

# Trenga, Bonnie. The Curious Case of the

## Hisplaced Modifier: How to Solve the Mystery of Weak Writing. Cincinnati: Writer's Digest Books, 2006. Print.

### Appendix Three

## GLOSSARY

Cincinnati: Writer's  
Digest Books,  
2006. Print.

**active sentence**—A sentence in which the subject, not the object, is performing the action: The batter struck the ball. (*The batter* is the subject, *the ball* is the object.)  
*See also:* object, subject. *Contrast with:* passive sentence.

**active voice**—*See:* active sentence.

**adjective**—A word that describes a noun: happy.  
*See also:* noun.

**adverb**—A word that describes an adjective, a verb, or another adverb: very good, I ate greedily. *See also:* adjective, verb.

**antecedent**—The word that a pronoun stands in for: The man ate his lunch. *See also:* pronoun.

**apostrophe**—A punctuation mark (') used to form contractions or to indicate possession: It's time to go (it is time to go), one boy's shoes, three boys' shoes. *See also:* contraction, possessive.

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**clause**—A group of words that often begins with *that*, *who*, or *which*. Contains a subject and a main verb. Is more complex than a phrase: The dog that I saw at the pet shop was cute. *See also:* main verb, subject. *Contrast with:* phrase.

**cliché**—An expression that has been used too often: larger than life.

**colon**—A punctuation mark used to introduce something, especially a list: You need to buy the following pastries: éclairs, hot-cross buns, and pecan tarts.

**comma**—A punctuation mark used to separate items within a series or within a sentence: They enjoy movies, concerts, operas, and plays.

**complete sentence**—A sentence that contains a subject and a verb and sometimes an object: She likes him. *See also:* object, subject, verb. *Contrast with:* fragment, incomplete sentence.

**contraction**—A shorter version of one or more words. Use an apostrophe instead of the missing letter(s): they've (they have), it's (it is, it has). *See also:* apostrophe.

**countable noun**—A noun you can count: trees. *See also:* noun. *Contrast with:* uncountable noun.

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**em dash**—A punctuation mark used to mark an aside: He asked me—me, of all people—to cook his dinner.

**exclamation point**—A punctuation mark used to express excitement or surprise: I love you!

**fragment**—A sentence that is missing one of its required parts (a subject, verb, or object). Also known as an incomplete sentence: She likes. *See also:* object, subject, verb. *Contrast with:* complete sentence.

**hyphen**—A punctuation mark used to join related words: The sixteen-year-old boy crashed his car.

**hyphenated compound**—Two (or more) words joined by hyphens: my chocolate-loving sister. *See also:* hyphen.

**incomplete sentence**—*See:* fragment.

**indefinite pronoun**—A pronoun such as *everyone, somebody, or no one*. *See also:* pronoun.

**main verb**—Officially known as a *predicate*, the verb that goes with the subject of the sentence: She goes to school. *See also:* subject, verb.

**misplaced modifier**—A modifier that ends up next to the wrong word: Looking out the window, it was clear to me that it was raining. *See also:* modifier.

**modifier**—A word or short phrase that describes something. Should be right next to what it describes: Looking out the window, I saw it was raining.

**nominalization**—A noun you've created from a verb or an adjective: recommendation (from the verb *to recommend*). *See also:* adjective, noun, verb.

**noun**—A person, place, or thing: essay, Tom.

**object**—The person or thing that receives the action of the verb in a sentence: The batter struck the ball. *See also:* active sentence, passive sentence, verb. *Contrast with:* subject.

**parallel sentence**—A sentence in which all the elements are in the same form: She ran up the hill, into the woods, and down to the lake. *See also:* base word. *Contrast with:* unparallel sentence.

**parentheses**—A punctuation mark used to mark incidental information: I put on my raincoat (it was sprinkling).

**passive sentence**—A sentence in which the recipient of the verb's action is the subject instead of the object: The ball was struck by the batter. *See also:* object, subject, verb. *Contrast with:* active sentence.

**passive voice**—*See* passive sentence.

**past participle**—A past-tense form of a verb that appears in passive voice: It was done by me. *See also*: passive sentence, verb.

