

MISPLACED PARTS / DANGLING MODIFIERS

EFFECTIVE SENTENCES

1. COHERENCE: MISPLACED PARTS / DANGLING MODIFIERS

The meaning of an English sentence depends largely on the position of its parts. Usually these parts (words, phrases, subordinate clauses serving as modifiers) can be placed in various positions.

Note how the meaning in the following sentences changes according to the position of the modifier “ only”

1-Jane said that she loved *only* her mother (she loved no one else)

2-Jane said that *only* she loved her mother (no one else loved her mother)

3-Jane said *only* that she loved her mother (she said nothing else)

- **A- Avoid needless separation of related parts of the sentence**

1-In standard written English, adverbs such as *almost, only, just, even, hardly, nearly, or merely* are regularly placed immediately before the words they modify

Ambiguous: He is *just* asking for a trifle

Clear: He is asking *just* for a trifle

2-The position of a modifying prepositional phrase should clearly indicate what the phrase modifies

A prepositional phrase used as an adjective nearly always immediately follows the word modified

Misplaced: Mother gave date muffins to *my friends with pecans in them*

Clear: Mother gave my friends date muffins *with pecans in them*

3- Adjective clause should be placed near the words they modify

Awkward: I saw the horse stop at the edge of the precipice *that had raced ahead.*

Clear: I saw the horse *that had raced ahead* stop at the edge of the precipice.

4- Avoid “squinting” constructions (modifiers that may refer either to a preceding or to a following word)

Squinting: I agreed *on the next day* to help him

Clear: I agreed to help him *on the next day* or *On the next day*, I agreed to help him.

5-Avoid awkward separation of parts of verb phrases and awkward splitting of infinitives

Awkward: There stood the old car which we *had* early last autumn *left* by our lake cottage

Improved: There stood the old car which we *had left* by our lake cottage early last autumn.

- **B-Dangling modifiers**

Avoid dangling modifiers

The word *dangling* is applied especially to incoherent clearly and logically to some word verbal phrases and elliptical clauses .A dangling modifiers is one that does not refer to some word in the sentence

Gerund phrase: *After watching the late show*, Nancy was tired (Nancy watched the late show)

Elliptical clause: *When only a small boy*, I went with my father to Texas (“*I was*” is implied in the elliptical clause)

Note: To correct a dangling modifier: **1-** rearrange the words in the sentence to make the modifier sensibly refer to the right word, or **2-** add words to clear up the meaning

1-Avoid dangling participial phrases

Dangling : *Taking our seats*, the game started (“taking” does not refer to the subject “ game”, nor to any other word in the sentence)

Improved : Taking our seats, **we** watched the opening of the game (“ taking” refers to “ we” , the subject of the sentence)

Or : *After we had taken our seats*, the game started (Participial phrase expended into a clause)

Note: Participles do not dangle when they are used in an absolute phrase or used to introduce or refer to a general truth .**E.g.** *Generally speaking*, an optimist is a happy man.

2-Avoid dangling infinitive phrases

Dangling : *To write well*, good books must be read.

Improved : *To write well*, **a student** must read good books.

Note : Infinitives do not dangle when they introduce a general truth rather than designate the action of a specific person or thing. **E.g.** *To be brief*, rats carry disease.

3-Avoid dangling elliptical clauses

An elliptical clause, which is a clause with an implied subject and verb, dangles unless the implied subject is the same as that of the main clause (**See the example above, B- Dangling modifiers**)

Exercise 1: Rewrite the following sentences to eliminate dangling or misplaced modifiers. (Keep in mind that there is more than one correct way to revise these sentences.)

1-To be a successful student, good study habits need to be developed

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2- Published in the paper, the man believed the story.

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3- The dog ate the food with the brown fur.

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4. The woman driving the car wearing a bikini sped through town.

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5.All that glitters is not gold.

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6. When completely empty, the technician should refill the beaker.

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7.He even works during his vaccation

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8. Tightening his red tie, the microphone was approached by the announcer.

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9. Walking along the street, the fallen leaves were kicked up by the little boy.

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10. The book was on the table which she had read the day before.

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11-The house only costs \$12.500.

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12- Opening the door, the fresh breeze tousled her hair.

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Do your duty , come what may