

ACT Mini-Lesson: Those Pesky Modifiers

*adapted from Grammar Bytes!, Manhattan Prep
ACT Book of Practice Problems, and Prep
Scholar*

**A misplaced and/or
inappropriately used modifier
item on an objective test
might look like this ...**

Sample Item

- A. Broken and dusty, Clarence found an old computer in the garage.
- B. Broken and dusty, the garage had an old computer that was found by Clarence.
- C. **In the garage, Clarence found an old computer that was broken and dusty.**

Sample Item 2

- A. Though exhausted, it would be another hour before Pedro got to go home.
- B. Though exhausted, Pedro wouldn't get to go home for another hour.

Place a *present participle phrase* right before or right after the word it describes.

Present participle: verb + ing

The children ate ***banana splits*** dripping with hot fudge and whipped cream.

Place a *past participle phrase* right before or right after the word it describes.

Past participle: regular = **verb + ed**; irregular forms vary.

Angered by the football score, **Paul** kicked the television in the living room.

Place an ***adjective clause*** right after the word it describes.

An ***adjective clause*** begins with a word such as ***that***, ***which***, or ***who***.

The landscaper wrestled the old ***lawnmower*** that coughed and choked through the long grass.

To place modifiers correctly,
avoid ***passive voice verbs.***

Passive voice: form of ***be*** + past
participle + ***by***.

Typing furiously, ***Beatrice*** finished the essay
by the 3 p.m. deadline.

Quick Test

Directions: In the items that follow, choose the sentence in which the modifiers are correctly placed.

Item 1

- A. Sitting on the top shelf of the refrigerator,
Desmond saw Mom's pristine birthday cake.
- B. Desmond, sitting on the top shelf of the
refrigerator, saw Mom's pristine birthday cake
- C. **Sitting on the top shelf of the refrigerator,
Mom's pristine birthday cake caught
Desmond's attention.**

Item 2

- A. Loudly slurping the bowl of hot soup, Derrick's impolite behavior annoyed the other diner patrons.
- B. As Derrick loudly slurped the bowl of hot soup, his impolite behavior annoyed the other diner patrons.**
- C. Loudly slurping the hot soup, the other diner patrons were annoyed by Derrick's impolite behavior.

Item 3

- A. Seated by the window, Barbara munched popcorn on the long bus ride home.
- B. Seated by the window, popcorn was munched by Barbara on the long bus ride home.
- C. Barbara munched popcorn seated by the window on the long bus ride home.

Item 4

- A. Twisting in the strong wind, we knew the hurricane was close as we watched the trees.
- B. We knew the hurricane was close as we watched the trees twisting in the strong wind.**
- C. We knew the hurricane was close, twisting in the wind, as we watched the trees.

Item 5

- A. Huddled by the door, the rain made the wet kitten cry to come in.
- B. Crying to come in, the door is where the wet kitten huddled during the rain.
- C. **Huddled by the door, the wet kitten cried to come in from the rain.**

Item 6

While watching TV, the power went out,
scaring Christina.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. the power going out scared Christina.
- C. Christina was scared by the power going out.
- D. Christina's fear was inspired by the power going out.

Item 7

I was waiting in line with a young girl who was sketching in a flowing scarf with colored pencils.

The best placement for the underlined portion would be:

- F. where it is now.
- G. after the word *line*.
- H. after the word *girl*.
- J. after the word *pencils* (ending the sentence with a period).

Item 8

- 3. Suggested by me the new mystery novel, supposedly a page turner, our book club decided to read it unanimously.
 - A. NO CHANGE
 - B. Our book club unanimously decided to read the new mystery novel I suggested, which was supposed to be a page turner.
 - C. A page turner, unanimously the new mystery novel was decided by our book club, suggested by me.
 - D. Decided on by our book club, the new mystery novel, a page turner, was suggested unanimously by me.

Answers

1. C
2. H
3. B