

Grammar Modifier

Miscues

Modifiers are words or phrases we use in a sentence to describe or clarify the meaning of the sentence. But modifiers are tricky. Sometimes modifiers get misplaced or dangle in thin air. When that happens, instead of clarifying; modifiers confuse our readers.

The following are a few examples.

DANGLING MODIFIERS (modifying a word or phrase that is not clearly identified)

UNCLEAR Walking by the park, rain began to fall.
BETTER When Jim walked by the park, rain began to fall.

The first sentence does not identify who (or what) was walking by the park.

UNCLEAR Angry, the rioting began.
BETTER Angry, the crowd began rioting.

The first sentence does not explain who was angry.

MISPLACED MODIFIERS (the placement of the modifier makes the meaning unclear or incorrect)

UNCLEAR Reading the report quickly hampered comprehension.

Was comprehension hampered by reading the report too quickly? Or did the report quickly hamper comprehension because it was unclear?

INCORRECT Shawn found a bagel in the lunch room that does not belong to him.

The bagel is the item that does not belong to Shawn.

BETTER While in the lunchroom, Shawn found a bagel that does not belong to him.

