

## Modifiers Can Muck Things Up

When you use modifying words, phrases, and clauses make sure the relationship between the modifier and the word it modifies is clear, or you'll end up with a dangling modifier, squinting modifier, or misplaced modifier.

1. A dangling modifier happens when an adjective phrase or clause isn't connected to any word or phrase in the sentence. They cause confusion because the reader doesn't know what they modify:

*To get the quilt done*, the sewing machine must be fixed.

*To get the quilt done*, I must get the sewing machine fixed.

*Tiny and scared*, the big man in the red suit can be frightening.

*Tiny and scared*, the girl was frightened by the big man in the red suit.

*Hammering the nail*, the board slipped and smacked him in the face.

When he was *hammering the nail*, the board slipped and smacked him in the face.

2. A squinting modifier is an adverb that is put between two verbs and can modify either one:

The flag she waved *energetically* enthralled the crowd.

The flag she *energetically* waved enthralled the crowd.

3. A misplaced modifier is a phrase or clause that isn't close enough to the word it modifies, making it appear to modify a different word:

John admitted to his boss *with a worried face* that he couldn't get the project done.

*With a worried face*, John admitted to his boss that he couldn't get the project done.

John received *the bonus rewards in his office* from his secretary.

John's secretary *brought the bonus rewards* to his office.

Sometimes modifiers can unintentionally create funny results. Writers should be clear with their meaning, and avoid these types of errors that leave a reader laughing, when they shouldn't be:

*She served juice to the children in plastic cups.* (Are the children in plastic cups?)

*Covered with hot sauce, we ate the nachos.* (Are we covered with hot sauce?)

*Hanging on the refrigerator, my grandma liked my picture.* (Did we really hang grandma from the refrigerator?)

*They bought a kitten for my brother they call Annie.* (Is brother's name Annie?)

*Want a woman to take care of toddler who doesn't smoke or drink.* (Good for those parents who don't let their toddler smoke or drink.)

If you are a humorist, you may want these kinds of sentences. If not, watch those modifiers!