

Grammar...

YUCK!



The Speaking, Reading, and
Writing Center

College of the Mainland

Spring 2015



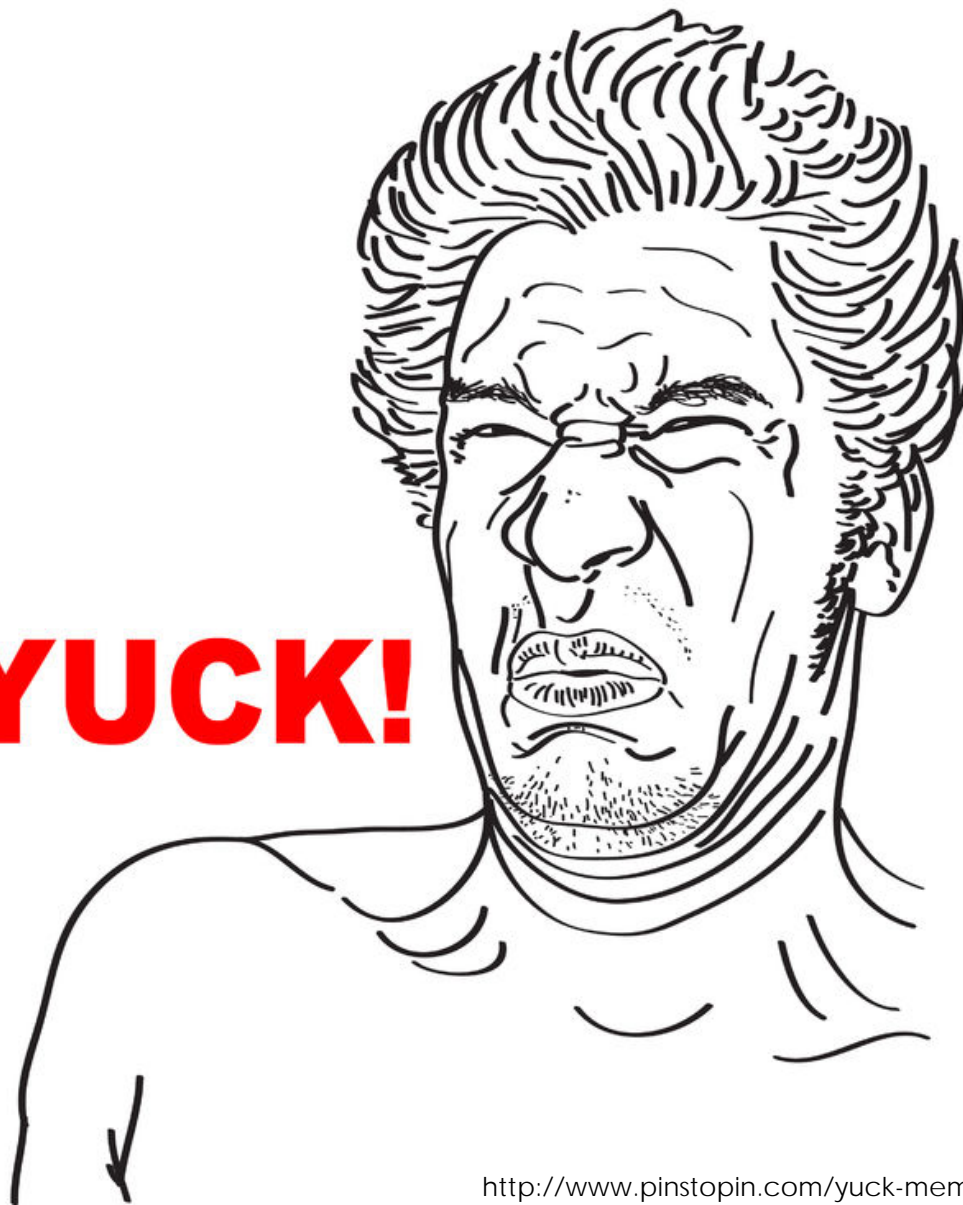
College of
the Mainland

We all **want** good grammar.

We know we **need** it.

