

# Modifiers



A modifier is a word or phrase that adds detail or description to a sentence.

In the example sentences below, the modifiers are underlined.

Example: Yesterday, I went to dozens of stores, searching for a hat.

While modifiers are great for adding detail and interest to sentences, they must be used carefully so that the reader understands the details being added.

## Ambiguous:

In this type of sentences, it is not clear who the subject of the modifier is.

Example: "He painted her sitting on the step." Who is sitting on the step?

Revision: "He painted her as he was sitting on the step."

**The ACT likes clarity. This is the only exception to the rule "shorter is better".**

## Misplaced:

In this type of sentences, the placement of the modifiers is awkward. This often happens when there are two or more modifiers in one sentence.

Example: "My mother served pizza to my friends on paper plates."

Technically, it sounds like the friends are on paper plates. The correct construction is:

Revision: My mother served pizza on paper plates to my friends."

**This is often presented as: Where should the following sentence fragment be placed?**

**RULE: the modifier should be close to the noun it describes. (Right before or after)**

## Dangling:

A dangling modifier occurs when the subject of the modifier is missing, and erroneously makes a different noun the subject of the sentence.

Often, these modifiers occur at the beginning of sentences.

Example: "Turning the corner, a handsome school building appeared."

Technically, it sounds like the school building is turning the corner, and then appeared.

Revision: "When I turned the corner, a handsome school building appeared."

**The ACT loves this one! It often gives you three similar solutions for the modifier.**

**RULE: Everything before the comma refers to the first noun/pronoun after the comma**

# Exercises:

1. At the age of eight, my family finally bought a dog.
2. Walking down Main Street, the trees were beautiful.
3. Being in a neglected condition, I was able to buy the house very cheaply.
4. Kathy went to the seminar with Jenny, but she was talking to her friend on the phone.
5. Running for the bus, the rain started coming down in buckets and I got all wet.
6. The couch was kind of ugly in the furniture store.
7. Having searched and searched for Mr. Right, it started to seem like he didn't exist.

1. My family is not eight years old. 2. The trees do not walk on Main Street. 3. I was not in neglected condition. 4. Who is talking? Kathy or Jenny? Also: it is not a "friend on the phone"; it is a real friend! It should be: She was talking on the phone to a friend. 5. The rain was not running for the bus. 6. The couch in the furniture store was kind of ugly. 7. Was "it" looking for Mr. right? Who is "it"? instead, write "she".