

Sentence Structure Handout 036  
**Modifiers – Misplaced & Dangling**

**036**  
**Key**

**Misplaced Modifiers**

Misplaced modifiers are words that, because of their placement, confuse the meaning of a sentence. Words should be placed as closely as possible to what they describe.

Examples:

**Misplaced modifier**

The students could see the shuttle launch from the school.

**Correct**

From the school, the students could see the shuttle launch.

**Explanation**

The shuttle did not launch from the school.

**Misplaced modifier**

We had a pizza after the movie that was delicious.

**Correct**

After the movie, we had a pizza that was delicious.

**Explanation**

It was not the movie that was delicious.

**Misplaced modifier**

She returned the fruit to the market that was spoiled.

**Correct**

She returned the fruit that was spoiled to the market.

**Explanation**

It was not the market that was spoiled.

**Misplaced modifier**

He bought a doughnut from the bakery filled with jelly.

**Correct**

He bought a doughnut filled with jelly from the bakery.

**Explanation**

It was not a bakery filled with jelly.

**Dangling Modifiers**

Modifying words or groups of words that open a sentence should be followed as closely as possible by the word that they describe.

Examples:

**Dangling modifier**

While sleeping soundly, the alarm clock awakened Mary.

**Correct**

While sleeping soundly, Mary was awakened by the alarm clock.

**Explanation**

It was not the alarm clock that was sleeping soundly.

**Dangling modifier**

Swinging from a giant tire, the tourists were delighted by the gorilla.

**Correct**

Swinging from a giant tire, the gorilla delighted the tourists.

**Explanation**

It was not the tourists who were swinging from a giant tire.

**Dangling modifier**

Walking through the woods, ticks covered my ankles.

**Correct**

Walking through the woods, I discovered ticks covering my ankles.

**Explanation**

It was not ticks walking through the woods.

**Dangling modifier**

After working hard all day in the sun, a cold drink tasted good.

**Correct**

After working hard all day in the sun, we were ready for a cold drink.

**Explanation**

The drink did not work hard all day in the sun.

Many of the modifiers in the following examples are misplaced, distorting the writer's intended

meaning of the sentences. If the sentence contains a **misplaced modifier**, label it **MM and underline the misplaced modifier**. If the sentence is correct, label it **C**.

- MM 1. The students watched the bears looking through binoculars.
- MM 2. She saw a roach opening the refrigerator door.
- MM 3. Tickets have gone on sale for the play in the college box office.
- MM 4. The clerk asked for the money with a frown.
- MM 5. Sandra had her photographs blown up in an envelope.
- C 6. She met him in the gym for a pep rally.
- MM 7. Tickets have gone on sale for the concert in the bookstore.
- MM 8. Sandy tripped and broke her wrist on her bell bottom jeans.
- MM 9. The boys found a pizza place driving around in their car.
- MM 10. I read that Sam Smith was a scientist who launched a rocket in the library.
- MM 11. She bought a cake from the bakery with chocolate icing.
- MM 12. He thought about his lost baseball glove driving home.
- MM 13. I returned the shirt to the store that my mother gave me.
- C 14. Garlic should be stored in a sealed bag in the refrigerator.
- C 15. With a smile, she accepted the ring.

Most of the modifiers in the following sentences are dangling because they do not really modify anything in the sentence. If the sentence contains a **dangling modifier**, label it **DM and underline the dangling modifier**. If the sentence is correct, label it **C**.

- DM 1. Sealed in an envelope, I couldn't read the message.
- DM 2. Wading into the stream, a snake swam between my feet.
- C 3. Soaked in sweat, Sam was hot and thirsty.
- DM 4. Hanging on the wall, I read his diploma.
- DM 5. Sitting quietly, the book kept her attention.
- C 6. Hot and sizzling, the hamburgers tasted great.
- DM 7. After sleeping on the open ground, a cot was a welcome change.
- DM 8. Catching the pass on the run, the fans cheered when he scored.
- C 9. Since failing the first test, I have studied harder.
- DM 10. Before leaving for work, a car requires some inspection.
- DM 11. Though very happy, the wedding ring didn't fit her finger.
- C 12. After taking a break, Sue left.
- C 13. Tired and dirty, Ralph asked for more time to finish the job.
- DM 14. Driving home very late at night, the lines in the road became blurs.
- DM 15. Waiting for the bus, a storm blew in.

