

## Forms of Modifiers

A *modifier* is a word or word group that makes the meaning of another word or word group more specific. The two kinds of modifiers are *adjectives* and *adverbs*. Adjectives modify nouns and pronouns. Adverbs modify verbs, adjectives, and other adverbs.

- 11a.** If a word in the predicate modifies the subject of the verb, use the adjective form. If it modifies the verb, use the adverb form.

**EXAMPLES** Their gift was **generous**. [*Generous* is an adjective that makes the meaning of the subject *gift* more specific.]

They gave **generously**. [*Generously* is an adverb that makes the meaning of the verb *gave* more specific.]

**REMINDER** Many adverbs end in *-ly*.

**TIP** If you're trying to figure out whether to use an adjective or an adverb after a verb, look at the verb. Ask, *Is the verb a linking verb?* If so, the modifier to use after the verb is probably an adjective. If the verb is not a linking verb, the modifier to use after the verb is probably an adverb. Some common linking verbs are *am, appear, be, become, feel, grow, look, remain, seem, stay, and taste*.

### V ADJ

**ADJECTIVE** Our pet rabbit's fur feels **soft**. [The verb *feels* is used as a linking verb. *Soft* comes after the verb *feels*, and it is an adjective. *Soft* makes the meaning of the noun *fur* more specific.]

### V ADV

**ADVERB** The child felt our pet rabbit **softly**. [The verb *felt* is not used as a linking verb. *Softly* makes the meaning of the verb *felt* more specific. *Softly* is an adverb.]

**EXERCISE A** Tell whether the underlined word in each sentence is an adjective or an adverb. Write *ADJ* or *ADV* on each line provided.

- Examples** ADV 1. The hurricane moved slowly across the Atlantic. [The verb *moved* is not a linking verb. *Slowly* comes after the verb and is an adverb. *Slowly* makes the meaning of the verb *moved* more specific.]
- ADJ 2. Is the orchestra familiar with Rossini's *William Tell Overture*? [The verb *is* is a linking verb. *Familiar* comes after the verb and is an adjective. *Familiar* makes the meaning of the noun *orchestra* more specific.]

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. The children were happy to see their grandparents. [Is *were* a linking verb?]

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. Does this sweater look red to you? [Is *look* used as a linking verb?]

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- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I can barely read the writing on the billboard.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The scientist handled the fossil delicately.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Is that novel interesting?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Bobby Fischer played chess extremely well.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. If you look carefully, you can see faint drawings on the walls of the cave.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Alan and his teammates seemed ready for the game.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. The road was dangerously close to the edge of the cliff.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. The library at the end of the street is old.

Like one-word modifiers, phrases and clauses can also be used as adjectives and adverbs.

**EXAMPLES** The building with the clock tower is the tallest in the city. [The phrase *with the clock tower* acts as an adjective that makes the meaning of the noun *building* more specific. *With the clock tower* tells *which* building.]

The skateboard that he received for his birthday is just like mine. [*That he received for his birthday* is an adjective clause that makes the meaning of the noun *skateboard* more specific.]

While she was signing books, the author greeted her fans. [*While she was signing books* is an adverb clause that makes the meaning of the verb *greeted* more specific. The adverb clause tells *when*.]

**REMINDER** ▶ A *clause* is a word group that has a subject and a verb.

**EXERCISE B** Tell whether the underlined phrase or clause in each sentence acts as an adjective or an adverb. Write *ADJ* or *ADV* on each line provided.

**Example** ADJ 1. The dress that Alexia wore this evening is new. [The clause *that Alexia wore this evening* acts as an adjective. The clause makes the meaning of the noun *dress* more specific.]

- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Please bring me a glass of water. [Does *of water* describe the noun *glass* or the verb *bring*?]
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. After the applause ended, the curtain fell.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. During the Middle Ages, few people could read.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. Rene, whose parents are from Brazil, plays on my soccer team.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. Will you introduce me to the person who spoke first?

# Degrees of Comparison

**11b.** The three degrees of comparison are the positive, the comparative, and the superlative.

Adjectives and adverbs may be used to compare things. These modifiers take different forms depending on how many things are being compared. There are three different *degrees of comparison*.

(1) The **positive degree** is used when only one thing is being described and no comparison is being made.

**ADJECTIVE** Laurel Avenue is a **busy** street. [No comparison is being made. *Busy* is a positive adjective describing the noun *street*.]

**ADVERB** I travel **often**. [No comparison is being made. *Often* is a positive adverb describing the verb *travel*.]

(2) The **comparative degree** is used when two things or groups of things are being compared.

