

## I. MISPLACED MODIFIER

A **misplaced modifier** is a word, phrase, or clause that is improperly separated from the word it modifies/describes. Because of the separation, sentences with this error often sound awkward, ridiculous, or confusing. Furthermore, they can be downright illogical.

Misplaced: *On her way home, Jan found a gold man's watch.*  
The example above suggests that a gold man owns a watch.

Misplaced modifiers can usually be corrected by moving the modifier to a more sensible place in the sentence, generally next to the word it modifies.

Good: *On her way home, Jan found a man's gold watch.*  
Now it is the watch that is gold.

There are several kinds of misplaced modifiers:

1. **Misplaced adjectives** are incorrectly separated from the nouns they modify and almost always distort the intended meaning.

Misplaced: *The child ate a cold bowl of cereal for breakfast this morning.*  
Good: *The child ate a bowl of cold cereal for breakfast this morning.*

Misplaced: *The torn student's book lay on the desk.*  
Good: *The student's torn book lay on the desk.*

2. **Placement of adverbs** can also change meaning in sentences. For example, the sentences below illustrate how the placement of *just* can change the sentence's meaning.

*Just* means only John was picked: *Just John was picked to host the program.*  
*Just* means that John was picked now: *John was just picked to host the program.*  
*Just* means that John hosted only the program: *John was picked to host just the program.*

Each of these sentences says something logical but quite different, and its correctness depends upon what the writer has in mind. Often, misplacing an adverb not only alters the intended meaning, but also creates a sentence whose meaning is highly unlikely or completely ridiculous.

Misplaced: *We ate the lunch that we had brought slowly.*  
The sentence above suggests that we brought a lunch slowly.  
Good: *We slowly ate the lunch that we had brought.*

3. **Misplaced phrases** may cause a sentence to sound awkward and may create a meaning that does not make sense. The problem sentences below contain misplaced phrases that modify the wrong nouns.

Misplaced: *The dealer sold the Cadillac to the buyer with leather seats.*  
The sentence above suggests that the person had leather seats, not the car.  
Good: *The dealer sold the Cadillac with leather seats to the buyer.*

Misplaced: *The three bankers talked quietly in the corner smoking pipes.*  
Good: *The three bankers smoking pipes talked quietly in the corner.*

4. **Misplaced clauses** may cause a sentence to sound awkward and may create a meaning that does not make sense. The problem sentences below contain misplaced clauses that modify the wrong nouns.

Misplaced: *The waiter served a dinner roll to the woman that was well buttered.*  
Good: *The waiter served a dinner roll that was well buttered to the woman.*

Misplaced: *Ralph piled all of his clothes in the hamper that he had worn.*  
Good: *Ralph piled all of his clothes that he had worn in the hamper.*

Note: Be careful when you correct misplaced modifiers! Don't create a sentence with two possible meanings. Example: *The teacher said on Monday she would return our essays.* (Did the teacher **say** this on Monday or will she **return** the essays on Monday? It can't be made clear in this sentence.)

## II. DANGLING MODIFIER

A **dangling modifier** is a phrase or clause that is not clearly and logically related to the word or words it modifies (placed next to). Unlike a misplaced modifier, a dangling modifier cannot be corrected by simply moving it to a different place in a sentence.

Sometimes the dangling modifier error occurs because the sentence fails to specify anything to which the modifier can refer.

Dangling: *Looking toward the west, a funnel shaped cloud stirred up dust.*  
This sentence does not specify who is looking toward the west. In fact, there is nothing at all in the sentence to which the modifying *phrase looking toward the west* can logically refer. Since the modifier, *looking toward the west*, is sitting next to the funnel shaped cloud, the sentence suggests that the cloud is doing the looking.

There are two ways to fix a dangling modifier.

### Correction Method 1

1. Leave the modifier as it is.
2. Change the main part of the sentence so that it begins with the term actually modified.
3. This change will put the modifier next to the term it modifies

Dangling: *Looking toward the west, a funnel shaped cloud stirred up dust.*  
Good: *Looking toward the west, I saw a funnel shaped cloud stir up dust.*

Dangling: *Walking to the movies, the cloudburst drenched Jim.*  
Good: *Walking to the movies, Jim was drenched by the cloudburst.*

### Correction Method 2

1. Change the dangling phrase to a subordinate clause, creating a subject and verb.
2. Leave the rest of the sentence as it is.

Dangling: When nine years old, my mother enrolled in medical school.  
Good: When I was nine years old, my mother enrolled in medical school.

Dangling: Having been fixed the night before, Priscilla could use the car.  
Good: Since the car had been fixed the night before, Priscilla could use it.

### III. VERB VOICE

Most English sentences with an action verb are called **Active Voice** sentences because the subject performs the action denoted by the verb. These examples show that the subject is doing the verb's action:

- a. The man must have eaten five hamburgers.  
The *man* (subject) is doing the *eating* (verb).
- b. Marilyn mailed the letter.  
*Marilyn* (subject) is doing the *mailing* (verb).
- c. Colorful parrots live in the rainforests.  
*Parrots* (subject) are doing the *living* (verb).