**Read the sentences below. In the blank, place the letter of the sentence that is written most clearly.**

- B   1.     A) The preschool children watched the pelicans holding hands.  
              B) The preschool children were holding hands and watching the pelicans.  
              C) Holding hands, the pelicans walked around the preschool children.
- B   2.     A) She found a spider cleaning the bathroom.  
              B) While cleaning the bathroom, she found a spider.  
              C) While cleaning the bathroom, a spider ran under the door.
- A   3.     A) Wearing a bathing suit, she washed the car.  
              B) Wearing a bathing suit, washing the car was fun.  
              C) She washed the car in her bathing suit.
- C   4.     A) Smiling, the refund was handed to her by the clerk.  
              B) The clerk handed her the refund with a smile.  
              C) Smiling, the clerk handed her the refund.
- A   5.     A) She thanked the usher wearing a badge in the theater.  
              B) She thanked the usher in the theater wearing a badge.  
              C) Wearing a badge, she thanked the usher in the theater.
- B   6.     A) The children took pictures of the bears sitting in the car.  
              B) Sitting in the car, the children took pictures of the bears.  
              C) Sitting in the car, the bears had their pictures taken by the children.
- B   7.     A) On her way to the bank, the missing dog was seen by Sarah.  
              B) On her way to the bank, Sarah saw the missing dog.  
              C) Sarah saw the missing dog on her way to the bank.
- C   8.     A) He got a Mustang from his father with a custom interior for his birthday.  
              B) He got a Mustang for his birthday from his father with a custom interior.  
              C) For his birthday, he got a Mustang with a custom interior from his father.
- B   9.     A) A man got onto the bus with a bottle of whiskey.  
              B) A man with a bottle of whiskey got onto the bus.  
              C) Carrying a bottle of whiskey, the bus was boarded by a man.
- C   10.    A) He was attacked by a stray dog delivering the mail.  
              B) Delivering the mail, a stray dog attacked him.  
              C) Delivering the mail, he was attacked by a stray dog.
- B   11.    A) Karen returned the fruit to the store that was spoiled.  
              B) Karen returned the spoiled fruit to the store.  
              C) Spoiled, Karen returned the fruit to the store.

- B   12.     A) We ordered a pizza after watching the movie that was delicious.  
              B) We ordered a delicious pizza after watching the movie.  
              C) After watching the move, a delicious pizza was ordered.
- C   13.     A) We bought a car with \$600 that we had saved.  
              B) After saving \$600, a car was purchased.  
              C) After saving \$600, we bought a car.
- A   14.     A) With dismay, she remembered that she had chemistry homework.  
              B) She remembered that she had chemistry homework with dismay.  
              C) With dismay, her chemistry homework was remembered.
- B   15.     A) She greeted the plumber at the door in a nightgown.  
              B) Wearing a nightgown, she greeted the plumber.  
              C) She greeted the plumber in a nightgown at the door.
- C   16.     A) Hidden in the garbage, I could not find the note.  
              B) After roasting for two hours, mother served the turkey.  
              C) Tripping over his own feet, Dave fell and broke his arm.
- A   17.     A) While waiting for her ride, Sarah got soaked when it began to rain.  
              B) Having eaten too much pie, my stomach didn't feel well.  
              C) At the age of 16, his father bought him a used truck.
- B   18.     A) Waving their pennants, the players were cheered by the fans.  
              B) Walking to class, the students saw the movie star.  
              C) Just before finishing the book, the phone rang.
- C   19.     A) Driving along A1A, the turtles were seen laying their eggs.  
              B) Before going to the prom, dance lessons may be necessary.  
              C) While flying the kite, the little boy ran into a tree.
- B   20.     A) Though very tired, a nap wouldn't have helped.  
              B) They went to class in their uniforms.  
              C) The dog was chasing the ball with a spiked collar.