

Modifier Errors

Marked as “mod-u” or “mod-m”

Modifiers describe or clarify a part of a sentence. Modifiers can surface in a single word, a phrase, or in a dependent clause. A modifier error occurs 1) when a modifier appears to modify the wrong phrase, 2) when a modifier can modify more than one word or phrase, or 3) when a modifier cannot logically modify any word in a sentence because the modifier’s intended referent is missing.

Identifying and Correcting Modifier Errors

Modifier must modify a single word or idea. If you cannot find the word that is being modified, or if the modifier can modify more than one word, you have a modifier error.

Modifiers are most commonly called dangling modifiers and tend to appear at the beginning or at the end of sentences. Often, the ending of a modifier that is dangling is “ing,” but not always (see the second example below). These modifiers are also known as participles or as participial phrases and describe or modify a word.

The following are examples of common modifier errors and their corrections:

Modifier error: Producing faulty testers, the product was not purchased.
[The product itself seems to produce faulty testers.]

Corrected: After producing faulty testers, the company lost customers.

Modifier error: The staff assembled the testers, ignoring the guidelines.
[Are the testers ignoring the guidelines?]

Corrected: The staff, ignoring the guidelines, assembled the testers.

Modifier error: Unable to work with Carellas, Corporate transferred
Keller’s predecessor to Munich.
[Corporate seems unable to work with Carellas.]

Corrected: Unable to work with Carellas, Keller’s predecessor transferred
to Munich.

<p>For more information on Modifiers, see pp. 137-138 and 358-360 of the <i>Business Writer’s Handbook</i>.</p>
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