

Misplaced Modifiers

WHAT ARE MODIFIERS?

A modifier is a word or a phrase that is used to describe another word or phrase. Modifiers can be adjectives, adverbs, prepositional phrases, or articles. For example:

Brandon loves vanilla ice cream.

⇒ In this example, “vanilla” is an adjective describing “ice cream,” making it the modifier.

Angela ran quickly to the parking lot to seek cover from the rain.

⇒ In this example, the adverb “quickly” modifies the verb “ran” by describing the rate at which Angela was running.

The boy with blonde hair is from Sweden.

⇒ In this example, the prepositional phrase “with blonde hair” is used to describe “boy,” making it the modifier.

My mom was looking to buy a car.

⇒ In this example, “a” is an article modifying “car,” making it the modifier.

Misplaced Modifiers

WHAT ARE MISPLACED MODIFIERS?

Misplaced modifiers are words or phrases that are placed too far from the word they are modifying. For this reason, the true meaning of the sentence can be lost, and the reader may not understand the intended meaning. For example:

The man living in the yellow house had several children.

The man had several children living in the yellow house.

⇒ The placement of the modifier in this case changes the meaning of the sentence completely. In the first sentence, the modifier “living in the yellow house” is describing the man whereas in the second sentence the same modifier is describing the children. Either sentence would make sense, but they both convey different meanings to the reader. Take care to modify the correct word or phrase.

One-word Modifiers

Like phrases, some words can cause confusion when misplaced in a sentence. These words include: *almost, just, nearly, simply, even, hardly, merely, and only*. The following examples demonstrate how the meaning of a sentence will change by misplacing a one-word modifier.

The restaurant on the corner only serves dinner on Fridays.

⇒ In this sentence, the modifier “only” describes when dinner is served at the restaurant. This implies that the restaurant does not serve dinner on any other day of the week.

The restaurant on the corner serves only dinner on Fridays.

⇒ In this sentence, the modifier “only” describes what the restaurant serves on Fridays; therefore, it can be assumed that no other meal will be served on Fridays besides dinner.

Only the restaurant on the corner serves dinner on Fridays.

⇒ In this sentence, the modifier “only” describes the restaurant itself and suggests that no restaurant serves dinner on Fridays except this one.

Introductory Clause Modifiers

Many times when an introductory clause is acting as a modifier in a sentence, it is unclear which word is being modified. This is because the modified word is misplaced and does not directly follow the clause. The modified word can be completely left out at times as well, making the meaning of the sentence very vague.

Weighing only one hundred pounds, donating blood was not recommended for Jamie.

⇒ In this case, the modifying clause, “weighing only one hundred pounds,” is supposed to be modifying “Jamie.” Because of the placement of the clause, it is actually modifying the verb “donating” instead. A possible revision of this sentence could be:

Weighing only one hundred pounds, Jamie was not able to donate blood.

⇒ In this sentence, “weighing only one hundred pounds” is correctly modifying the subject “Jamie.”

More Introductory Clause

Modifiers

Running through the field, the sun was setting.

- ⇒ This sentence is missing a subject for the modifying phrase, “running through the field.” The placement of “the sun” after the modifying phrase makes it seem as if it were the word being modified, but “the sun” is not able to run, so this does not make sense. A possible revision of this sentence could be:

Running through the field, we saw the sun setting.

- ⇒ In this sentence, “running through the field” is correctly modifying the subject “we.”

Arriving late at the house, no one was home to greet us.

- ⇒ “Arriving late at the house” is used as an introductory clause and modifying phrase in this sentence. As it stands it is currently modifying “no one,” but by modifying “no one,” the sentence makes no sense. The correct subject should be “we,” but it is currently missing from the sentence. A possible revision of this sentence could be:

Arriving late at the house, we found no one home.

- ⇒ In this sentence, “running through the field” is correctly modifying the subject “we.”