2: Identify what word the modifier was intended to modify: *I*

STEP 3: Place the modifier as close as possible to the word or phrase it is supposed to describe:

In my pajamas, I shot an elephant. OR *While wearing my pajamas, I shot an elephant.*

Dangling Modifiers

A **dangling modifier** is a modifier that lacks a word or group of words to modify. Usually, a dangling modifier is found near the beginning of the sentence and starts with either a *verb + ing* or a *to + verb* phrase.

EXAMPLE: *Sighing with sadness, the expensive shoes were returned to the salesman.*
Who sighed with sadness, the expensive shoes or the salesman? Neither: I did, but I am not in the sentence.

There are three simple steps to correcting a dangling modifier:

STEP 1: Find the modifier: *sighing with sadness*

STEP 2: Decide what word the modifier was intended to modify: *I*

STEP 3: Revise the sentence. To correct a dangling modifier, you cannot simply rearrange the sentence. You must add the word that the dangling modifier describes:

Sighing with sadness, I returned the expensive shoes to the salesman.