**past tense**—A form of a verb that indicates something has already happened: I ate it. *See also*: verb. *Contrast with*: present tense.

**period**—A punctuation mark used to end a sentence.

**phrase**—A short group of words that does not contain both a subject and a main verb. Is less complex than a clause: The dog that I saw at the pet shop was cute. *See also*: main verb, subject. *Contrast with*: clause.

**plural**—More than one item or person: the books, they. *Contrast with*: singular.

**possessive**—A form of a word that denotes ownership or possession: the boy's shoes (the shoes that belong to the boy).

**preposition**—A word that often describes the position of something: in the park, next to my sister.

**prepositional phrase**—A phrase that starts with a preposition: in the park, next to my sister. *See also*: preposition.

**present tense**—A form of a verb that indicates something is happening now or happens habitually: They like spaghetti. *See also*: verb. *Contrast with*: past tense.

**pronoun**—A word that takes the place of a noun or another pronoun: he, they, it. *See also*: noun.

**pronoun-antecedent agreement**—When a singular pronoun agrees with a singular antecedent, and a plural pronoun agrees with a plural antecedent: My aunt visited her cousin. *See also*: antecedent, noun, plural, pronoun, singular.

**question mark**—A punctuation mark used at the end of a question: Where did I put my keys?

**quotation mark**—A punctuation mark used to indicate a quotation or dialogue, or to signal deceit or sarcasm: She asked, "Where did I put my keys?"

**run-on sentence**—An incorrect sentence made up of two sentences joined with a comma instead of a period or semicolon: I like ice cream, it's good. *See also*: comma, period, semicolon.

**semicolon**—A punctuation mark used to separate items that contain commas, or to join two connected sentences

into one: I couldn't find my shoes in the closet; however, I did find an old pizza. *See also:* comma.

**sentence structure**—The way you build your sentence. This book favors active as opposed to passive sentence structure. *See also:* active sentence, passive sentence. }

**singular**—A single item or person: the book, he. *Contrast with:* plural.

**subject**—The person or thing that performs the action of the verb in a sentence: The batter struck the ball. *See also:* active sentence, passive sentence, verb. *Contrast with:* object.

**subject-verb agreement**—When a singular subject agrees with a singular verb, and when a plural subject agrees with a plural verb: The detective's shoes, which are always pristine, looked dirty yesterday. *See also:* plural, singular, subject, verb.

**uncountable noun**—A noun you can't count: sand. *See also:* noun. *Contrast with:* countable noun.

**unparallel sentence**—A sentence in which similar elements are not in the same form: They like to fish, barbecueing their catches, and to relax with a beer. *Contrast with:* parallel sentence.

**vague -ing word**—A word ending in *-ing* that allows you to write vaguely or passively. (Not all words ending in *-ing* are vague.) Often leads to a misplaced modifier: After going to bed, some barking dogs were noisy. *See also:* misplaced modifier, passive sentence, verb.

**verb**—A part of speech that indicates the action in a sentence: They ran all the way home.

**weak verb**—A verb that is repetitive, passive, wordy, or general, has multiple meanings, fails to clarify the action, or makes readers work too hard: to be, to do, to have. *See also:* passive sentence, verb.

Appendix Four

# WEAK WRITING RAP SHEET

PROBLEM AREA	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	EXAMPLES
Passive Voice	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A form of <i>to be</i>.</li> <li>2. A past participle.</li> <li>3. The word <i>by</i>.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The show <u>was held</u> <u>by</u> the museum.</li> <li>• The carpets <u>were chewed up</u>.</li> </ul>
Nominalizations, or Empty Nouns	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A word such as <i>a, an, the, his, her, these, or several</i>.</li> <li>2. A noun such as <i>utilization, sadness, or taking</i>.</li> <li>3. The word <i>of</i>.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I was unsure who had done the beautiful arrangement of flowers.</li> <li>• The cooking of the six-course meal was time consuming.</li> </ul>
Pronoun-Antecedent Agreement	Singular antecedent but plural pronoun, or vice versa.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The detective and <u>their</u> boss...</li> </ul>
<i>Woman</i> instead of <i>Female</i>	Using <i>woman</i> or <i>woman</i> as an adjective.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The <u>woman</u> painter became famous.</li> </ul>