**ADJECTIVE** Laurel Avenue is **busier** than Thomas Road. [One thing is being compared with another. *Busier* is a comparative adjective describing the noun *Laurel Avenue*.]

**ADVERB** I travel **more often** than he does. [One person is being compared with another. *More often* is a comparative adverb describing the verb *travel*.]

(3) The **superlative degree** is used when three or more things are being compared.

**ADJECTIVE** Laurel Avenue is the **busiest** street in this part of town. [One street is being compared with many others. *Busiest* is a superlative adjective describing the noun *street*.]

**ADVERB** Of the four of us, I travel **most often**. [One person is being compared with three others. *Most often* is a superlative adverb describing the verb *travel*.]

**EXERCISE A** Identify the degree of the underlined modifier in each of the following sentences. Write *positive*, *comparative*, or *superlative* on each line provided.

**Example** positive 1. The impatient audience was ready for the show to begin. [The adjective *impatient* describes the audience. The audience's impatience is not being compared to anything. *Impatient* is a positive adjective.]

\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Is his story more fascinating than hers? [How many stories are being compared?]

\_\_\_\_\_ 2. The new engine runs more smoothly than the old one.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Of all American presidents, Franklin D. Roosevelt served longest.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Please bring me the largest flower pot in the garden shed.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5. The children whispered excitedly.

## Regular Comparison

Most one-syllable modifiers form the comparative degree by adding *-er* and the superlative degree by adding *-est*.

	POSITIVE	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
ONE-SYLLABLE MODIFIER	clear	clearer	clearest

**REMINDER** ▶ A syllable is a word or part of a word that is spoken with an uninterrupted sound.

	ONE SYLLABLE	TWO SYLLABLES	THREE OR MORE SYLLABLES
EXAMPLES	word, one, Bill	novel, heavy, Nixon	sentences, February, computer

Most two-syllable modifiers form the comparative degree by adding *-er* or by using *more*.

Two-syllable modifiers form the superlative degree by adding *-est* or by using *most*.

	POSITIVE	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
TWO-SYLLABLE MODIFIER	lonely	lonelier	loneliest
	rapid	more rapid	most rapid

Most modifiers that have three or more syllables form the comparative degree by using *more* and the superlative degree by using *most*.

	POSITIVE	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
THREE-SYLLABLE MODIFIER	important	more important	most important

**EXERCISE B** Write the comparative and superlative degrees of the modifiers given. Write your answers on the lines provided.

**Example 1.** cleverly more cleverly most cleverly

[*Cleverly* has three syllables. Three-syllable modifiers form the comparative by using *more* and the superlative by using *most*.]

	Positive	Comparative	Superlative
6. small	_____	_____	_____
	[How many syllables does <i>small</i> have?]		
7. doubtful	_____	_____	_____
8. dramatic	_____	_____	_____
9. hard	_____	_____	_____
10. steady	_____	_____	_____

# Regular and Irregular Comparison of Adjectives and Adverbs

## Regular Comparison

**11b.** The three degrees of comparison are the positive, the comparative, and the superlative.

**Regular Comparison** Most adjectives and adverbs that have only one syllable form the comparative degree by adding *-er* and the superlative degree by adding *-est*.

POSITIVE	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
cute	cuter	cutest
mild	milder	mildest

**TIP** When comparing **two** things, use the **two**-letter ending (*-er*). When comparing **three** or more things, use the **three**-letter ending (*-est*).

Adjectives and adverbs that have two syllables form the comparative degree by adding *-er* or by using *more*. Adjectives and adverbs form the superlative degree by adding *-est* or by using *most*.

POSITIVE	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
cloudy	cloudier	cloudiest
fragile	<b>more</b> fragile	<b>most</b> fragile

Modifiers that have three or more syllables form the comparative degree by using *more* and the superlative degree by using *most*.

POSITIVE	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
inventive	<b>more</b> inventive	<b>most</b> inventive
joyfully	<b>more</b> joyfully	<b>most</b> joyfully

**EXERCISE A** Complete each of the following sentences with the appropriate comparative or superlative form of the adjective or adverb given in italics.

**Example 1.** *fast* The passenger train travels faster than the freight train. [Two types of trains are being compared, so the comparative form is needed. *Fast* has one syllable, so adding *-er* is the way to form the comparative.]

- peaceful* The protesters are \_\_\_\_\_ now than they were an hour ago. [How many time periods are being compared? How many syllables does *peaceful* have?]
- carefully* She'd borrowed the book, so Ellen turned the pages \_\_\_\_\_ than usual.
- unusual* That is the \_\_\_\_\_ sculpture in the art gallery!
- soon* We reached the lake \_\_\_\_\_ than we expected.
- long* The Nile is the \_\_\_\_\_ river in the world.

