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The Modifier

Recognize a *modifier* when you see one.

Modifiers are words, phrases, or clauses that provide description in sentences.

Modifiers allow writers to take the picture that they have in their heads and transfer it accurately to the heads of their readers. Essentially, modifiers breathe life into sentences. Take a look at this "dead" sentence:

Stephen dropped his fork.

Now read what several well placed modifiers can do:

Poor *Stephen*, who just wanted a quick meal to get through his three-hour biology lab, quickly *dropped his fork* on the cafeteria tray, gagging with disgust as a tarantula wiggled out of his cheese omelet, a sight requiring a year of therapy before Stephen could

eat eggs again.

Modifiers can be adjectives, adjective clauses, adverbs, adverb clauses, absolute phrases, infinitive phrases, participle phrases, and prepositional phrases. The sentence above contains at least one example of each:

Adjective = *poor*.

Adjective clause = *who just wanted a quick meal*.

Adverb = *quickly*.

Adverb clause = *as a tarantula wiggled out of his cheese omelet*.

Absolute phrase = *a sight requiring a year of therapy before Stephen could eat eggs again*.

Infinitive phrase = *to get through his three-hour biology lab*.

Participle phrase = *gagging with disgust*.

Prepositional phrase = *on the cafeteria tray*.

Without modifiers, sentences would be no fun to read. Carefully chosen, well-placed modifiers allow you to depict situations with as much accuracy as words will allow.



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