HOW TO CORRECT IT	BETTER WRITING STYLE
Identify who is doing the action (subject) and who is receiving it (object). Decide if you want to focus on the subject or the object. If the subject is most important, use active voice. Ensure the person/thing doing the action is the subject of the sentence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The museum held the show.</li> <li>• The dog chewed up the carpets.</li> </ul>
Figure out what verb or adjective to use instead of the nominalization. For example, <i>a preparation of</i> becomes the verb <i>to prepare</i> , and <i>the sadness of</i> becomes the adjective <i>sad</i> . Use this verb or adjective when you rewrite. You may need a new subject, so be sure to specify who or what is doing the action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I was unsure who had arranged the flowers so beautifully.</li> <li>• The chef spent hours cooking the six-course meal.</li> </ul>
If the antecedent is singular, use a singular pronoun. If it's plural, use a plural pronoun.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The detective and her boss...</li> </ul>
Use the word <i>female</i> or reword the sentence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The female painter became famous.</li> </ul>

PROBLEM AREA	COMMON MISTAKE	EXERCISES
Vague -ing Words	A word ending in -ing. Appears anywhere in a sentence, especially the first word or after one of these words or phrases: <i>after, although, before, by, due to, if, instead of, since, through, through, upon, when, whereas, and while.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Rewriting is fun.</u></li> <li>• The curtains were drawn before <u>going out.</u></li> </ul>
Weak Verbs	Basic verbs such as <i>to be, to do, to get, to go, to have, to make, to occur, and to use.</i> Weak phrasing such as <i>there is, it is, and this is.</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That is a good movie.</li> <li>• He went up the mountain with difficulty.</li> </ul>
Misplaced Modifiers	A descriptive phrase that's next to the wrong subject. If at the beginning of a sentence, a phrase followed by a comma. If in the middle/at the end, a <i>that</i> or <i>who</i> clause.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Flying around the room,</u> I saw the bird.</li> <li>• I drove over a bug in the driveway <u>that was huge.</u></li> </ul>

HOW TO CORRECT IT	BETTER WRITING STYLE
Determine which sentences with -ing words are missing a clear subject. Rewrite each sentence and state who is doing the action. You can often use the verb that appears in the vague -ing construction (for example, turn after going into <i>after he goes</i> ). Try to use a more interesting verb than <i>was</i> or <i>were</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• She enjoys rewriting.</li> <li>• He drew the curtains before they went out.</li> </ul>
Use specific, descriptive verbs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• That movie bowled me over.</li> <li>• He struggled to reach the summit.</li> </ul>
Ensure the modifier is right next to what it describes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I saw the bird flying around the room.</li> <li>• I drove over a huge bug in the driveway.</li> </ul>

PROBLEM AREA	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	EXAMPLES
Long Sentences	More than forty words. Words such as <i>and</i> , <i>but</i> , <i>after</i> , <i>although</i> , <i>because</i> , <i>before</i> , <i>if</i> , <i>since</i> , <i>so</i> , <i>though</i> , <i>when</i> , <i>which</i> , and <i>who</i> . Pairs of em dashes or parentheses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Instead of confessing to the heist, which they took part in yesterday they robbed a bank with an accomplice, the evil duo, who would no longer have to flip burgers, celebrated.</li> </ul>
Wordiness	Many words but little substance. Forms of weak verbs such as <i>to be</i> . Passive writing. Phrasing such as <i>there is ... that</i> and <i>the reason is because</i> . Repetitions of the same idea.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The utilization of span by the salesman <u>was why there was lots of money flowing into his bank account</u> (19 words)</li> <li>The reason that the policeman was standing in the middle of the road <u>was because the traffic light was not working</u>. (21 words)</li> </ul>
Generic Vocabulary	Using overly general nouns, verbs, and adjectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The <u>bad</u> criminal took a <u>lot</u> from my neighbor.</li> </ul>
Quotation Marks	Using quotation marks to emphasize something.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I love you "so much."</li> </ul>

