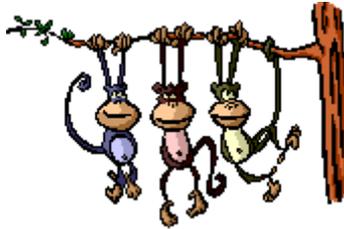




Help With: Misplaced Modifiers



A modifier *modifies* other words—it is usually an adjective or adverb, but can be other word types as well. Put modifiers as close as possible to the words they modify. The rule is that simple. The trouble is that we often think of the modifier out of sequence. The modifier's placement may make sense to us, but it may be puzzling for a reader.

Placement of Single Words

Make sure to put modifiers next to the words they modify:

No: Fred almost works out every day. (He exercises nearly every day? Or he *almost*, but never quite makes it to the gym?)

Yes: Fred works out almost every day.

Placement of Phrases and Clauses

As with words, place modifying phrases and clauses close to the words they modify.

No: The school needed someone to coach basketball with experience.

Yes: The school needed someone with experience to coach basketball.

No: The young woman was walking her dog in a short skirt.

Yes: The young woman in a short skirt was walking her dog.

Squinting Constructions

Avoid placing modifiers in positions that make the meaning of the sentence ambiguous.

No: The fireman refused before the contract was signed to perform overtime.

This sentence can mean either that the fireman refused before the signing of the contract or that the fireman refused to perform the duty during that period which was not under contract. The first is a blanket refusal; the second, a temporary refusal. The sentence isn't a mistake but the reader doesn't know which meaning is intended.

Dangling Modifiers

Dangling modifiers can look fine when you are writing them but might look ridiculous later:

No: Unaware of any danger, the ball sped towards Fred's nose.

Yes: Unaware of any danger, Fred did not know the ball was speeding towards his nose.