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**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 illustrating modifiers working properly:

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.

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**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.

- 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**.

- In this sentence, it sounds as though the murderer was somehow trapped inside the newspaper. It is more likely that the author meant that he or she read about the capture in the paper.

*Revised version:* I saw **in the evening paper** that the murderer had been capture.

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**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.

- 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 most 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 **as he took her in his arms**.

**Example 2:**

*Dangling modifier:* **After playing Frisbee all evening**, my English paper did not get finished.

- We do not know what playing Frisbee has to do with an unfinished paper, or who is the subject of the sentence. We need to add a subject, and clarify the relationship between the two parts of the sentence.

*Revised version:* **Because I played Frisbee all evening**, my English paper did not get finished.

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**A squinting modifier is** a modifier that is placed between two clauses, but isn't clearly meant to modify either one.

**Example 1:**

*Squinting modifier:* As the ship sank **slowly** the life boats were lowered.

- Did the ship sink slowly, or were the lifeboats lowered slowly? Splitting this sentence up into two separate clauses with a comma will clarify this sentence.

*Revised version:* As the ship sank, the life boats were **slowly** lowered.

**Example 2:**

*Squinting Modifier:* The lamp flickered **halfheartedly** Mark went to get a new bulb out of the pantry.

- It is not clear whether "halfheartedly" is describing the way the lamp flickers, or the way Mark goes to the pantry. We can restructure the sentence so the modifier will be right next to "Mark."

*Revised version:* The lamp flickered, so Mark **halfheartedly** went to get a new bulb out of the pantry.

**Practice:** If you are having a difficult time catching modifier mistakes in your writing, try reading your work aloud. Many writers find that it helps catch confusing sentences. Also, try circling all of the adjectives and adverbs, and then find the nouns and verbs these should be modifying. Are your modifiers clearly describing the nouns and verbs you intended them to? If not, try correcting your error using the strategies suggested in this handout.