

CHAPTER 19: PLACEMENT OF MODIFIERS

MISPLACED MODIFIERS

A modifying phrase or clause that is placed too far from the word it sensibly modifies is called a *misplaced modifier*.

19a Avoid using a misplaced modifier.

To correct a misplaced modifier, place the phrase or clause as close as possible to the word you intend it to modify.

MISPLACED Filling the air with thick smoke, we watched the garage burn.
CLEAR We watched the garage burn, filling the air with thick smoke.

MISPLACED Jovita bought a new CD player for the family which never worked well.
CLEAR Jovita bought the family a new CD player, which never worked well.

19b Avoid placing a phrase or clause so that it seems to modify either of two words. Such a misplaced modifier is often called a *two-way*, or *squinting*, modifier.

MISPLACED Tell Gwen between acts I would like to see her.
CLEAR **Between acts**, tell Gwen I would like to see her.
CLEAR Tell Gwen I would like to see her **between acts**.

EXERCISE 1 Revising Sentences by Correcting Misplaced Modifiers

Revise each of the following sentences by moving the misplaced phrase or clause as close as possible to the word it modifies. Write your revised sentences on the line provided.

- EX. 1. Plants are sold by florists that grow in the tropics.
Plants that grow in the tropics are sold by florists. _____
1. Fran talked about the illness she had had on the way home from the hospital. _____

2. Digging a hole with his front paws, Harold saw your dog Spike. _____

3. My neighbor has a parakeet who writes children's books. _____

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4. We watched the clouds drift by eating our picnic lunch. _____
5. I remember during the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill I was involved in antipollution activities. _____
6. Please put this vase near the piano on the table. _____
7. He made a loaf of bread for his family that has raisins in it. _____
8. The teacher asked the two students after class to report to the office. _____
9. Lori said after Hanukkah we would go to Santa Fe. _____
10. We found a veterinarian for my cat who specializes in skin diseases. _____
11. Please tell the man on Monday I need the firewood. _____
12. Hidden under the table, I can see your shoes. _____
13. They learned at the museum she was a tour guide. _____
14. A woodchuck dug a hole in the garden that is unbelievably deep. _____
15. We hired for my sister a tutor who needs extra help in math. _____

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DANGLING MODIFIERS

A modifying phrase or clause that does not sensibly modify any word or group of words in the sentence is called a *dangling modifier*.

19c Avoid using a dangling modifier.

You may correct a dangling modifier in several ways.

- (1) Add a word that the phrase or clause can sensibly modify.
- (2) Add, change, or delete words in the phrase or clause so that your meaning is clear.
- (3) Reword the sentence.

- DANGLING** The car went off the road while trying to read the map.
CLEAR The car went off the road **while I was trying to read the map.**
CLEAR I drove the car off the road **while trying to read the map.**
- DANGLING** Talking about the game, dinner was forgotten entirely.
CLEAR **Talking about the game,** Claudia and Shane forgot dinner entirely.
CLEAR **Because Claudia and Shane were talking about the game,** dinner was forgotten entirely.

NOTE A few dangling modifiers have become standard idiomatic expressions.

- EXAMPLES** **Generally speaking,** the Japanese *ryokan* is the place to choose if you want to stay at a peaceful inn.
To be perfectly frank, that writer's only good book was her first one.

REFERENCE NOTE: For more about using commas after introductory words, phrases, and clauses, see page 303.

EXERCISE 2 Revising Sentences by Eliminating Dangling Modifiers

On the lines provided, revise each sentence to eliminate the dangling modifier.

EX. 1. To win the championship, an undefeated season is necessary.
To win the championship, our team needs an undefeated season.

1. While fishing, these trout were caught. _____

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