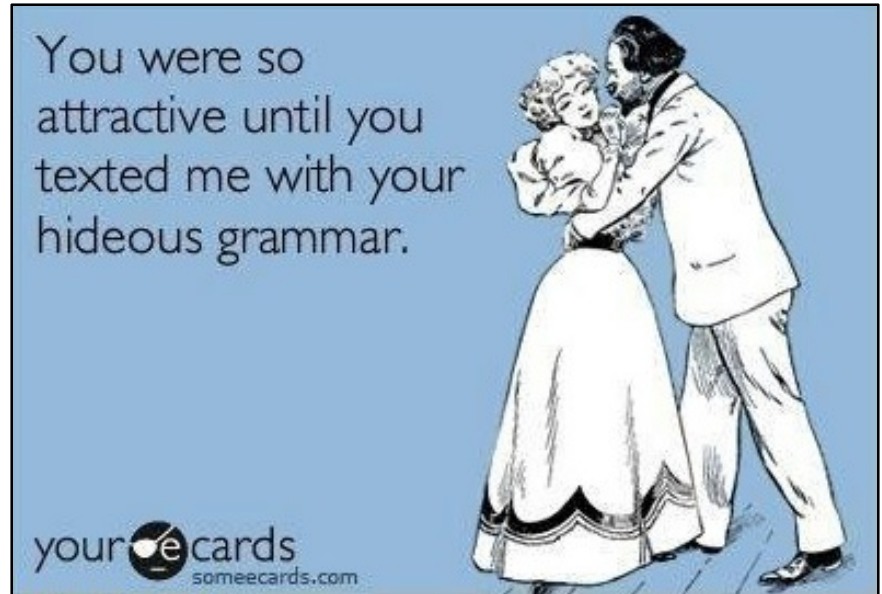
But we aren't always sure how to recognize **yucky** grammar when we see it, or what to do about it.

YUCK!



Common grammar issues include:

- Vague pronoun reference
- Unnecessary verb tense shift
- Lack of subject/verb agreement
- Lack of pronoun/antecedent agreement
- Misplaced/dangling modifier



Vague Pronoun Reference

Writers use pronouns in place of nouns to prevent the repetition of words.

Examples of pronouns include *I, we, you, he, she, it, they, who, me, you, us, him, her, it, them, whom, anybody, anything, each, either, everybody, everything, neither, none, somebody, and something.*

The noun the pronoun is replacing/referencing is called the **antecedent**, and it can be found in the same sentence or in a close or adjacent sentence. In a well-written sentence, the antecedent is clear:

*Despite the torrential rains, the **college** made the decision to keep **its** campus open.*

***Lisa** poured Josh a cup of coffee from **her** coffee pot in the SRWC.*

*Robert had previously shared some Dunkin Donuts Jelly Donut coffee with the **staff**, and **they** loved it.*



I, you, he, she, it, we, and they are **subject pronouns**.

Subject pronouns *perform the action* of a sentence:

"I wrote the book."

"She" read it."



Me, you, him, her, it, us, and them are **object pronouns**.

Object pronouns *receive the action* of a sentence:

John kissed ***her***."

She called ***me***."

Vague Pronoun Reference

But when pronouns can potentially refer to more than one noun (or antecedent), readers can easily be confused:

What goes into the bin:
the poo, or the dog?

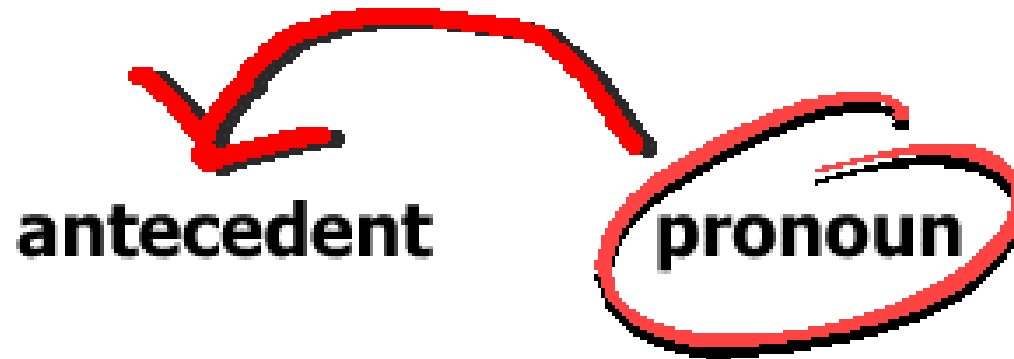


Multiple nouns in the sentence can confuse the reader, particularly when another noun comes close to the intended antecedent and its pronoun, as it did in this example.

