

UNIVERSITY WRITING CENTER
20+ years of student success
www.csulb.edu/uwc
(562) 985 -5162
SSC- 245

Misplaced, Dangling, and Squinting Modifiers

Overview: A modifier is a word or group of words that describes another word (or group of words) in a sentence. The modifier should be placed as close as possible to the word it is describing. When a modifier is too far from the word it is describing, the sentence becomes confusing. Here we will look at misplaced, dangling, and squinting modifiers and ways to fix them.

Modifiers can work as either an adjective or an adverb, describing a noun or a verb. Here are some examples.

1. The old chair broke and fell to the filthy floor.
2. I gave him a record that had a lot of scratches
3. Spinning away from the stovetop, Ramona knocked a pan to the floor

Misplaced modifiers are separated from the word they are describing, and as a result do not make logical sense.

Example 1:

Misplaced modifier: Shooting from the toy cannon, we could see little white pieces of paper.

- ¾ This sentence makes it sound like the people in the sentence are being shot out of a cannon. That could be the case, but it is more likely that the author meant that the paper was being shot from a cannon.

Revised version: We could see little white pieces of paper falling from the top of the Empire State Building

Example 2:

Misplaced modifier: I saw the murderer had been captured in the evening paper

- ¾ In this sentence, it sounds as though the murderer was somehow trapped inside the newspaper. It is more likely that

Dangling modifiers do not clearly describe anything in the sentence. In these instances, simply moving the modifier will not be enough. We will need to add something to clarify what the modifier is describing.

Example 1:

Dangling modifier: Taking her in his arms, the moon hid behind the clouds.

¾ It is not clear what the two people mentioned in the first part of the sentence have to do with the moon in the second part. The ~~logical~~ relationship is that the two actions described in the sentence are happening at the same time. We can make that relationship clear by adding a word.
Revised version: The moon hid behind the clouds