

Misplaced Modifiers

APSU Writing Center Handout

A modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that describes, clarifies, or limits the meaning of another word in a sentence.

Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier is a word or phrase that does not clearly modify any word in the sentence. It usually appears at the beginning and seems to modify the wrong subject or none.

Example 1: Crouched and ugly, the young boy gasped at the phantom moving across the stage.

Explanation: This makes it sound like the boy is crouched and ugly.

Revision: The young boy gasped at the crouched and ugly phantom moving across the stage.

Example 2: After listening to Richie's speech, the mood in the room changed.

Explanation: The sentence implies the mood listened to the speech.

Revision: After Richie finished his speech, the mood in the room changed.

Misplaced Modifiers

A misplaced modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that is placed too far from the word it modifies. This can cause confusion or create an unintended meaning.

- **Example:** I read about a wildfire that was out of control in yesterday's paper.

Explanation: Implies the wildfire was in the paper.

Revision: In yesterday's paper, I read about a wildfire that was out of control.

Placement of Short Modifiers

Modifiers such as almost, even, hardly, just, and only should appear immediately before the word they modify. Moving them changes the sentence's meaning.

- **Example 1:** The committee can only nominate two members for the position.
- **Explanation:** The committee can nominate but not appoint members.

- **Example 2:** The committee can nominate only two members for the position.
- **Explanation:** The committee is limited to two nominations.

- **Example 3:** Only the committee can nominate two members for the position.
- **Explanation:** No one else is allowed to nominate members.

Placement of Phrases and Clauses

Keep prepositional phrases and adjectival clauses close to the word they modify. When misplaced, they create ambiguity or unintended meaning.

- **Example:** She recorded the song from the movie that was her favorite.
- **Explanation:** Was the movie or the song her favorite?
- **Correction 1:** She recorded her favorite song from the movie.

Squinting Modifiers

A squinting modifier is a word (often an adverb) that can modify either the word before or after it, creating uncertainty. To fix it, move the modifier or add punctuation to clarify what it modifies.

- **Example:** Even though Erikson lists some advantages, overall his vision of a successful business is faulty.
- **Explanation:** “Overall” could modify lists or is faulty.
- **Revision:** Even though Erikson lists some overall advantages, his vision of a successful business is faulty.

References

Aaron, J. E. (2011). *The LB brief handbook* (5th ed.). Pearson.

Glenn, C., & Gray, L. (2012). *The Writer's Harbrace handbook* (3rd ed.). Wadsworth Cengage Learning.