Revise the sentence to clarify what you mean:

Vague: If your dog does a poo, please put it in a litter bin.

Better: Please put your dog's poo in a litter bin.



Follow these steps from Letourneau University's OWL to avoid pronoun reference problems:

1. Circle all pronouns in your draft and draw an arrow to their antecedent.
2. If you can't find the antecedent or if it seems unclear, you can:
 - Replace the pronoun with a noun
 - Supply the missing antecedent
 - Use a possessive pronoun to refer back to a possessive antecedent
 - Place the pronoun so that the nearest noun is its antecedent

<http://owlet.letu.edu/grammarlinks/pronouns/pronoun1s.html>

Verb Tense Shift

The most commonly used tenses in academic writing include present and past. Usually, a consistent verb tense is used throughout writing:

The president **won** the election based on a promise, but then **ignored** his own commitment; he **vetoed** the bill.

The verbs in the sentence above are all past tense. Switching tense in this sentence could look like this:

The president **won** the election based on a promise, but then **ignores** his own commitment; he **vetoed** the bill.



Here, we have two verbs in past tense, and one in present. It must be clear to the reader when the action is taking place, and unnecessary tense shifts make that difficult to understand. Be careful when toggling back and forth between tenses: does it accurately reflect the time order of events?

Verb Tense Shift

- If the time frame of the action or state **has not changed**, then neither should the verb tense.
- If the time frame **has changed**, **OR if multiple time frames are referenced**, writers should carefully word their sentence so that the shift is clear to the reader.

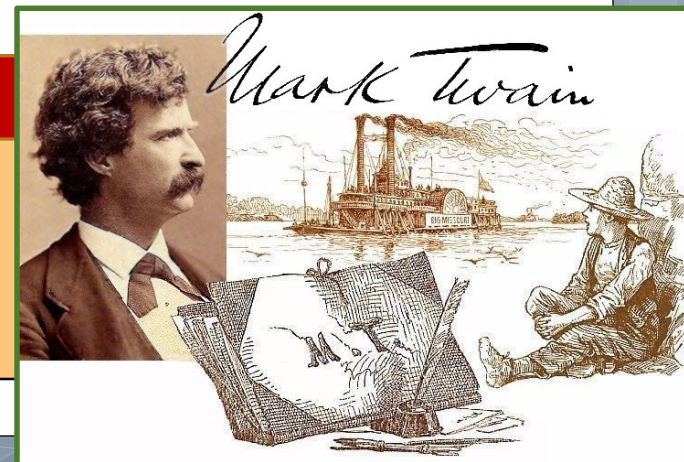
An example of a necessary and correctly done tense shift:

The president **won** the election based on a promise, but now he **is going** back on his word. He **plans** to veto the bill tomorrow.

Multiple shifts are present in this sentence, but the reader can easily follow the chronological order because the writer has included important words like 'now' and 'tomorrow' to let the reader know when actions have taken, or will take, place.

Special note when writing about literature

A writer may need to toggle back and forth in verb tenses when writing about literature; consult with your instructor for clarification.



Examples of Incorrect Tense Shift:

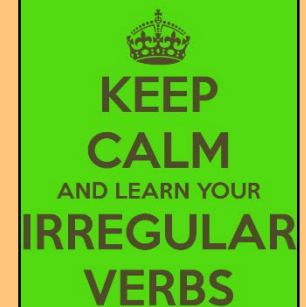
Last year the Texas government **limited** funding for public schools and **increase** funding for roads and highways.

While Professor Hart **allows** late assignments, Professor North **refused** them.

She **planned** to include that source for her paper but **forgets** the in-text citations when she **revised** the final draft.



It can also be easy to leave off or add an 's' or 'ed' to verbs...pay close attention during revision for these sneaky errors 😊



Subject/Verb Disagreement

Subject verb agreement is not always simple to spot.

It gets complicated when you are dealing with

- Subjects joined by or, either/or, or neither/nor
- Subjects paired with modifying phrases
- Indefinite pronouns as subjects
- Collective nouns as subjects



Subjects joined by or, either/or, or neither/nor

- When a compound subject is joined by **or**, **either/or**, or **neither/nor**, the verb must agree with the subject it is closest to:

Is it the yogurt or the eggs
that **are** expired?

