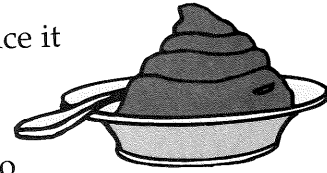


Sentence Clarity: Misplaced Modifiers

When you add a modifying phrase to a sentence, be sure to place it where it makes sense. Any modifier describing a noun or a pronoun belongs just before or just after the word it describes. A modifier placed in the wrong part of a sentence often leads to confusion. Note how, in the first sentence below, misplacing the underlined phrase results in a wrong message.



Misplaced: The pudding is for you in the yellow bowl.

Correct: The pudding in the yellow bowl is for you.

In the first sentence, the modifier is closer to *you* than it is to *pudding*. Therefore, the sentence suggests that the person spoken to is in the yellow bowl. The second sentence makes it clear that it is the pudding that is in the bowl.

A **misplaced modifier** is any modifier that is placed in a sentence in such a way that it describes the wrong person or thing. You can usually avoid misplaced modifiers by placing every descriptive phrase as close as possible to the word it modifies.

Find the misplaced modifier in each sentence. Then rewrite the sentence, correcting the position of the modifier.

- Any customer can order a dining room set with a good credit rating.

- Hiding acorns under a bush, I saw a brown squirrel.

- Several coins rolled into the street that fell from Zubin's pocket.

- The pencils are sharp in that box, but they have no erasers.

- Marooned on a desert island, the story is about a pirate.

- Our neighbors' dog irritates us, always barking.

B Practice

A modifying phrase can cause confusion when it is added to a sentence that has no word for it to modify. Here is an example:

Crossing the ocean, the weather was awful.

There is no word in the sentence modified by the phrase *crossing the ocean*. Such a phrase, which is not connected to any word in its sentence, is called a **dangling modifier**. Be sure that when you add a modifier to a sentence, the modifier relates to a specific word in the sentence. Correct a sentence with a dangling modifier by rewriting it to include the word that is modified.

Crossing the ocean, the travelers experienced awful weather.

For each item, circle the letter of the sentence that is written correctly without any dangling modifiers.

1. A With steady income from investments, retirement can be pleasant.
B With steady income from investments, a person can enjoy retirement.
2. A Falling on the slick ice, you could break a bone.
B Falling on the slick ice, broken bones are a possibility.
3. A Perry came home to a fine dinner by the turnpike.
B After traveling on the turnpike, Perry came home to a fine dinner.
4. A Listening to the radio, we heard some old favorites.
B Listening to the radio, the beat of the drums was strong and steady.
5. A Covered with chocolate, the calories in that sundae must be high!
B When you are trying to lose weight, choosing a sundae is a bad idea.
6. A With two scoops, Moira is eating a chocolate ice-cream cone.
B Moira is eating a chocolate ice-cream cone with two scoops.
7. A Joel found the CD he lost last summer recently.
B Joel recently found the CD he lost last summer.
8. A Searching in the mountains of Siberia, an archeologist found a major treasure.
B The Russian archeologist discovered a 2400-year-old mummy searching in the mountains of Siberia.

C**Apply**

Read each set of underlined sentences. Then choose the sentence that combines the underlined sentences.

1. Alice was swimming at a hotel pool.

A toddler fell into the water.

Alice saved the child.

A Swimming at a hotel pool, a toddler fell into the water, and Alice saved the child.

B Alice, swimming at a hotel pool, saved a toddler who fell into the water.

C Swimming at a hotel pool, a toddler who fell into the water was saved.

2. Let the dough rise for about an hour.
Then divide it into four equal portions.

F After rising for about an hour, divide the dough into four equal portions.

G For about an hour, divide the dough which has risen into four equal portions.

H After letting the dough rise for about an hour, divide it into four equal portions.

3. Tippy was originally named Tabitha.
She got her nickname from a little brother.
Her brother couldn't say her name.

A Originally named Tabitha, Tippy got her nickname from a little brother who couldn't say her name.

B Originally named Tabitha, her nickname Tippy came from a little brother who couldn't say her name.

C Originally named Tabitha, a little brother who couldn't say her name gave Tippy her nickname.

Read the underlined sentences. If the final sentence combines the underlined ones correctly, write *Correct*. If it does not, rewrite the combined sentence correctly.

4. Allen was cutting the lawn.

A skunk crossed the lawn in front of him.

Cutting the lawn, a skunk crossed the lawn in front of Allen.

5. Ilona's cell phone was lying in her pocket.

It rang during an orchestra concert.

Ilona's cell phone rang during an orchestra concert lying in her pocket.

D Check Up

For each item, choose the sentence that has no misplaced or dangling modifiers.

1.

A Shooting across the night sky, we saw a meteor.

B My nephew impressed everyone playing a cornet solo at the high school band concert.

C Buildings on the east side of the city were not damaged by the tornado.

D After stopping at a gas station on the way here, my tank is full.
2.

F Most of the parents at the PTA meeting voted to hold a fundraiser.

G Laying off many workers at area plants, citizens have seen the local economy falter.

H With a malfunctioning timer, no one can use this microwave oven.

J Several neighbors tried out for parts in a play about a vampire that I know.
3.

A First enjoyed by Native Americans, we prepare succotash by cooking lima beans and corn together.

B The knocker on the front door makes a sound heard throughout the entire house.

C Despite record cold temperatures, fans camped out overnight for tickets dropping into the 30s Fahrenheit.

D Returning from the sea, relieved families greeted the crews of the fishing vessels.
4.

F Lydia accidentally left the album on the train filled with family photographs.

G Before deciding whom to vote for, a review of the candidates' records is recommended.

H With delicate pink flowers, Evan planted rhododendrons along the north edge of the yard.

J Carrying a bulky desk down the stairs, the movers scraped paint off the walls.
5.

A Holding little Fritz up to the mirror, the baby reached toward his reflection.

B The clothes that Indira put into the washer with her new red towels came out pink.

C Not long after surgery, Enrique greeted visitors at the hospital on his elbow.

D Elected the second president of the United States, ancestors of John Adams had settled in Massachusetts before 1640.
6.

F Yelling enthusiastically, the arena was a noisy bedlam.

G Eliza carved two jack-o'-lanterns for her children with triangle eyes and oval mouths.

H Speaking at Monday's City Council meeting, Leonard asked for improved street lighting.

J Spread with jam, almost every child likes toast.