

MISPLACED AND DANGLING MODIFIERS

Writing III

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1. Misplaced modifiers

Modifiers are descriptive words. *Misplaced modifiers* are words that, because of awkward placement, do not describe the words the writer intended them to describe. Misplaced modifiers often obscure the meaning of a sentence and make it have two possible meaning. To avoid them, place words as close as possible to what they describe.

Examples:

- a. Clyde and Charlotte decided to have two children on their wedding day.

Unintended meaning:

Clyde and Charlotte decided to have two children who would magically appear on the day of their wedding.

Intended meaning:

On their wedding day, Clyde and Charlotte decided to have two children.

- b. The students no longer like the math instructor who failed the test.

Unintended meaning:

The math instructor failed the test.

Intended meaning:

The students who failed the test no longer like the math instructor.

- c. I nearly earned a hundred dollars last week.

Unintended meaning:

I just missed earning a hundred dollars last week. (*In fact I earned nothing.*)

Intended meaning:

I earned nearly a hundred dollars last week. (*I earned a little under a hundred dollars.*)

Exercise:

- I saw mountains of uncollected trash walking along the city streets.
- The child stares at the movie monster with huge, innocent eyes.
- Charlotte returned the hamburger to the supermarket that was spoiled.
- The biology teacher told us there would be a pop quiz with an evil grin.
- Rita found it difficult to mount the horse wearing tight jeans.

2. Dangling modifiers

Dangling modifiers are modifiers opening a sentence without being immediately followed by the word it is meant to describe. They make the sentence have two possible meaning; the unintended and the intended ones.

Examples:

- a. While smoking a pipe, my dog sat with me by the crackling fire.

Unintended meaning:

My dog smoked a pipe.

Intended meaning:

My dog sat with me as I smoke a pipe.

- b. While eating my sandwich, five mosquitoes bite me.

Unintended meaning:

Five mosquitoes were eating my sandwich.

Intended meaning:

While I was eating my sandwich, five mosquitoes bit me.

- c. Looking at the leather-skirted woman, his sports car went through a red light.

Unintended meaning:

His sports car looked at a leather-skirted woman.

Intended meaning:

He looked at a leather-skirted woman.

Exercise:

- a. To join the team, a C average or better is necessary.
- b. After putting on a corduroy shirt, the room didn't seem as cold.
- c. Covered with food stains, my mother decided to wash the tablecloth.
- d. Under attack by beetles, Charlotte sprayed her roses with insecticide.
- e. Braking the car suddenly, my shopping bags tumbled off the seat.

B. CAPITAL LETTERS & PUNCTUATION

1. Capital letters

- a. Write the full name of a person you know:
- b. In what city and state were you born?
- c. What is your present street address?
- d. Name a country where you would like to travel:
- e. Name a school that you attended:
- f. Give the name of a store where you buy food:
- g. Name a company where someone you know works:
- h. What a day of the week gives you the best chance to relax?
- i. What holiday is your favourite?
- j. What brand of toothpaste do you use?
- k. What the brand name of a candy or gum you like?
- l. Name a song or television show you enjoy:
- m. Write the title of a magazine you read:

the masked man reared his silvery-white horse, waved good-bye and rode out of town. My heart thrilled when i heard someone say, "that was the Lone Ranger. You don't see this kind much, anymore".

Main uses of capital letters:

- a. The first word in a sentence or direct quotation.
- b. Names of persons and the word *I*.
- c. Names of particular places
- d. Names of days of the week, months and holidays
- e. Names of commercial products
- f. Names of organizations such as religious and political groups, associations, companies, unions and clubs.
- g. Titles of books, magazines, newspapers, articles, stories, poems, films, television shows, songs, papers that you write, and the like
- h. Names that show family relationship
- i. Titles of persons when used with their names
- j. Specific school courses
- k. Languages
- l. Geographic locations
- m. Historical periods and events
- n. Races, nations, and nationalities
- o. Opening and closing of a letter

