

MISPLACED AND DANGLING MODIFIERS

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What if an ad for a hotel resort read, “Swim in our lovely pool while you drink it all in?” Would you enjoy drinking pool water while going for a swim? This is actually a real-life example of an ad with a modifier glitch. Modifiers, used correctly, clarify the meaning of a sentence. Put in the wrong place, however, they become **Misplaced modifiers**. Because they are so far removed from the action they modify, misplaced modifiers can cause a sentence’s meaning to be unclear.

For example: *Alien spaceships were reported to have landed on the radio.*

Did the alien ships land on the radio? Or were they just reported on the radio?
What happens if the modifier (“on the radio”) is moved?

Alien spaceships were reported on the radio to have landed.

Is this clearer now?

Dangling Modifiers are modifiers in sentences where there is information missing. These can result in misleading sentences.

Fearing an attack, the alien spaceships were fired upon.

Who feared an attack? The alien ships?
What happens when the sentence **subject** is added?

Fearing an attack, the military opened fire on the alien spaceships.

Does the sentence make sense now?

Misplaced and dangling modifiers appear most commonly in journalistic writing and advertisements, but they are also common in academic writing as well. The best way to recognize them is to practice finding and correcting them. If you find a **misplaced modifier**, try rewriting the sentence by putting the modifiers closer to the subjects they modify. If you find a **dangling modifier**, fill in the missing information or substitute specific and accurate words for the confusing or vague words.

Here are a few well-known and humorous examples of newspaper headlines with modifier glitches:

- Two Sisters Reunited After 18 Years at Checkout Counter (MM)
- Enraged Cow Injures Farmer with Ax (MM)
- Miners Refuse to Work after Death (DM)
- Old School Pillars Are Replaced by Alumni (DM)