

Rule 3: For clear meaning, put **limiting modifiers** such as *almost, even, just, merely, nearly, not, only* in front of OR right after the words they modify. In academic writing, writers limit the use of these words.

Examples: **Almost** a handful of students attended the lecture.

modifier modified words

- The words *a handful* are modified by *almost* giving an idea of about how many students attended the lecture.

A handful of students **almost attended** the lecture.

modifier modified word

- The word *attended* is modified by *almost* giving the idea that the students did not go to the lecture, although they may have thought about it.

Five **students only**, no more, attended the lecture.

modified modifier word

- The word *students* is modified by *only* explaining exactly how many students attended.

Five students **attended only** the lecture.

modified modifier word

- The word *attended* is modified by *only* explaining that the lecture was the only thing the students attended.

Rule 4: Avoid splitting infinitives with a long modifying phrase. An infinitive is “to” + a verb: *to run, to leave, to see*, etc. An infinitive is *split* when a word is placed between “to” and the verb.

Examples: Students should try **to whenever possible get enough rest**. (split infinitive)

infinitive
modifying phrase modified words

Students should try **to get enough rest whenever possible**. (intact infinitive)

Infinitive modifying phrase
modified words

- In the second sentence, the infinitive *to get* is kept together which is more clear.

Rule 5: Dangling modifiers happen when the word to be modified is absent or implied. The modifier “dangles” because it does not refer to any particular subject. Dangling modifiers often occur at the start or the end of sentences.

Examples: **Flipping through the pages of the magazine,** my eyes noticed the auto ads. (unclear)

modifying phrase

- Eyes cannot flip through pages. To fix this sentence, an appropriate “actor” is needed (whoever is flipping the pages).

Flipping through the pages of the magazine, **I** noticed the auto ads. (clear)

modifying phrase *modified subject*

- Adding the subject “I” makes it clear who is doing the action.

The mountains were snow-covered and cloudless, **flying over the Rockies.** (unclear)

modifying phrase

- Mountains cannot fly. To fix this sentence, an appropriate “actor” is needed (whoever is flying). Placing the modifying phrase at the start of the sentence will help make it more clear.

Flying over the Rockies, **we** saw the snow-covered and cloudless mountains. (clear)

modifying phrase *modified subject*

- Adding the subject “we” clarifies who is doing the action.

These are the basic modifier placement rules; for more complex rules, please see Writing Center staff or several handbooks available in the JCCC Writing Center.

For exercises to practice your modifier placement skills, please see Writing Center staff.