Because the subject does or "acts upon" the verb in such sentences, the sentences are said to be in the active voice.

One can change the normal word order of many active sentences (specifically, those with a direct object) so that the subject is no longer active, but is, instead, being acted upon by the verb - or **Passive Voice**. Note in these examples how the subject-verb relationship has changed:

- a. Five Hamburgers must have been eaten by the man.  
*Hamburgers* (subject) *are being eaten* (verb).
- b. The letter was mailed by Marilyn.  
The *letter* (subject) *was being mailed* (verb).

Because the subject is being "acted upon" (or is passive), such sentences are said to be in the passive voice.

NOTE: Colorful parrots live in the rainforests, cannot be changed to passive voice because the sentence does not have a direct object.

#### Changing a Sentence from Passive to Active

Active voice is generally preferred in writing, so we will focus on making sentences active. To change a passive voice sentence into an active voice sentence, follow the steps below:

1. Move the passive sentence's subject into the active sentence's direct object slot

Passive voice                      → Active Voice  
*The letter* (subject) was mailed by Marilyn.                      → Marilyn mailed *the letter* (direct object).

2. Remove the auxiliary verb be from the main verb and change main verb's form if needed

Passive voice                      → Active Voice  
The letter *was mailed* ("to be" auxiliary)...                      → Marilyn *mailed* the letter.

3. Place the passive sentence's object of the preposition by into the subject slot.

Passive voice                      → Active Voice  
The letter was mailed by *Marilyn* (object of the preposition "by") →  
→ *Marilyn* (subject) mailed the letter.

Because it is more direct, most writers prefer to use the active voice whenever possible.

**The passive voice may be a better choice, however, when**

The doer of the action is unknown, unwanted, or unneeded in the sentence

Examples:      The ballots have been counted.  
                     Sometimes our efforts are not fully appreciated.

The writer wishes to emphasize the action of the sentence rather than the doer of the action

Examples:      The high-jump record was finally broken last Saturday.  
                     A suspect was questioned for sixteen hours by the police.

The writer may, also wish to use passive voice for sentence variety. For the sake of class, however, please write the most active sentences that you can.

**Worksheet on next page →**

**NAME:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please complete this to the best of your ability. It is my hope that each worksheet gets progressively more difficult, so I do expect some questions about this assignment. If you have some questions, don't be shy! Send me an email, come to office hours, or set up an appointment to meet with me at some other time.

A. Rewrite each sentence to fix all parallelism errors.

1. An actor knows how to memorize his lines and getting into character.
2. Tell me where you were, what you were doing, and your reasons for doing it.
3. Clark's daily exercises include running, swimming, and to lift weights.
4. To donate money to the homeless shelter is helping people stay warm in the winter.
5. Jim not only likes working outside but also getting dirty.
6. We followed the path through the forest, over the hill, and we went across the river.
7. The writer was brilliant but a recluse.
8. After the party, we want to either go to a movie or the diner.
9. She told Jake to take out the trash, to mow the lawn, and be listening for the phone call.
10. Marcie studied for the test by reviewing her class notes and she read her textbook.

B. Find and correct these examples of sentences with misplaced modifiers.

11. When we opened the leather woman's purse, we found the missing keys.
12. The striking Honda's paint job made everyone gasp.
13. Michelle took the dog on the way to the movies.
14. My wife found a photograph in the attic that Smith had given to Jones.
15. The governor made some remarks about inflation during her news conference.

C. Find and fix the following dangling modifier issues.

16. Originally written for children, many adults have been enchanted by *Peter Pan*.
17. After assaulting several bystanders, the police captured the criminal.
18. Once filled with ink, you can write for hours before the pen runs dry.
19. After showing my ID, the gate opened.
20. Driving up the long, tree lined driveway, the mansion loomed above us.

D. Rewrite the following sentences so that they use the active voice. When necessary, supply the missing performer of the action. Some of the sentences may already use the active voice.

1. Alice was invited to play croquet by the Queen of Hearts.
2. The Daltons and the Clantons were never captured by the posse.
3. Mario had been training for the marathon for six months.
4. Janet was not allowed to watch the movie because her homework was not yet completed.
5. Members of the army were inoculated for scarlet fever by the government.
6. Airline passengers are routinely checked by security guards to make sure no weapons are being carried on board
7. Many scenes of American life in the 1950s were painted by Norman Rockwell.
8. Fireworks are considered dangerous by many people and have been outlawed by many cities.
9. Emily Dickinson's poems had been rejected by publishers many times.
10. The Harry Potter movies were watched numerous times by Douglas and Jaime.
11. The strong wind bent the newly planted birch tree to the ground.
12. Blue skies and warm weather are hoped for by everyone who has been invited to the picnic.
13. Darnell is studying to be a doctor even though he does not know how his tuition will be paid.
14. Herman started to worry when he was told that wasps had been seen flying into his bedroom.
15. A llama and an aardvark were chased from one end of the park to the other by six worried zookeepers.