Modifiers & parallel structure

A modifier must sit next to the word it describes



Lesson `rw.conventions.W6`

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The idea

A modifier must sit next to the word it describes. An introductory modifying phrase must be immediately followed by the noun it logically modifies; if that noun is missing or wrong, the modifier dangles.

Is there an introductory or inserted modifier? A series, a correlative pair, or a comparison that must be parallel?

Make the noun right after an introductory phrase the thing it describes. Keep modifiers next to their targets. Put all items in a series or pair into matching grammatical form.

Watch every step

Walking to school, ___.

Which choice completes the text so that the modifier attaches correctly and conforms to Standard English?

- **A.** Maria noticed the fresh snow
- **B.** the fresh snow was noticed ✗ *dangling modifier*
- **C.** it was a beautiful morning ✗ *dangling modifier*
- **D.** the streets were quiet ✗ *dangling modifier*

Why **A** — "Maria noticed the fresh snow." Reposition modifiers and match the forms of parallel elements.

Now a harder one

The new policy is intended not only to reduce costs but also ___.

Which choice completes the text so that it conforms to the conventions of Standard English?

- **A.** to improve service ✓
- **B.** improving service ✗ *paired/correlative parallelism error*
- **C.** service improvements ✗ *paired/correlative parallelism error*
- **D.** it improves service ✗ *paired/correlative parallelism error*

Why A — "to improve service." Reposition modifiers and match the forms of parallel elements.

The method, in one line

Modifiers & parallel structure

Make the noun right after an introductory phrase the thing it describes. Keep modifiers next to their targets. Put all items in a series or pair into matching grammatical form.

Does the introductory phrase describe the subject that follows it? Is each modifier beside its target? Are the series and paired elements grammatically parallel?

Watch out: two traps to dodge

dangling modifier
An introductory modifying phrase has no logical or correct subject to attach to, so it modifies the wrong noun or none at all.

misplaced modifier
A modifier sits far from the word it describes, attaching to the wrong word and distorting the meaning.

Name the trap before you pick — most wrong answers are one of these two.

Try it, then watch the walk-through

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