

Misplaced Modifiers

A **misplaced modifier** is a word, phrase, or clause that is in the wrong place in a sentence. Because it is misplaced, it ends up modifying one word when it should modify another word instead.

- MISPLACED** Kate wrote a letter about her trip to her best friend. [Did Kate make a “trip to her best friend”? The prepositional phrase is misplaced.]
- CORRECT** Kate wrote a letter to her best friend about her trip.

To correct a misplaced modifier, move it as close as possible to the word you want it to modify. You may also reword the sentence.

- MISPLACED** This morning, I ate toast in my robe.
- CORRECT** In my robe this morning, I ate toast.
- CORRECT** While I was still in my robe this morning, I ate toast.
- MISPLACED** Is that woman over there with the small child the one who gave you a dirty look? [Who gave the dirty look, the woman or the small child? The adjective clause is misplaced.]
- CORRECT** Is the woman who gave you the dirty look the one over there with the small child?
- MISPLACED** I saw the movie about the whale that everyone said was mawkish.
- CORRECT** I saw the movie that everyone said was mawkish. It was about a whale.

The word *already* is often misplaced. The meaning of a sentence can depend on its correct placement.

- MISPLACED** You told me that you finished your essay already. [Did you already tell me, or did you already finish the essay? The single word *already* is misplaced.]
- CORRECT** You already told me that you finished your essay.
- CORRECT** You told me that you already finished your essay.

WRITING HINT

The word *only* is often misplaced. In this next example, the meaning of the sentence changes depending on the placement.

I drink **only** juice in the morning.

I drink juice **only** in the morning.

In the following sentence, *only* is clearly misplaced.

I **only** have one more lap to run.

Enriching Your Vocabulary

Although its root is the Middle English word *mawke*, meaning “maggot,” the word *mawkish* has evolved to mean “sickening in a sentimental way.” *Mawkish* greeting cards make you feel disgusted with their insipid sweetness.