



DeYoung Consulting Services

Helping People Learn up to Their Potential

Happy New Year!

One of the fun things about writing is how many different ways you can rearrange the order of a set of words, but still say the same thing. Of course, this can also get you in trouble—particularly with misplaced and dangling modifiers.

Before you drag out your old grammar book, here's a reminder of what misplaced and dangling modifiers are.

A modifier is an adjective, adverb, phrase or clause that describes other words. A misplaced modifier is a modifier that is placed incorrectly in the sentence resulting in a confusing sentence. A dangling modifier appears to modify a word which isn't in the sentence.

There are a few general guidelines to prevent misplaced and dangling modifiers.

Place single-word modifiers near the word or words they modify.

After our language classes, we could understand the French spoken by the actors in the movie easily.

This sentence is confusing; do we understand French easily or are the actors speaking French easily? Rewriting the sentence clarifies the meaning.

After our language classes, we could easily understand the French spoken by the actors in the movie.

Place modifying phrases or clauses as close as possible to the word or words they modify. Which of the following sentences makes more sense?

Incorrect: *By accident my son hit me with his elbow in the nose.*

Correct: *By accident my son hit me in the nose with his elbow.*

Don't place a modifier in the middle of an infinitive form of a verb.

(An infinitive form of a verb is a "to be" verb such as "to run.")

Incorrect: *My husband decided to, before he was laid off, apply for graduate school.*

Correct: *My husband decided to apply for graduate school before he was laid off.*

Make sure your subject is clearly expressed. Dangling modifiers are often located at the beginning of a sentence in which the subject and verb are implied and not expressed.

See if you can determine the subject of this sentence: *Raised in a big city, it is not surprising to enjoy the hustle and bustle.*

Actually, there are several options:

Sarah was raised in a big city so it is not surprising she enjoys the hustle and bustle.

I was raised in a big city so it is not surprising I enjoy the hustle and bustle.

If you were raised in a big city, it is not surprising you enjoy the hustle and bustle.

Don't let misplaced and dangling modifiers get the best of your writing. Give me a call and I'll make sure the modifiers in your training curriculum are all in the right place.

Karen DeYoung is President/CEO of DeYoung Consulting Service, which provides quality learning experiences for individuals and groups. We develop training materials and activities that advance individual, team, and organizational learning. Our work is done with integrity, reliability, and accountability.

From DeYoung Consulting: Avoiding Misplaced Modifiers