



# Dirty Dozen Workshop 5

## Misplaced & Dangling Modifiers

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# Which sentence is correct?

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A. The man yelled at the crowd with the mic.

~ OR ~

B. The man with the mic yelled at the crowd.

A. The man yelled at the crowd with the mic.

**INCORRECT**

B. The man with the mic yelled at the crowd.

Sentence A is incorrect.

The man, not the crowd, had the mic. The modifier, “**with the mic,**” must be placed as closely as possible to what it is intended to modify.

# What is a modifier?

A modifier is a word or phrase that describes a particular noun or pronoun in the sentence.

# Examples:

The yellow taxis gleam in the fall afternoon.

The woman with the red hat is the one in charge.

The newspaper on top of the stack is the one I always purchase.

# Misplaced Modifiers (mm)

Misplaced modifiers are words that because of awkward placement, do not describe what the writer intended. A misplaced modifier can make a sentence confusing or unintentionally funny.

# Misplaced Modifier Examples:

1. We sold lemonade to the thirsty customers in paper cups.

We sold lemonade to the thirsty  
customers in paper cups.



Were the customers  
in paper cups?

**Correct:**

We sold lemonade in paper cups to the thirsty  
customers.



2. I saw three bears on the way to class.

I saw three bears on the way to class.



Were the bears on the  
way to class?

**Correct:**

On the way to class, I saw three bears.

3. She nearly combed her hair for ten minutes every night.

She almost combed her hair?



She nearly combed her hair for ten minutes every night.

**Correct:**

She combed her hair for nearly ten minutes every night.



## **Rule of thumb:**

To avoid misplaced modifiers, place words as close as possible to what they describe.

Psst! Words like *almost, even, exactly, hardly, just, merely, nearly, only, scarcely, and simply* should come immediately before the word they modify.

The following sentences have different meanings because of the placement of *only*.

**Only** Kim offered me thirty dollars to wash her car.

Kim **only** offered me thirty dollars to wash her car.

Kim offered me **only** thirty dollars to wash her car.

**Only** Kim offered me thirty dollars to wash her car.  
(Kim was the only person to offer thirty dollars.)

Kim **only** offered me thirty dollars to wash her car.  
(Kim offered but did not ultimately pay.)

Kim offered me **only** thirty dollars to wash her car.  
(Kim offered thirty dollars, but I was expecting more.)



**The placement of one word can change  
the entire meaning of a sentence.**

# Checking for Misplaced Modifiers

1. Find the modifier
2. Find the word, phrase, or clause it modifies.
3. Make sure the modifier is as close as possible to the word, phrase, or clause it modifies.

In the following sentence, find the modifier and the word, phrase, or clause it modifies.

The farmer bought a bull at the auction with large horns.

**The placement of a few words can  
change the entire meaning of a sentence.**

# Dangling Modifiers (dm)

A **dangling modifier** is a modifier that does not sensibly relate to any word in the sentence. A modifier or a modifying phrase that begins a sentence must be followed closely by the word it is meant to describe.

# How to Check for Dangling Modifiers

1. Find the modifier.
2. Find the word, phrase, or clause it modifies.
3. Make sure the modifier is as close as possible to the word, phrase, or clause it modifies.
4. If the modifier has nothing to modify, add or change words so that it does.

# Tips for Spotting Dangling Modifiers



Dangling modifiers almost always include action verbs.



Not all dangling modifiers occur at the beginnings of sentences, but many of them do.

Let's take a look...

# Dangling Modifier Examples

1. While driving to the vet's office, my dog jumped out of the car.



Huh? Who was driving the car?





**Correct:**

**While I was driving to the vet's office,  
my dog jumped out of the car.**

**Also correct:**

**While driving to the vet's office, I saw  
my dog jump out of the car.**

2. Asked to give an autograph, we were disappointed by the player's refusal.



Who was asked to give an autograph?



