

Grammatical Terms

How many times have you gotten a paper back from a professor with markings all over it, indicating that you misplaced a *modifier* or you have a *subject/verb agreement* problem? Have you ever wondered what a misplaced modifier even is? This sheet should help answer two of the most common grammatical mistakes.

Grammatical Mistake #1: Subject/Verb Agreement

This problem occurs generally when you have a general singular subject, like “reader,” but you want to keep its antecedents (pronoun that follows the subject and usually identifies gender) gender neutral. Let’s use the sentence below as an example:

A **reader** will choose **their** favorite book based on character development.

- Subject – reader
- Antecedent – their

Problem:

Since the subject is singular, the antecedent should be singular as well.

Solution:

By changing “their” to a singular pronoun, we keep the antecedent singular and still gender neutral. The sentence should then read as follows:

A **reader** will choose **his or her** favorite book based on character development.

Grammatical Mistake #2: Misplaced Modifier

This is when a word that references a noun is placed too far away from that noun that it is confusing and the reader doesn’t know which noun that word refers to. For example:

The athlete will *only* run a few miles.

- Noun (who?) – athlete
- Modifier of “athlete” – only

Problem:

We don’t know whether the athlete will *only* run—as opposed to a *sprint*—or if the athlete will run for a short distance—*only* a few miles.

Solution:

To fix this, you would place the modifier, *only*, as close as possible to the noun you want it to modify. The sentence should then read as follows:

The athlete will run *only* a few miles.

For more information: Visit http://webster.commnet.edu/grammar/sx_agr.hem