2. Punctuation

a. Apostrophe

Main functions:

- 1) To show the omission of one or more letters in a contraction
- 2) To show ownership or possession

ADD APOSTHROPE + -s		
1. To singular nouns and to plural nouns that don't end in -s	Singular nouns Child's toy Boss's office My-mother-in-law's car The emperor of Japan's palace	Plural nouns <i>Children's game</i> <i>Men's ties</i> <i>The media's influence</i> Mr. and Mrs. Smith's house Plural of letters <i>There are four s's and four i's in the word of Mississippi.</i> <i>The teacher gave two A's and ten F's last semester.</i> Plural of abbreviations (that have more than one period e.g. M.D., Ph.D. and so on); with -s or without is fine. <i>My mother has two Ph.D.'s: one in English and one in Philosophy.</i> <i>My mother has two Ph.D.s: one in English and one in Philosophy. (modern English writing).</i>
2. To indefinite pronouns	Someone's mistake Everyone else's opinion Nobody's fault	
3. To abbreviations	NAFTA's success UNESCO's budget	
ADD AN APOSTHROPE ALONE		
To plural nouns ending in -s		Plural nouns <i>Students' club</i> <i>Actresses' costume</i> <i>The Smiths' house</i> <i>The Joneses' daughters</i>
SPECIAL SITUATIONS		
Compound nouns		My mother-in-law's car The emperor of Japan's palace Everyone else's opinion
Joint possession		John and Mary's wedding Mr. and Mrs. Smith's house
Apostrophe in contractions and in years		To notice: He's He'd <i>He's a member of the class of '04.</i> <i>Jazz music first became popular in the 20's.</i>

Exercises:

- 1) Both of my aunt birthdays are the same day.
- 2) The womans purse was stolen.
- 3) The womens clothing department is on the third floor.

- 4) The cat hurt its paw, so its licking it.
- 5) The Smiths have a new baby daughter.

b. Quotation Marks

Main functions:

- 1) to set off the exact words of a speaker or a writer
- 2) to set off the titles of short works
- 3) to set off words with unusual, especially ironic, meanings
- 4) to set off translations of foreign words

Exercise:

- 1) Iced-cold drinks! shouted the vendor selling lukewarm drinks.
- 2) Be careful not to touch the fence, the guard warned. It's electricised.
- 3) Just because I am deaf, Lynn said, many people treat me as I'm stupid.
- 4) When Ling got her TV Guide, she read an article called Who Will Oscar Smile Upon? and thumbed through the listings to read the preview for Ally McBeal.
- 5) The night before his exam, he discovered with horror that the chapter Becoming Mature was missing from Childhood and Adolescence, the psychology text that he had bought secondhand.
- 6) The **banquet** consisted of a cheese sandwich and a soda.
- 7) German has many long words such as *Strassenbahnfuhrersgeldtasche* (streetcar conductor's money purse).

c. Comma

Main functions:

- 1) To separate items in a series
- 2) To set off introductory materials
- 3) Before and after words that interrupt the flow of thought in a sentence
- 4) Before two complete thoughts connected by *and, but, for, or, nor, so, yet*
- 5) To set off a direct quotation from the rest of a sentence
- 6) For certain everyday material

Exercises:

- 1) Can I borrow the car tonight Dad?
- 2) No you can't.
- 3) It's a nice day today isn't it?
- 4) The United States declared its independence from England on July 1776 in Philadelphia Pennsylvania and started a war.

d. Other punctuations

Exercise:

Each of the sentences needs one of the following punctuation marks:

: _ - ()

- a. The following holiday plants are poisonous and should be kept away from children and pets holly, mistletoe, and poinsettias.
- b. The freeze dried remains of Annie's canary were in the clear bottle of her bookcase.
- c. William Shakespeare 1564 – 1616 married a woman eight years his senior when he was eighteen.