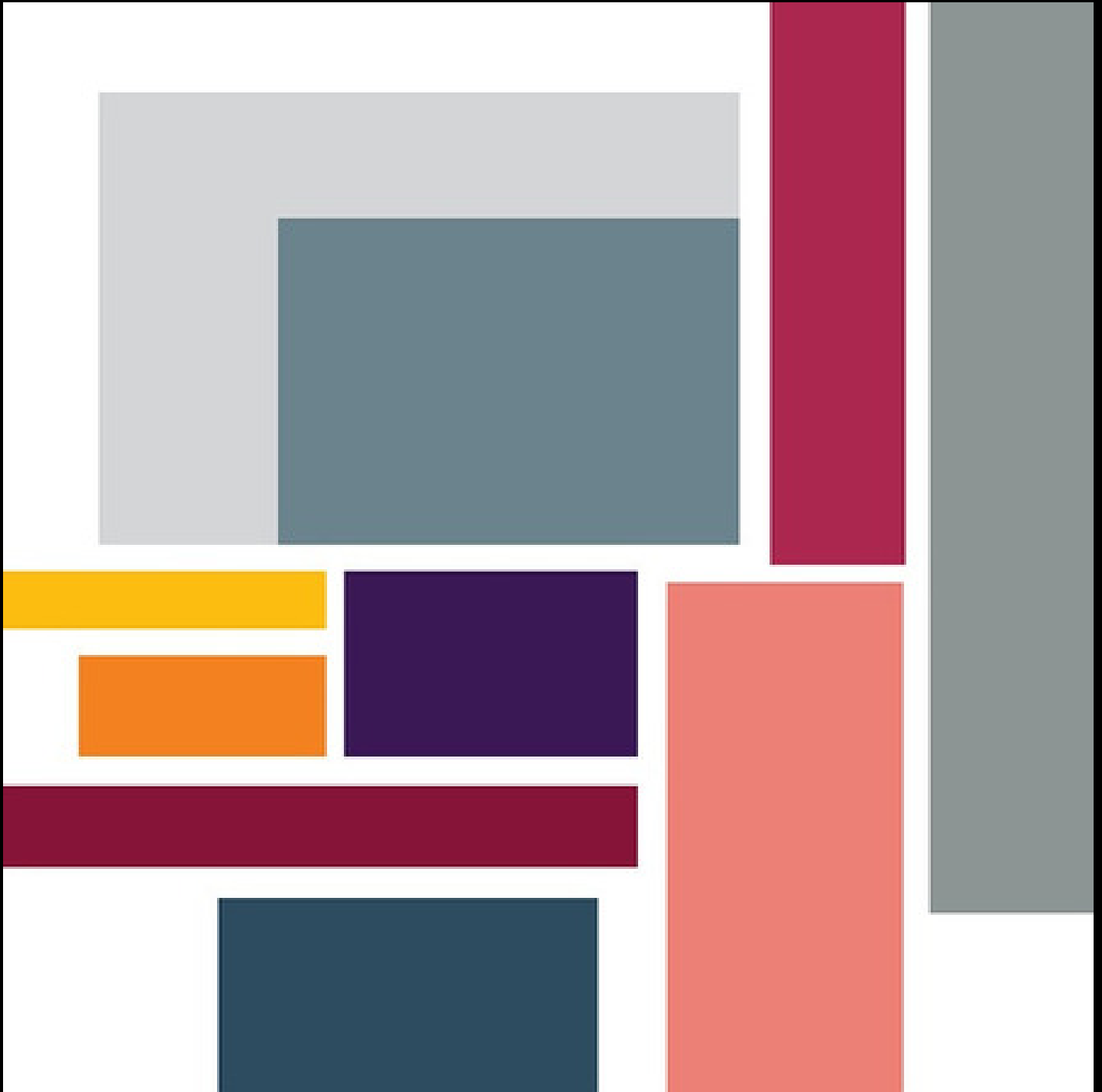


# Modification



# Dangling, Misplaced & Squinting Modifiers

## Lesson & Exercises

In any given sentence, modifiers should be placed as close as possible to the nouns, pronouns, or phrases they modify; sentences that separate modifiers from the items they modify are often unclear and sometimes downright absurd.

There are three main types of modification errors.

- 1) Dangling Modifiers
- 2) Misplaced Modifiers
- 3) Squinting Modifiers

### Dangling Modifiers

Sentences that include dangling modifiers are typically characterized by an introductory phrase or clause that describes the subject but does not name it. This clause is always set off from the rest of the sentence by a comma.

Whenever a sentence contains such an introductory statement, the subject must appear immediately after the comma. If the subject does not appear there, the modifier is dangling, and the sentence is incorrect.

Incorrect:     An elementary school teacher from Arkansas, increased funding and support for public libraries were what Bessie Boehm Moore worked for.

The first thing we can note about the above sentence is that it contains an introductory phrase (*An elementary school teacher from Arkansas*) that does not name the subject – it does not tell us who the elementary school teacher from Arkansas is.

We must therefore ask ourselves whom or what it is referring to. When we look at the rest of the sentence, it is clear that this description can only refer to Bessie Boehm Moore.

The words *Bessie Boehm Moore* do not appear immediately after the comma, so the modifier is dangling.

In order to fix the sentence, we must place Bessie Boehm Moore's name after the comma.

Correct:       An elementary school teacher from Arkansas, **Bessie Boehm Moore** worked to increase funding and support for public libraries.

One construction to watch out for involves the possessive form of a subject placed after an introductory phrase.

Incorrect: An elementary school teacher from Arkansas, **Bessie Boehm Moore's goal** was to increase funding and support for public libraries.

At first glance, this sentence looks and sounds correct. But who is the elementary school teacher from Arkansas? *Bessie Boehm Moore*.

Here, however, the *goal* is the subject – not *Bessie Boehm Moore*. As a result, the modifier is dangling.

Correct: An elementary school teacher from Arkansas, **Bessie Boehm Moore** worked to increase funding and support for public libraries.

When fixing dangling modifiers, it is most important that you identify the subject because that word must follow the introductory phrase. The rest of the sentence you can then rearrange as necessary.

Note that it is acceptable to begin the main clause with a modifier describing the subject; the description is considered part of the **complete subject**.

Correct: An Arkansas native, elementary school teacher **Bessie Boehm Moore** worked to increase funding and support for public libraries.

In the above sentence, the phrase *elementary school teacher* functions not as a noun but as a modifier describing Bessie Boehm Moore. As a result, it can be correctly placed after the comma.

Note that sentences that begin with participles, both present (ending in *-ing*) and past (typically ending in *-ed*, but also in *-ung*, *-unk*, *-own* for irregular verbs), are particularly vulnerable to the creation of dangling modifiers.

### Present Participle

Incorrect: **Stretching** from one end of the city to the other, the efficiency of the new tram system often surprises both tourists and city residents.

Correct: **Stretching** from one end of the city to the other, the new tram system often surprises both tourists and city residents with its efficiency.

### Past Participle

Incorrect: **Raised** in a small town in Missouri, the majority of singer and actress Josephine Baker's career was spent performing throughout Europe.

Correct: **Raised** in a small town in Missouri, singer and actress Josephine Baker spent the majority of her career performing throughout Europe.