

Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers

LNC Writing Center Review

The Basics

A **modifier** is a word, phrase, or clause that gives more information about other words. Generally, modifiers should be placed next to their **target**—the word they describe.

For example, in the following sentence the phrase “**in his father’s grove**” tells us where Todd picks oranges, and the phrase “**when they are ripe**” tells us when he picks oranges. These are modifiers that are placed appropriately.

Todd picks **oranges** in his father’s grove when they are ripe.

If a modifier is not placed next to its target, unintended and sometimes strange meaning is made. Written this way, it sounds like Todd picks oranges when Todd is ripe.

When ripe, **Todd** picks oranges in his father’s grove.

A **dangling or misplaced modifier** happens when a modifier seems to describe one word when it really refers to something completely different, or doesn’t refer to anything at all.

The Problem

Here, the dangling modifier “**hungry for more**” has no target word to describe. We don’t know *who* was hungry for more. In fact, because it is placed next to “**another sandwich**,” it seems to be saying that the sandwich was hungry for more.

Hungry for more, **another sandwich** was prepared and devoured.

The modifier “hot” is misplaced here, describing the cup as hot instead of the coffee.

Rachel always starts her day with a hot cup of coffee.

The misplaced modifier in this sentence is “called *Grammar for Dummies*.” Because of where this phrase is placed, it sounds like the library is called *Grammar for Dummies*, rather than the book that Griffin found.

Griffin found a book in the library called *Grammar for Dummies*.

The Fix

To correct dangling modifiers, revise the sentence by giving the modifier something to describe.

Hungry for more, Justin prepared and devoured another sandwich.

To correct misplaced modifiers, place the modifiers nearer to their target word.

Rachel always starts her day with a cup of hot coffee.

Griffin found a book called *Grammar for Dummies* in the library.