## Irregular Comparison

**11c.** The comparative and superlative degrees of some modifiers are not formed by the usual methods.

POSITIVE	COMPARATIVE	SUPERLATIVE
good	better	best
bad	worse	worst
well	better	best
many	more	most
much	more	most
little	less	least
far	farther <i>or</i> further	farthest <i>or</i> furthest

**EXAMPLES** Janet is a **better** diver than Lindsay.  
Janet is the **best** diver in the state.

**NOTE** Irregular modifiers do not use *less* and *least* to show decreasing comparison.

**EXERCISE B** Complete each of the following sentences with the appropriate comparative or superlative form of the adjective or adverb given in italics.

- Examples**
- little* Of the six new employees, Elizabeth has the least experience. [Six employees are being compared, so the superlative form of *little* is needed.]
  - bad* Is your cold worse today than it was yesterday? [Two days are being compared, so the comparative form of *bad* is needed.]
- good* Even though the choir sounded good at the start of rehearsal, they sounded even \_\_\_\_\_ after warming up their voices. [How many different time periods are being compared? Which form of the irregular modifier *good* is needed?]
  - many* Of all four candidates, who received the \_\_\_\_\_ votes? [How many people are being compared? Which form of the irregular modifier *many* is needed?]
  - little* The front tire has \_\_\_\_\_ air in it than the rear tire has.
  - far* Is Chicago \_\_\_\_\_ away from here than Detroit?
  - well* Ana plays the flute \_\_\_\_\_ than she played last year.
  - much* May I have some \_\_\_\_\_ orange juice?
  - bad* Hurricane Andrew was one of the \_\_\_\_\_ hurricanes in recent history.
  - good* Math is my \_\_\_\_\_ subject.
  - much* Although we went out for a little while, we spent \_\_\_\_\_ of the day at home.
  - well* Of the three instruments I play, I play the piano \_\_\_\_\_.

# Placement of Modifiers A

## Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

**11h.** Place modifying words, phrases, and clauses as near as possible to the words they modify.

Where you place modifiers in a sentence affects the meaning of the sentence.

**EXAMPLES** The famous chef **from Denmark** hosted a program about native food. [The phrase modifies *chef*.]

The famous chef hosted a program **from Denmark** about native food. [The phrase modifies *program*.]

The famous chef hosted a program about native food **from Denmark**. [The phrase modifies *food*.]

A word that seems to modify the wrong word in the sentence is called a *misplaced modifier*.

**MISPLACED** Nadine has only read one of the three books assigned for class. [*Only* is not meant to modify *has read*, so it sounds awkward where it is.]

**CORRECT** Nadine has read **only** one of the three books assigned for class. [*Only* makes sense when it modifies *one*. Here, *only* means that one book—not two, three, or more books—have been read.]

A *dangling modifier* does not clearly modify any word or word group in the sentence.

**DANGLING** Walking through the park, squirrels were playing in the trees. [*Walking through the park* does not clearly modify any word or word group in the sentence.]

**CORRECT** **Walking through the park**, we watched the squirrels playing in the trees. [*We* were the ones walking through the park. It makes sense that *Walking through the park* is placed next to *we*.]

**EXERCISE A** Revise each of the following sentences to eliminate misplaced or dangling modifiers. You may need to add, delete, or rearrange words.

**Example 1.** While taking pictures, the camera battery died. [The original sentence has a dangling modifier, *While taking pictures*. The revised sentence shows who was taking pictures.]

*While he was taking pictures, the camera battery died.*

1. Nervous, Alberto's heart pounded faster. [Was Alberto's heart nervous, or was Alberto nervous?]

\_\_\_\_\_

2. As devoted fans, the rock star signed autographs for us.

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Working for four years, the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel was painted by Michelangelo.

\_\_\_\_\_

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4. Did you find any petrified wood walking through the forest?
- \_\_\_\_\_
5. Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare were two famous authors who were almost born at the same time.
- \_\_\_\_\_

## Prepositional Phrases

A *prepositional phrase* consists of a preposition, a noun or a pronoun called the *object of the preposition*, and any modifiers of that object.

A prepositional phrase used as an adjective should come directly after the word it modifies.

