

Modifier Errors



Raju Shrivastava, PT's Humour Ambassador, would get a lot of grist in this chapter.

Modifier is a word or phrase that modifies another word or phrase, limiting or adding to its meaning.

Modifier errors occur due to the faulty placing of words or phrases in a sentence.


There are no fixed rules to correct these. All we need to make sure is that the right (intended) meaning is conveyed using the least possible words. Your best friend in these situations will be your **common sense**, and of course, experience gained from plenty of practice.

Read the following sentences. While you enjoy yourself, make a mental note not make such mistakes.

1. **Wanted:** Man to take care of cow that does not smoke or drink (*who should not smoke a drink the cow or the man*)
2. If the baby does not thrive on fresh milk, it should be boiled. (*What is to be boiled – the baby or the milk?*)
3. At the age of twenty, my father let me drive his car. (*Who was 20, the father or the author?*)
4. Walking back from the village, my wallet was lost. (*Does your wallet walk?*)
5. The store sold inflatable children's toys. (*The sentence reads as though the children are inflatable, instead of the toys.*)
6. We provide restrooms for ladies that are clean and comfortable. (*Paul Harvey said that about Wal-Mart restrooms. What about ladies who are not clean and comfortable?*)
7. Beautiful and sensually dressed, the men noticed her immediately. (*Why were the men so dressed?*)
8. Dressed in a silk nightgown, he thought his wife looked sexy. (*What was he doing in the nightgown?*)
9. I lost my hat running down the street. (*Was the hat running?*)
10. The other day, I shot an elephant in my pajamas. (*How did the elephant get inside my pajamas, I'll never know.*)
11. She claimed yesterday she saw a UFO. (*Did she see the UFO yesterday? Or did she make the claim yesterday? To be clear, we must rewrite the sentence.*)
12. The assembly line workers were told they had been fired by the personnel director. (*Did the personnel director tell the workers they had been fired? Or was he the one who actually fired them and somebody else told them? It's not at all clear.*)
13. If your dog hates the cat, throw it out. (*Throw out what – the dog or the cat?*)

We are sure you have got a first-hand feel of what modifier problems are. So, ready for some BATTING practice?

Incorrect	Correct
Smoking a big cigar, the baby was admired by its father.	Smoking a big cigar, the father admired his baby.
Romeo almost kissed Juliet as soon as he met her.	Romeo kissed Juliet almost as soon as he met her.
I have fallen in love with the beautiful woman's daughter.	I have fallen in love with the woman's beautiful daughter.
Following are some useful tips for protecting your person and property from the FBI.	Following are some useful tips from the FBI for protecting your person and property.
Manufactured in Italy, Abhishek was delighted with the fine quality of the leather shoes.	Abhishek was delighted with the fine quality of the leather shoes manufactured in Italy. OR Manufactured in Italy, the leather shoes delighted Abhishek.
The patient was referred to a psychologist with several emotional problems.	The patient with several emotional problems was referred to a psychologist.
Two cars were reported stolen by the police yesterday.	Yesterday, the police reported that two cars were stolen.

Incorrect	Correct
The young girl was walking the dog in a short skirt. The dog was chasing the boy with the spiked collar.	The young girl in a short skirt was walking the dog. The dog with the spiked collar was chasing the boy.
In a red satin gown spangled with sequins, he was captivated by her beauty.	Catching sight of her in a red satin gown spangled with sequins, he was captivated by her beauty.
Mother gave the cake to the homeless man that she had baked and iced yesterday.	Mother gave the homeless man the cake that she had baked and iced yesterday.
I gave a book to my teacher that was old and tattered.	I gave my teacher a book that was old and tattered.
The mayor was described as a round, squat man with a droopy beard weighing 60kg.	The mayor was described as a round, squat man, weighing 60kg, with a droopy beard.
Hanging on the wall, she glanced in the mirror.	She glanced in the mirror hanging on the wall.
I bought a bus from an elderly man that was in good running condition.	I bought a bus that was in good running condition from an elderly man.
Having lost patience, the malfunctioning computer was replaced.	Having lost patience, the student replaced the malfunctioning computer.
Having leaped out of a second-storey window, her leg was broken by the fall.	Having leaped out of a second-storey window, the girl suffered a broken leg in the fall. OR When the girl leaped out of a second-storey window, she broke her leg in the fall.
While climbing the tree, the bottle dropped. 	While Mr. Daroobaz was climbing the tree, the bottle dropped. OR While climbing the tree, Mr. Daroobaz dropped the bottle.
The teacher said on Thursday we'd have to work harder on our math exercises.	On Thursday, the teacher said we'd have to work harder on our math exercises.
Though only sixteen, UCLA accepted her application	Though she was only sixteen, UCLA accepted her application.
Defining your terms clearly strengthens your argument.	Defining your terms will clearly strengthen your argument. OR A clear definition of your terms strengthens your argument.
Naina said during the meeting Maina acted like a fool.	During the meeting, Naina said Maina acted like a fool. OR Naina said Maina acted like a fool during the meeting.
Do not sit in the chair without being fully assembled.	You should not sit in the chair unless it is fully assembled.
While eating dinner, a fly slipped into her soup.	While she was eating dinner, a fly slipped into her soup.
They bought a puppy for my sister they call Fido.	They bought a puppy they call Fido for my sister.
Nearly dead, the police finally found the victim.	The police finally found the victim, who was nearly dead.
Walking through the park, the grass tickled my feet.	Walking through the park, I found that the grass tickled my feet.
A fine athlete and student, the coach honoured the captain of the tennis team.	The coach honoured the captain of the tennis team, a fine athlete and student.
He said tonight he'd call me.	Tonight, he said he'd call me. OR He said he'd call me tonight. (<i>Slightly different meaning</i>)