

Language – Modifier Phrases

Reading/Discussion

Remember **adjectives** and **adverbs**? Adjectives describe or **modify** nouns and adverbs describe or modify verbs. Instead of using just one word to modify nouns or adverbs we often use a **phrase** instead. In English, we have two types of modifier phrases: adjective phrases and adverbial phrases.

A complete sentence contains at least a noun and a verb. Modifier phrases refer to the noun or the verb which they are modifying and although they are not necessary to make a sentence, they tell us much more about the subject. Look at these two sentences. 'The bird sat in a tree.' 'The bird had a red chest.' You can combine them into one sentence with a modifier phrase like this: 'The bird with a red chest sat in a tree.'

Notice that the modifier must be placed closest to the word that it describes. 'The bird sat in a tree, with a red chest.' makes it sound as if the tree had the red chest instead of the bird! We call this a **misplaced** modifier. Often these misplaced modifiers appear at the beginning of a sentence and are known as **dangling** modifiers. Dangling modifiers usually begin with –ing words. Look at this one: 'Scratching the furniture, Alice scolded her cat.' Because Alice is the closest noun to the modifier it sounds as if she scratched the furniture and then blamed it on her cat! You can correct the sentence like this: 'Alice scolded her cat who was scratching the furniture.' or like this: 'Scratching the furniture, the cat was scolded by Alice.'

If you are not sure whether the sentence has a misplaced or dangling modifier, all you have to do is underline the noun to which the modifier refers, in the above example it would be the cat.

Language – Modifier Phrases Activities

A. Correct the dangling modifiers.

Can you correct these sentences? Identify the dangling modifier and underline the word to which it refers, and then change the sentence so that it makes better sense.

1. Running down the path, the stone tripped Billy up.
2. Blowing hard, Mary's hair was tangled by the wind.
3. Wearing her best dress, the photographer told Mary she looked pretty.
4. Floating in the air, the baby laughed at the bubbles.
5. The dog tried to get through the gate barking loudly.

B. Create your own sentences.

Combine these sentences by using a modifier phrase:

1. The boy climbed the tree.
The boy wore a green jacket.
2. The dog came for a pat.
The dog was wagging his tail.
3. The girl is his sister.
The girl has blue eyes.
4. The tree has a nest in it.
The tree has yellow flowers.
5. The book belongs to the library.
The book has torn pages.

Name _____

Date _____

Language – Modifier Phrases Answers

Activity A

Suggested answers:

1. Running down the path, Billy tripped over the stone.
2. Blowing hard, the wind tangled Mary's hair.

OR

Mary's hair was tangled by the wind, which was blowing hard.

3. The photographer told Mary, wearing her best dress, that she looked pretty.
4. The baby laughed at the bubbles floating in the air.
5. Barking loudly, the dog tried to get through the gate.

Activity B

1. The boy wearing a green jacket climbed the tree.
2. Wagging his tail the dog came for a pat.
3. The girl with blue eyes is his sister.
4. The tree with yellow flowers has a nest in it.
5. The book with torn pages belongs to the library.