

MODIFIERS

Modifiers come in the forms of words, phrases, and clauses and have the power to impact the meaning of a sentence by adding clarity or detail. Adjectives and adverbs are familiar modifiers, but they may also appear as adjectival or adverbial phrases or clauses.

What are the kinds of modifiers?

- **Adjectival Clauses:** act as an adjective; generally begin with relative pronoun (that, which, who, whom, whose) or relative adverb (when, where, why).
 - Ex. My brother-in-law, who works for NASA, lives in Madison.
 - In this sentence, "who works for NASA" is the dependent clause describing (or modifying) the noun "brother-in-law."
- **Adverbial Clauses:** act as an adverb; generally answer *how?* *when?* or *why?* behind the actions; generally begin with subordinating conjunctions.

SUBORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS	
TIME	after, when, until, soon, before
CONDITION	if, whether or not, provided, in case, unless
CAUSE & EFFECT	because, as, since, so, in order that, now that, inasmuch as
CONTRAST	though, although, while, whereas, even though

- Ex. Because she didn't have enough caramel in her coffee, Valerie didn't enjoy the coffee.
 - In this example, "Because she didn't have enough caramel in her coffee" describes the *why* behind "Valerie didn't enjoy the coffee."
- **Demonstratives:** identify specific nouns that appear before the modified noun
 - Ex. this semester; those hockey players; that season; these socks
- **Possessive Adjectives & Pronouns:** express possession; they're related to possessive pronouns.

Perso n	Pronoun	Adjective
1 st	Mine Ours	My Our
2 nd	Yours	Your
3 rd	Hers His Its Theirs	Her His Its Their

Adapted from the University of Victoria's English Language Centre

- **Prepositional Phrases:** often express the relationship between nouns, including location.
 - Ex. The hockey players in the penalty box were exciting the crowd.

What are some examples of errors writers make when using modifiers?

- Because modifiers can exist in the form of groups of words—phrases and clauses—it is easy to misplace them in writing. Just like adjectives and adverbs need to be in the correct location with respect to the nouns and verbs they modify, adjectival and adverbial clauses, prepositional phrases, and other modifiers need to be placed such that they correctly modify their intended words/groups of words.

COMMON ERRORS			
DANGLING MODIFIER	Ex. After camping in the forest, the city feels cold and mechanical.	"After camping in the forest" is an adverbial phrase that incorrectly modifies "the city feels cold and mechanical." The city cannot camp in the forest. This is a dangling modifier because the speaker (the pronoun that should be modified), isn't included.	A correction: After camping in the forest, I feel like the city is cold and mechanical
MISPLACED MODIFIER	Ex. The university officials also talked about hiring an astronomer while having a meeting about parking.	As it is currently written, this sentence suggests that the astronomer is having a meeting about parking. The modifier, which is supposed to be clarifying what the officials are supposed to be talking about, is misplaced.	A correction: While having a meeting about parking, the university officials also talked about hiring an astronomer.
AMBIGUOUS MODIFIER	Ex. Explaining the argument clearly improves your chance of success.	Here, "clearly" might modify either improving the chances of success or explaining the argument.	A correction: Explaining the argument clearly will improve your chance of success.