



Misplaced Modifiers

Misplaced modifiers are **descriptive words** that are out of position. Single words, **phrases** and **clauses** can all be modifiers. When modifiers are out of place, the sentence can be awkward or confusing as they appear to modify the wrong noun.

- Sammy D. Eagle bought a doughnut from the bakery **filled with jelly**.

Because the modifier, "filled with jelly" is next to the word bakery, **it is describing the noun "bakery."** This makes the sentence confusing as the bakery is likely not filled with jelly.

There are a few ways that we can fix this:

- Move the modifier closer to the word it is intended to describe
- Change the sentence structure to clarify the meaning
- Use a different modifier

Let's fix the sentence above by moving the modifier closer to "doughnut."

- Sammy D. Eagle bought a doughnut filled with jelly from the bakery.

Now the modifier is describing the doughnut. This makes a lot more sense.

Here are some more examples of misplaced modifiers:

- This table was made by Sammy D. Eagle with **furrowed** legs.

This sentence is confusing because it suggests that Sammy D. Eagle has furrowed legs. Also, we can probably **use a better descriptor than furrowed.**

Speaking and Writing Center [1]: These are typically adjectives or adverbs.

Speaking and Writing Center [2]: A phrase is a group of two or more words that form a concept but don't make up a complete sentence.

Speaking and Writing Center [3]: A clause is a group of words that contains at least a subject and verb, forming a complete sentence.

Speaking and Writing Center [4]: Descriptors like "filled with jelly" want to describe the thing they are closest too—even if that isn't what the writer wants to describe.

Speaking and Writing Center [5]: In other words, this sentence means that there is an ocean of jelly filling the bakery. It would be difficult for Sammy D. Eagle to even enter the store in this scenario.

Speaking and Writing Center [6]: Now, it is the doughnut that is filled with jelly, not the store.

Speaking and Writing Center [7]: Furrowed, in this case, means grooved for decoration.



We can fix this by moving the placement of the modifier and picking a different

one.

- This table with carved legs was made by Sammy D. Eagle.

Now the modifier, “carved legs,” is correctly describing the table instead of Sammy D. Eagle.

- President Paino drove past in a Corvette wearing his suit.

This sentence doesn’t make sense because cars can’t wear a suit (right?). Let’s change the sentence structure.

- Wearing his suit, President Paino drove past in a Corvette.

The modifier, “wearing his suit,” is now located next to the noun it is modifying and is correctly describing President Paino instead of his Corvette.

- Walking down College Avenue, the snow began to fall.

The modifier here, “walking down College Avenue,” is misplaced because it is describing a subject that isn’t in the sentence. Without a subject, the sentence is suggesting that the snow is walking down College Avenue when it falls over. That doesn’t make sense. We need to add a subject and rephrase this sentence.

- The snow began to fall as I was walking down College Avenue.

The modifier is now describing the subject, a person, instead of the snow.

Speaking and Writing Center [9]: Picking a new adjective isn’t mandatory or even necessary. We could still write, “This table with furrowed legs was made by Sammy D. Eagle.”

Speaking and Writing Center [10]: Picture a snowflake with legs...