

Ambiguous Modifiers

Ambiguous modifiers are words that confuse the meaning of a sentence because they could refer to more than one element within the sentence.

Example:

Ambiguous modifier

The band director told us strictly to count beats.

Correct

The band director strictly told us to count beats.

Explanation

Did the band director tell us strictly or ask us to count strictly?

Practice: Label the following sentences **C** if correct and **AM** if the modifier is ambiguous.

- _____ 1. Grandma told us nicely to eat our dinner.
- _____ 2. She buys computer games from catalogues that she likes.
- _____ 3. Mother told me after school to clean the garage.
- _____ 4. The policeman arrested the demonstrators by the gate.
- _____ 5. They carefully examined the crime scene.
- _____ 6. The teacher's comment disturbed my mother very much.
- _____ 7. Dad asked us weekly to wash the dog.
- _____ 8. The personnel told us yearly to complete an evaluation form.
- _____ 9. She stood awkwardly waiting for the next spelling bee word.
- _____ 10. I reminded my daughter to check her car's oil regularly.

Split Infinitives

Usually the two parts of an infinitive (to + a verb) belong together; avoid placing words or phrases between the word "to" and its verb.

Example:

Split infinitive

She asked me to carefully drive home.

Correct

She asked me to drive home carefully.

Explanation

The word "carefully" falls between the word "to" and its verb (drive).

Practice: Label the following sentences **C** if correct and **SI** if there is a split infinitive.

- _____ 1. He wanted to formally announce his candidacy for the office.
- _____ 2. The doctor told her to more carefully watch her diet.
- _____ 3. He promised to write every day.
- _____ 4. The nurse knew she had to quickly stop the bleeding.
- _____ 5. The teacher wanted to completely explain the assignment.
- _____ 6. Maria convinced John to join the Marines.
- _____ 7. I want to, if I can, leave early.
- _____ 8. The Internal Revenue Service wants to enforce new laws.
- _____ 9. No one is too smart to ever pass her course without studying
- _____ 10. No one is permitted to even look up during Dr. Demper's exams.

