**2.7 Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers**

**Misplaced Modifiers**

A misplaced modifier is a modifier that is placed too far from the word or words it modifies. Misplaced modifiers make the sentence awkward and sometimes unintentionally humorous.

**Incorrect:** She wore a bicycle helmet on her head *that was too large*.

**Correct:** She wore a bicycle helmet *that was too large* on her head.

* Notice in the incorrect sentence it sounds as if her head was too large! Of course, the writer is referring to the helmet, not to the person’s head. The corrected version of the sentence clarifies the writer’s meaning.

Look at the following two examples:

**Incorrect:** They bought a kitten for my brother *they call Shadow*.

**Correct:** They bought a kitten *they call Shadow* for my brother.

* In the incorrect sentence, it seems that the brother’s name is *Shadow*. That’s because the modifier is too far from the word it modifies, which is *kitten*.

**Incorrect:** The patient was referred to the physician *with stomach pains*.

**Correct:** The patient *with stomach pains* was referred to the physician.

* The incorrect sentence reads as if it is the physician who has stomach pains! What the writer means is that the patient has stomach pains.

*Tip*

Simple modifiers like *only*, *almost*, *just*, *nearly*, and *barely* often get used incorrectly because writers often stick them in the wrong place.

**Confusing:** Tyler *almost* found fifty cents under the sofa cushions.

**Repaired:** Tyler found *almost* fifty cents under the sofa cushions.

* How do you *almost* find something? Either you find it or you do not. The repaired sentence is much clearer.

**Exercise 1**

On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite the following sentences to correct the misplaced modifiers.

1. The young lady was walking the dog on the telephone.
2. I heard that there was a robbery on the evening news.
3. Uncle Louie bought a running stroller for the baby that he called “Speed Racer.”
4. Rolling down the mountain, the explorer stopped the boulder with his powerful foot.
5. We are looking for a babysitter for our precious six-year-old who doesn’t drink or smoke and owns a car.
6. The teacher served cookies to the children wrapped in aluminum foil.
7. The mysterious woman walked toward the car holding an umbrella.
8. We returned the wine to the waiter that was sour.
9. Charlie spotted a stray puppy driving home from work.
10. I ate nothing but a cold bowl of noodles for dinner.

**Dangling Modifiers**

A dangling modifier is a word, phrase, or clause that describes something that has been left out of the sentence. When there is nothing that the word, phrase, or clause can modify, the modifier is said to dangle.

**Incorrect:** *Riding in the sports car*, the world whizzed by rapidly.

**Correct:** As Jane was *riding in the sports car*, the world whizzed by rapidly.

* In the incorrect sentence, *riding in the sports car* is dangling. The reader is left wondering who is riding in the sports car. The writer must tell the reader!

**Incorrect:** *Walking home at night*, the trees looked like spooky aliens.

**Correct:** As Jonas was *walking home at night*, the trees looked like spooky aliens.

**Correct:** The trees looked like spooky aliens as Jonas was *walking home at night*.

* In the incorrect sentence *walking home at night* is dangling. Who is walking home at night? Jonas. Note that there are two different ways the dangling modifier can be corrected.

**Incorrect:** To win the spelling bee, Luis and Gerard should join our team.

**Correct:** If we want to win the spelling bee this year, Luis and Gerard should join our team.

* In the incorrect sentence, *to win the spelling bee* is dangling. Who wants to win the spelling bee? We do!

*Tip*

The following three steps will help you quickly spot a dangling modifier:

1. Look for an *-ing* modifier at the beginning of your sentence or another modifying phrase:

*Painting for three hours at night,* the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie. (*Painting* is the *-ing* modifier.)

1. Underline the first noun that follows it:

*Painting for three hours at night,* the kitchen was finally finished by Maggie.

1. Make sure the modifier and noun go together logically. If they do not, it is very likely you have a dangling modifier.

After identifying the dangling modifier, rewrite the sentence.

*Painting for three hours at night, Maggie* finally finished the kitchen.

**Exercise 2**

Rewrite the following the sentences onto your own sheet of paper to correct the dangling modifiers.

1. Bent over backward, the posture was very challenging.
2. Making discoveries about new creatures, this is an interesting time to be a biologist.
3. Walking in the dark, the picture fell off the wall.
4. Playing a guitar in the bedroom, the cat was seen under the bed.
5. Packing for a trip, a cockroach scurried down the hallway.
6. While looking in the mirror, the towel swayed in the breeze.
7. While driving to the veterinarian’s office, the dog nervously whined.
8. The priceless painting drew large crowds when walking into the museum.
9. Piled up next to the bookshelf, I chose a romance novel.
10. Chewing furiously, the gum fell out of my mouth.