

Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers

Modifiers are words (**adjectives and adverbs**) or phrases within a sentence that add more information to a particular noun. However, in some cases, the relationship between the modifier and its noun is unclear, and so may lead to misinterpretations of the sentence's intended meaning.

Dangling Modifiers

Sentences that contain dangling modifiers have a subject noun in the wrong place, or they are missing a subject noun altogether. As a result, the reader may mistakenly attach any verbs in the sentence to some other noun. Dangling modifiers often occur in sentences beginning with a modifier that contains a **participle** (talking, washed) or **an infinitive** (to be).

Ex. To be completely thorough, the procedure was repeated again.



This sentence lacks any reference to a person wanting "to be completely thorough", and so that modifying phrase attaches itself to the only other noun in the sentence. As a result, the sentence suggests that "the procedure" wanted to be thorough.

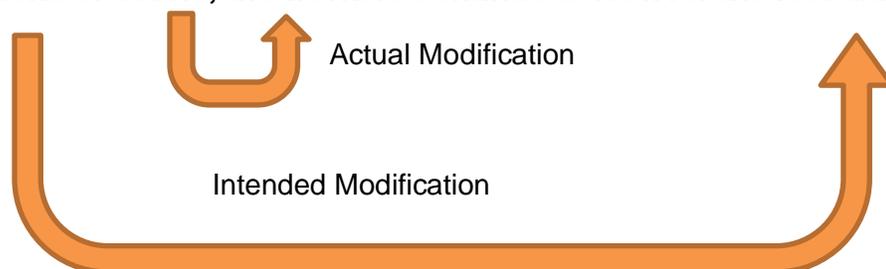


Corrected Example. To be completely thorough, the researcher repeated the procedure.

In some cases, a sentence may have a subject, but the placement of the subject in relation to the modifier confuses the meaning.



Ex. Though buried under tons of debris, the workers continue to look for the lost artifact.



This sentence places the modifier next to the subject, and so suggests that "the workers", rather than "the lost artifact", are buried. To correct this problem, simply place the modified noun next to the modifier.

Ex. The workers continue to look for the lost artifact though it is buried under tons of debris.

Misplaced Modifiers

With a misplaced modifier error, the subject of the sentence is always present, but the modifying phrase is **located away for the noun it is intended to modify**, and this leads the reader to interpret the modifying phrase as affecting some other noun in the sentence.

Ex. Mary prepared a sales presentation while flying from Boston to Miami on a laptop.



This sentence suggests the following image:



To correct the problem, the modifying phrase “on a laptop” must be located closer to the noun it is meant to change.

Corrected Ex. Mary prepared a sales presentation on a laptop while flying from Boston to Miami.

The word “only” is a modifier that is frequently misplaced in both spoken and written English.

Ex. I have only eaten one piece of sushi in my entire life.

The placement of “only” in this sentence indicates that all the speaker has eaten in their entire life is a single piece of sushi. This problem occurs because the modifier “only” changes the verb “eaten” rather than the noun “a single piece of sushi”.

Corrected Ex. I have eaten only one piece of sushi in my entire life.