HOW TO CORRECT IT	BETTER WRITING STYLE
Figure out the sentence's main idea and use that as the basis for the primary sentence. Then reroute the other parts of the overly long sentence. The new sentences should flow well together. Transitions should be smooth.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The evil duo, along with an accomplice, robbed a bank yesterday. Instead of confessing, they celebrated that they would no longer have to flip burgers.</li> </ul>
Rewrite most weak verbs. Replace wordy phrases with concise ones. Cut repetitions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The spammer got rich. (4 words)</li> <li>The policeman directed traffic when the signal broke. (8 words)</li> </ul>
Use specific words instead of vague ones.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The law-breaker made off with my neighbor's silverware and credit cards.</li> </ul>
Use quotation marks to indicate deceit or sarcasm, not to highlight something. Use italics or reword the sentence if you want to emphasize something.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I love you so much!</li> </ul>

PROBLEM AREA	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	EXAMPLES
Apostrophes	Using <i>it's</i> instead of <i>its</i> or confusing other pairs of contractions/possessive adjectives. Using an apostrophe incorrectly with plural nouns. Adding an unneeded apostrophe, such as in a plural noun. Leaving out a needed apostrophe.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There here.</li> <li>• My <u>children's</u> smiles are precious.</li> <li>• These <u>car's</u> are new.</li> <li>• The <u>manager's</u> special is fried eggs and bacon.</li> </ul>
Clichés	Overusing common phrases.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The robber gave the policewoman <u>a run for her money</u>.</li> </ul>
Hyphens	Forgetting to use hyphens to join related words. Using hyphens if descriptive words come after the noun. Using a hyphen after <i>-ly</i> adverbs. Joining too many words with hyphens. Using hyphens instead of em dashes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her <u>wonderfully talented nineteen-year-old sister</u> is <u>big-hearted</u>.</li> <li>• The <u>open-the-door-and-call-me-a-taxi</u> doorman went missing.</li> <li>• He passed the <u>polygraph-what a surprise!</u></li> </ul>

HOW TO CORRECT	BETTER WRITING STYLE
Be careful to distinguish between contractions (apostrophe) and possessive adjectives (no apostrophe). When you're making a noun possessive, ensure you put the apostrophe in the right place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They're here.</li> <li>• My <u>children's</u> smiles are precious.</li> <li>• These <u>cars</u> are new.</li> <li>• The <u>manager's</u> special is fried eggs and bacon.</li> </ul>
Pepper your writing with original phrasing.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The robber evaded the policewoman for a while, but she finally caught him.</li> </ul>
Use hyphens to join related words before a noun. Don't use hyphens if these words come after the noun or if you're joining an <i>-ly</i> adverb. Don't confuse readers by joining up too many words with hyphens. Don't use hyphens instead of em dashes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Her <u>wonderfully talented nineteen-year-old sister</u> is <u>big-hearted</u>.</li> <li>• The <u>doorman, who always opened the door and called a taxi for me,</u> went missing.</li> <li>• He passed the <u>polygraph—what a surprise!</u></li> </ul>



PROBLEM AREA	WHAT TO LOOK FOR	EXAMPLES
Comparisons	Comparing two incompatible ideas.	• The detective's shoes were newer than his boss.
Subject-Verb Agreement	Singular subject but plural verb, or vice versa.	• The detectives and their boss likes to arrest criminals.
Similar-Sounding Words	Mixing up words that sound the same or look similar but that have different spellings and meanings.	• She was leathe to turn herself in.

HOW TO CORRECT IT	BETTER WRITING STYLE
Make sure you're comparing apples to apples.	• The detective's shoes were newer than those of his boss.
Isolate the subject and determine if it's singular or plural. If the subject is singular, use a singular verb. If it's plural, use a plural verb. Plural subjects often contain the word <i>and</i> . Consider moving the subject close to the verb.	• The detectives and their boss like to arrest criminals.
Check your dictionary to make sure you're using the word you intend.	• She was loath to turn herself in.