**MISPLACED** The lamp doesn't work on the end table. [The lamp doesn't work when it is on the end table.]

**CLEAR** The lamp **on the end table** doesn't work. [*On the end table* acts as an adjective and tells *which* lamp.]

A prepositional phrase used as an adverb should be placed near the word it modifies. You should place the adverb phrase so that the meaning you intend is clear.

**MISPLACED** Jerry said on Saturday he will go surfing. [Did Jerry make the statement on Saturday, or will he go surfing on Saturday?]

**CLEAR** **On Saturday**, Jerry said he will go surfing. [*On Saturday* is closer to the verb *said*, so readers know that Jerry made the statement on Saturday.]

**CLEAR** Jerry said he will go surfing **on Saturday**. [*On Saturday* is closer to the verb *will go*, so readers know that Jerry will go surfing on Saturday.]

**EXERCISE B** Draw an arrow from the misplaced prepositional phrase in each of the following sentences to its correct location in the sentence.

**Example 1.** Driving through Kansas, we saw fields waving in the breeze of wheat. [The *fields* were made up of wheat, so *of wheat* should follow *fields*.]

6. We found some old letters written by my uncle inside a shoe box. [Where were the letters found?]
7. The children stood and waved to the airplane flying in the street.
8. Put the bowl on the table of cherries.
9. Above the city, crowds of people watched the professional sky divers floating.
10. Is the woman your aunt with the white blouse?



# Placement of Modifiers B

## Participial Phrases

A *participial phrase* consists of a verb form and any modifiers or complements of the participle. The verb form in a participial phrase is either a present participle or a past participle. A participial phrase modifies a noun or a pronoun.

**REMINDER** ▶ A participle is a verb form. The *present participle* of a verb ends in *-ing*; the past participle of regular verbs ends in *-d* or *-ed*.

As you may remember, a modifier should be placed as close as possible to the word it modifies. Participial phrases describe other words, so participial phrases should be placed near the words they describe. A participial phrase that is not placed near the noun or pronoun that it modifies is called a *misplaced modifier*.

**MISPLACED** We left our backpacks at the bottom of the hill containing our supplies. [The hill did not contain the supplies, so *containing our supplies* is not in the right place.]

**CLEAR** At the bottom of the hill, we left our backpacks **containing our supplies**. [*Containing our supplies* comes after *backpacks*, which is the word being described.]

A participial phrase that does not clearly and logically modify a word in the sentence is a *dangling modifier*.

**EXAMPLE** Stuck in a traffic jam, the meeting started without us. [Was the meeting stuck in a traffic jam? No.]

**CLEAR** Stuck in a traffic jam, **we** missed the start of the meeting. [We were the ones stuck in the traffic jam.]

**CLEAR** **Because we were** stuck in a traffic jam, the meeting started without us.

You can correct a dangling modifier in one of two ways.

- (1) Add a word that the phrase can modify.
- (2) Change the phrase into a clause.

**EXERCISE A** Circle the misplaced or dangling modifier in each of the following sentences. Then, revise the sentence to correct the modifier. You may need to add, delete, or rearrange words.

**Example 1.** Excited about the victory, the celebration lasted for hours. [The revised sentence shows who was excited.]

*Excited about the victory, the team celebrated for hours.*

1. *A Life in the Theater* is a play about a teacher and a student written by David Mamet. [What was written by David Mamet?]

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2. Researching on the Internet, several interesting facts were found.  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Stranded on the island, a boat rescued the shipwreck survivors.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Confused by the patient's symptoms, more tests were ordered.  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Several documents were discovered by historians written in the eighteenth century.  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Adjective Clauses

An *adjective clause* is a dependent clause that modifies a noun or a pronoun. Most adjective clauses begin with words such as *that*, *which*, *who*, *whom*, or *whose*. An adjective clause usually comes directly after the word it modifies.

**MISPLACED** The child received a trophy who won first place in the art contest. [Did the trophy win first place? No.]

**CLEAR** The child **who won first place in the art contest** received a trophy. [The child won first place.]

**EXERCISE B** Circle the misplaced adjective clause in each of the following sentences. Then, draw an arrow from the misplaced adjective clause to its appropriate location in the sentence.

**Example 1.** Fernando took us into the cockpit of the airplane, whose father is a pilot. [*Fernando* is the one whose father is a pilot, so the clause *whose father is a pilot* should be closer to *Fernando*.]

6. The purse is red that she bought. [What did she buy?]
7. Our friend Nancy lives in New Jersey, whom we met several years ago.
8. Drew knows a lot about computers, whose father designs software.
9. The movie was filmed in 1950 that we watched last night.
10. Our visit to Yellowstone National Park was the best part of our vacation, which is the oldest national park in the United States.