

Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

- Arrangement of words more important in English than in Czech
- Making mistakes when connecting modifiers to words they modify leads to confusion

a) Misplaced Modifier

- Seems to be **misplaced**, that is put into a wrong position and therefore modifying a different word

Confusing He served steak to the men on paper plates.

Revised He served the men steak on paper plates.

Confusing Many dogs are killed by automobiles and trucks roaming unleashed.

Revised Many dogs roaming unleashed are killed by automobiles and trucks.

Confusing This is the only chocolate chip cookie in a bag that tastes like Mom's. [Actual advertisement.]

Revised This is the only bagged [or packaged] chocolate chip cookie that tastes like Mom's.

EXERCISE 21.1 Revising: Misplaced phrases and clauses

Revise the following sentences so that phrases and clauses clearly modify the appropriate words. (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

Example:

I came to enjoy flying over time.

Over time I came to enjoy flying.

1. Women have contributed much to knowledge and culture of great value.
2. Emma Willard founded the Troy Female Seminary, the first institution to provide a college-level education for women in 1821.
3. Sixteen years later Mary Lyon founded Mount Holyoke Female Seminary, the first true women's college with directors and a campus who would sustain the college even after Lyon's death.
4. *Una* was the first US newspaper, which was founded by Pauline Wright Davis in 1853, that was dedicated to gaining women's rights.
5. Mitchell's Comet was discovered in 1847, which was named for Maria Mitchell.

Unclear She only found that fossil on her last dig.

Revised She found only that fossil on her last dig.

Revised She found that fossil only on her last dig.

- Keep the subject/verb/object word order!

Awkward subject Kuwait, after the first Gulf War ended in 1991, began re-
adverb turning to normal. verb

Revised adverb After the first Gulf War ended in 1991, Kuwait began re-
subject turning to normal. verb

Even a one-word adverb will be awkward between a verb and its object:

Awkward verb The war had damaged badly adverb many of Kuwait's oil fields. object

Revised verb The war had badly adverb damaged object many of Kuwait's oil fields.

- Split infinitives – try to avoid them in general

Awkward infinitive The weather service expected temperatures to not rise. infinitive

Revised infinitive The weather service expected temperatures not to rise. infinitive

A split infinitive may sometimes be natural and preferable, though it may still bother some readers:

Several US industries expect to more than triple their use of robots.

Here the split infinitive is more economical than the alternatives, such as *Several US industries expect to increase their use of robots by more than three times.*

Adverbs:

(Adapted from Colin Wood – “Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers.” <http://altform.com/served-sites/methanecandy/old/MM/MM.ppt>)

a) of frequency (never, often, rarely,...):

Robots have put **sometimes** humans out of work. **WRONG**

Robots have **sometimes** put humans out of work.

Sometimes robots have put humans out of work.

b) of degree (absolutely, only, hardly, ...):

Robots have been useful **especially** in making cars. **WRONG**

Robots have been **especially** useful in making cars.

c) of manner (badly, beautifully, openly, ...):

Robots **smoothly** work on assembly lines.

Robots work **smoothly** on assembly lines

EXERCISE 21.4 Revising: Separated sentence parts

Revise the following sentences to connect separated parts (subject-predicate, verb-object, verb phrase, infinitive). (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

Example:

Most children have by the time they are seven lost a tooth.

By the time they are seven, most children have lost a tooth.

1. Myra Bradwell founded in 1868 the *Chicago Legal News*.
2. Bradwell was later denied, although she had qualified, admission to the Illinois Bar Association.
3. In an attempt to finally gain admission to the bar, she carried the case to the Supreme Court, but the justices decided against her.
4. Bradwell was determined that no other woman would, if she were qualified, be denied entrance to a profession.
5. The Illinois legislature finally passed, in response to Bradwell's persuasion, a bill ensuring that no one on the basis of gender would be restricted from a profession.

b) Misplaced Modifier

A **dangling modifier** does not sensibly modify anything in the sentence; it is “dangling” in vacuum.

Passing the building, the vandalism became visible.

Identifying and revising dangling modifiers

- **Identify the modifier's subject.** If the modifier lacks a stated subject (as *when in diapers* does), identify what the modifier describes.
- **Compare the subject of the modifier and the subject of the sentence.** Verify that what the modifier describes is in fact the subject of the main clause. If it is not, the modifier probably dangles.
- **Revise as needed.** Either (a) recast the dangling modifier with a stated subject of its own, or (b) change the subject of the main clause to be what the modifier describes.

Dangling ┌── modifier ──┐ subject
When in diapers, my mother remarried.

Revision a When I was in diapers, my mother remarried.

Revision b When in diapers, I attended my mother's second wedding.

Revise the following sentences to eliminate any dangling modifiers. Each item has more than one possible answer. (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

Example:

Driving north, the vegetation became increasingly sparse.

Driving north, we noticed that the vegetation became increasingly sparse.

As we drove north, the vegetation became increasingly sparse.

1. After accomplishing many deeds of valor, Andrew Jackson's fame led to his election to the presidency in 1828 and 1832.
2. By the age of fourteen, both of Jackson's parents had died.
3. To aid the American Revolution, service as a mounted courier was chosen by Jackson.
4. Though not well educated, a successful career as a lawyer and judge proved Jackson's ability.
5. Winning many military battles, the American public believed in Jackson's leadership.

Combine each pair of sentences below into a single sentence by rewriting one as a modifier. Make sure the modifier applies clearly to the appropriate word. You will have to add, delete, and rearrange words, and you may find that more than one answer is possible in each case. (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

Example:

Bob demanded a hearing from the faculty. Bob wanted to appeal the decision.

Wanting to appeal the decision, Bob demanded a hearing from the faculty.

1. Evening falls in the Central American rain forests. The tungara frogs begin their croaking chorus.
2. Male tungara frogs croak loudly at night. The "songs" they sing are designed to attract female frogs.
3. But predators also hear the croaking. They gather to feast on the frogs.
4. The predators are lured by their croaking dinners. The predators include bullfrogs, snakes, bats, and opossums.
5. The frogs hope to mate. Their nightly chorus can result in death instead.

Revise the following paragraph to eliminate any misplaced or dangling modifiers. (You can do this exercise online at ablongman.com/littlebrown.)

Central American tungara frogs silence several nights a week their mating croaks. When not croaking, the chance that the frogs will be eaten by predators is reduced. The frogs seem to fully believe in "safety in numbers." They more than likely will croak along with a large group rather than by themselves. By forgoing croaking on some nights, the frogs' behavior prevents the species from "croaking."