**Correct:**

**Asked to give an autograph, the player disappointed us because he refused.**

**Also correct:**

**When the player was asked to give an autograph, we were disappointed that he refused.**

3. While walking home, a car honked at me.

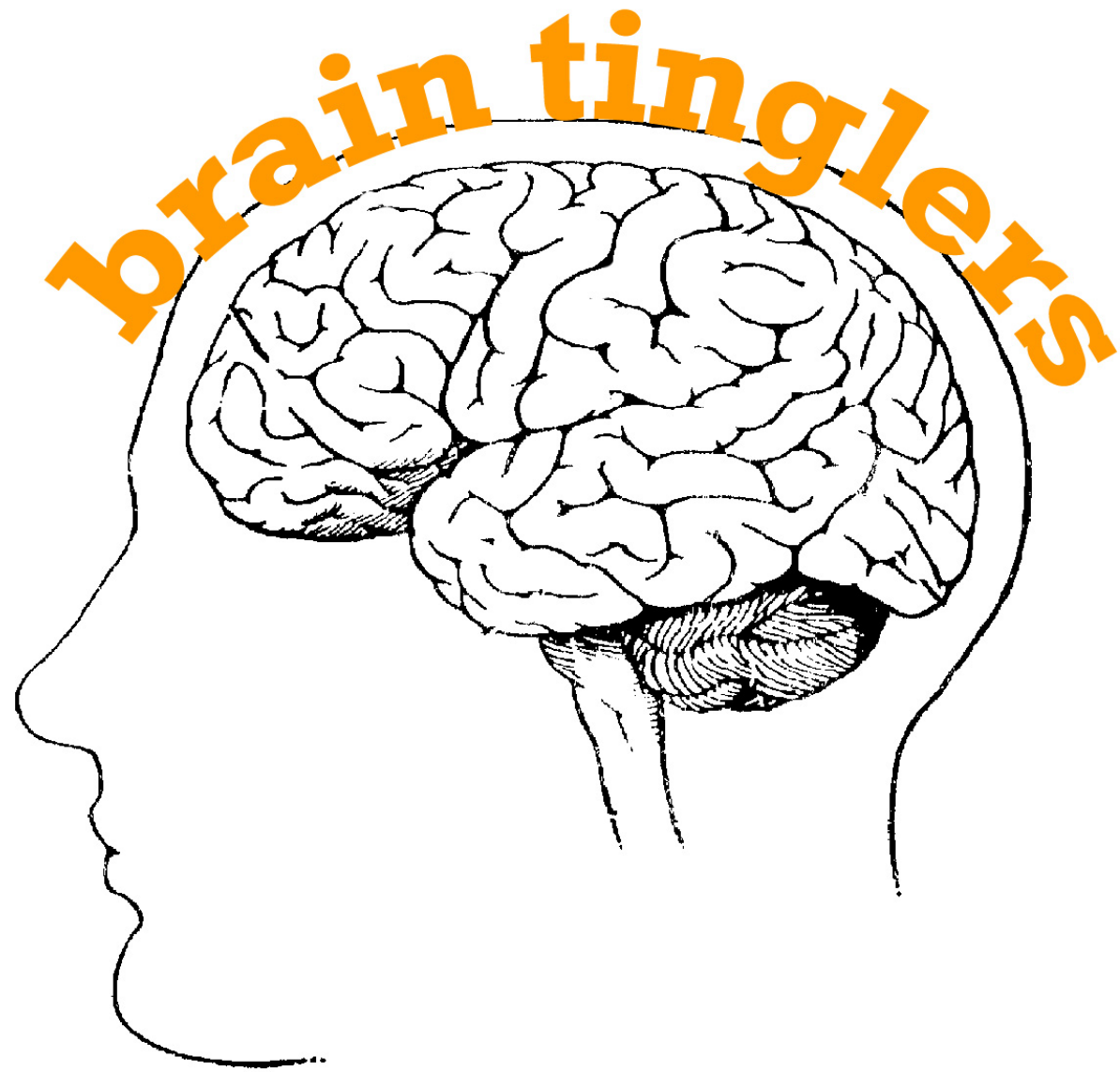


Who was walking home?



**Correct:**

While I was walking home, a car honked at me.





In the following pairs, one sentence is correct, and the other sentence has a misplaced or dangling modifier.

- A) Biking down the hill, my tire deflated.
- B) As I was biking down the hill, my tire deflated.



**Why?**

A) Biking down the hill, my tire deflated.

B) As I was biking down the hill, my tire deflated.

**INCORRECT**

Answer A is incorrect because my tire was not biking down the hill.





In the following pairs, one sentence is correct, and the other sentence has a misplaced or dangling modifier.

A) Jack bought a spotted horse for his sister named Polka Dot.

B) Jack bought a spotted horse named Polka Dot for his sister.



A) Jack bought a spotted horse for his sister named Polka Dot.

**INCORRECT**

B) Jack bought a spotted horse named Polka Dot for his sister.

**Why?**

Answer A is incorrect. The horse, not Jack's sister, was named Polka Dot.



In the following pairs, one sentence is correct, and the other sentence has a misplaced or dangling modifier.

I saw a huge lizard dropping off the ferrets at the vet's office this morning.



Dropping off the ferrets at the vet's office this morning, I saw a huge lizard.

**Why?**

The *huge lizard* was not dropping off the ferrets. *I* was dropping off the ferrets



The following has a misplaced or dangling modifier. Identify and fix the error.

Surfing this weekend, a shark ate my brother nearly.



Surfing this weekend, my brother was nearly eaten by a shark.

**Why?**

*My brother* was surfing, not the shark, and *nearly* is an adverb that must be closer to the verb.

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While attending college, some of my instructors graded my papers very harshly. I remember one English teacher who gave a failing grade to any essay by a student with more than three spelling errors. I've always had trouble with spelling, and whenever writing compositions in class, my palms would sweat. I was supposed to look up any word in the dictionary that was misspelled, but I couldn't always find the words I needed because, of course, I didn't know how to spell them in the first place. However, after buying an electronic spelling dictionary, my composition grades improved. When using the electronic dictionary, even incorrectly spelled entries would give me the correctly spelled word. I would recommend using an electronic dictionary to any student in any class with a spelling problem.



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