

Misplaced Modifiers

Misplaced modifiers occur when the subject of the modifier is unclear because the modifier is poorly placed. The reader may be unsure of what word the modifier is describing. The reader may even think the misplaced modifier is describing a different word than intended. Consider the sentence below and its revision (the modifier is underlined).

Incorrect: The jacket was just too small in the store.

The placement of the modifier *in the store* implies that the jacket was too small in the store. If the writer wants to convey that the jacket suddenly changed sizes when worn in other locations, then the modifier's placement in the sentence is correct. If the modifier is intended to specify that the author is talking about the jacket *in the store*, then this modifier should be moved.

Possible revision: The jacket in the store was just too small.

- In the wrong position

The frisbee was thrown by the kid on the garage.

The meat was eaten on the barbecue by the dog.

- In the right position

The frisbee was thrown on the garage by the kid.

The meat on the the barbecue was eaten by the dog.

Misplaced Modifiers Worksheet

Read the sentences below. Then decide whether each contains a misplaced modifier or no errors at all.

1. Emma Sue was delighted when Mr. Nguyen returned her perfect calculus test with an ear-to-ear grin.
2. Scrubbing the tile grout with bleach and an old toothbrush, the mildew stains began to fade.
3. To finish by the 3 p.m. deadline, the computer keyboard sang with Sylvia's flying fingers.
4. Sheila watched Desmond stuff his mouth with a cupcake frosted with vanilla icing.
5. Perched on the curtain rod, the parakeet watched Rocky the cat slink behind the living room sofa.
6. Groaning on rusty springs, the trampoline tossed the children like clothes in a dryer.
7. Rapping the pencil on the edge of the desk, the fourth cause of the French Revolution would not come to mind.
8. Slathering the popcorn with melted butter, the calorie count skyrocketed.
9. Attached to the email, Charlotte sent her boyfriend Byron another photographic self-portrait with eerie red eyes.
10. Hungry for dinner, the surface is where Gert the goldfish waited in anticipation of food flakes.
11. After the rainstorm, Jeremy walked his dachshund on a sidewalk covered in wet leaves.
12. Lying under the dining room table, Noodle the poodle waited for bites of roast beef that Rosie sneaked off her plate.
13. Tonya made the mistake of walking her boisterous bulldog Billy in high heels.
14. Too hungry to wait for Brenda's return from the restroom, the bowl of egg drop soup quickly disappeared.
15. Struggling with the tight jeans, the zipper would not budge.

Misplaced Modifiers Worksheet Answer Key

1. **With an ear-to-ear grin**, a prepositional phrase, is describing test when its target should be Mr. Nguyen. When a modifier is next to a word it doesn't logically describe, it is misplaced. To fix the problem, you should organize the sentence like this: With an ear-to-ear grin, Mr. Nguyen returned the perfect calculus test, which delighted Emma Sue.
2. **Scrubbing the tile grout with bleach and an old toothbrush**, a participle phrase, has no target in the sentence to describe. To fix the problem, you should revise the sentence like this: As Michael scrubbed the tile grout with bleach and an old toothbrush, the mildew stains began to fade. Adding Michael to the sentence lets the reader know who is scrubbing the tile grout.
3. **To finish by the 3 p.m. deadline**, an infinitive phrase, has no target in the sentence to describe. We find Sylvia's fingers, but not the typist herself. To fix the problem, you should revise the sentence like this: To finish by the 3 p.m. deadline, Sylvia made the keyboard sing with her flying fingers.
4. **Frosted with vanilla icing**, a participle phrase, comes right after the noun cupcake. This is a clear and logical pairing of target and modifier. There is no error.
5. **Perched on the curtain rod**, a participle phrase, comes right before the noun parakeet. This is a clear and logical pairing of target and modifier. There is no error.
6. **Groaning on rusty springs**, a participle phrase, comes right before the noun trampoline. This is a clear and logical pairing of target and modifier. There is no error.
7. **Rapping the pencil on the edge of the desk**, a participle phrase, has no target in the sentence to describe. To fix the problem, you should revise the sentence like this: Rapping the pencil on the edge of the desk, Rodney could not remember the fourth cause of the French Revolution. Adding Rodney to the sentence lets the reader know who is having trouble with the exam.
8. **Slathering the popcorn with melted butter**, a participle phrase, has no target in the sentence to describe. To fix the problem, you should revise the sentence like this: When Aida decided to slather the popcorn with melted butter, the calorie count skyrocketed. Adding Aida to the sentence lets the reader know who is ruining the calorie count.
9. **Attached to the email**, a participle phrase, is currently describing Charlotte when its target should be self-portrait. To fix the problem, you should revise the sentence like this: Charlotte emailed her boyfriend Byron another photographic self-portrait with eerie red eyes.
10. **Hungry for dinner**, a phrase, is describing surface when its target should be Gert. To fix the problem, you should organize the sentence like this: Hungry for dinner, Gert the goldfish waited at the surface in anticipation of food flakes.
11. **Covered in wet leaves**, a participle phrase, comes right after the noun sidewalk. This is a clear and logical pairing of target and modifier. There is no error.
12. **Lying under the dining room table**, a participle phrase, comes right before the noun Noodle. This is a clear and logical pairing of target and modifier. There is no error.
13. **In high heels**, a prepositional phrase, is currently describing Billy, the bulldog, when its target should be Tonya. To fix the problem, you should revise the sentence like this:

Tonya made the mistake of walking her boisterous bulldog Billy while she was wearing high heels.

14. **Too hungry to wait for Brenda's return from the restroom**, a phrase, has no target in the sentence to describe. To fix the problem, you should revise the sentence like this: Too hungry to wait for Brenda's return from the restroom, Leonard quickly ate the bowl of egg drop soup. Adding Leonard to the sentence lets the reader know who has no table manners!
15. **Struggling with the tight jeans**, a participle phrase, has no target in the sentence. When a modifier has no word to describe, it is dangling. To fix the problem, you should revise the sentence like this: Struggling with the tight jeans, Chris could not budge the zipper. Adding Chris to the sentence lets the reader know who should pick something different to wear!