Is it the eggs or the yogurt
that **is** expired?

Both of these sentences are
correct, even though they use
two different verbs.



Subjects linked to other nouns

- When a subject is linked to another noun with a phrase like *as well as*, *along with*, or *alongside*, the verb still agrees with the subject:

Ignore the *modifying phrase*.

Besides Duran Duran, Depeche Mode and Erasure are my favorite 80s bands.

Salmon, *alongside* rice and grilled asparagus, is my favorite meal.



Indefinite pronouns as subjects

- Most indefinite pronouns, such as *each*, *some*, *few*, *all*, *someone*, and *everyone*, are singular and agree with the singular forms of verbs:

Each **is** a wonderful choice for a potential honeymoon.

- If *each* is modified by a *phrase* that includes a plural noun, the choice becomes less obvious:

Each of the choices **is** wonderful for a potential honeymoon.



Collective nouns as subjects

- Collective nouns refer to groups and include words like **audience, class, crowd, family, group, jury, team**, etc.

When members of a group work together or are considered a unit, use singular verbs and singular pronouns:

The **jury is** back from deliberations and has reached its verdict.

Watch out for collective nouns that switch from singular in one context to plural in another; a collective noun is considered plural when the action of the group is reflective of individuals acting independently:

The **jury have returned** to their hotel to contemplate the day's proceedings and get a good night's sleep.



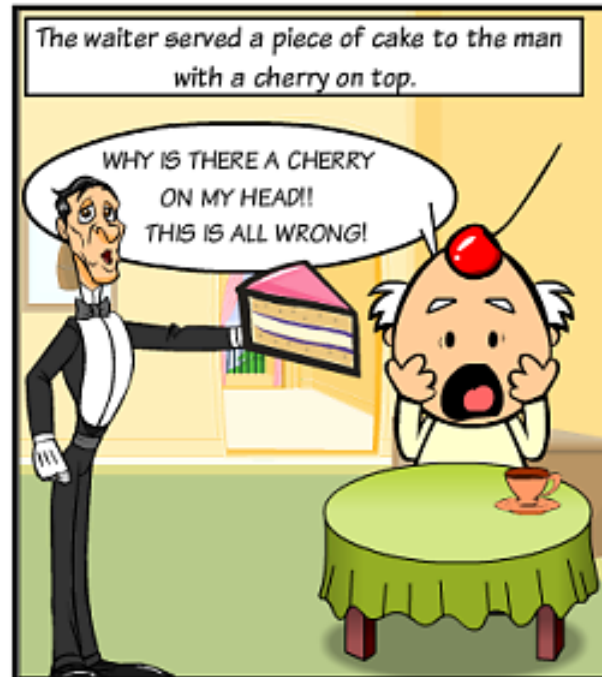
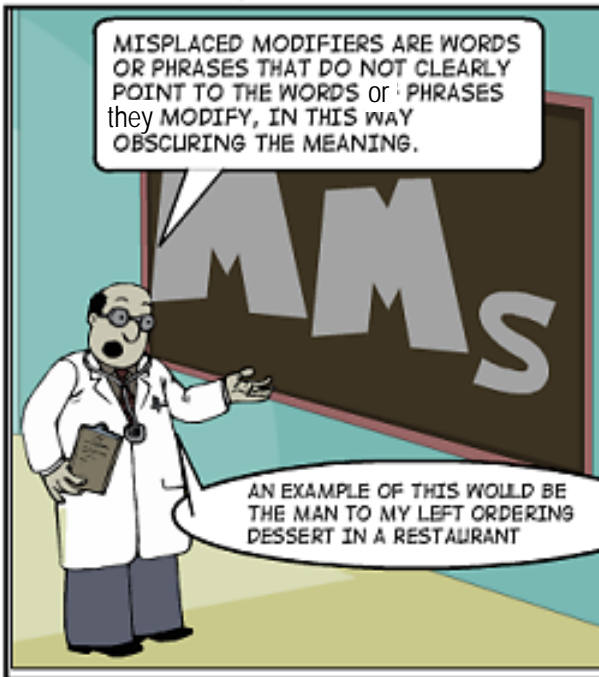
Misplaced Modifier

Modifiers are words or phrases that provide additional information about a noun or noun phrase.

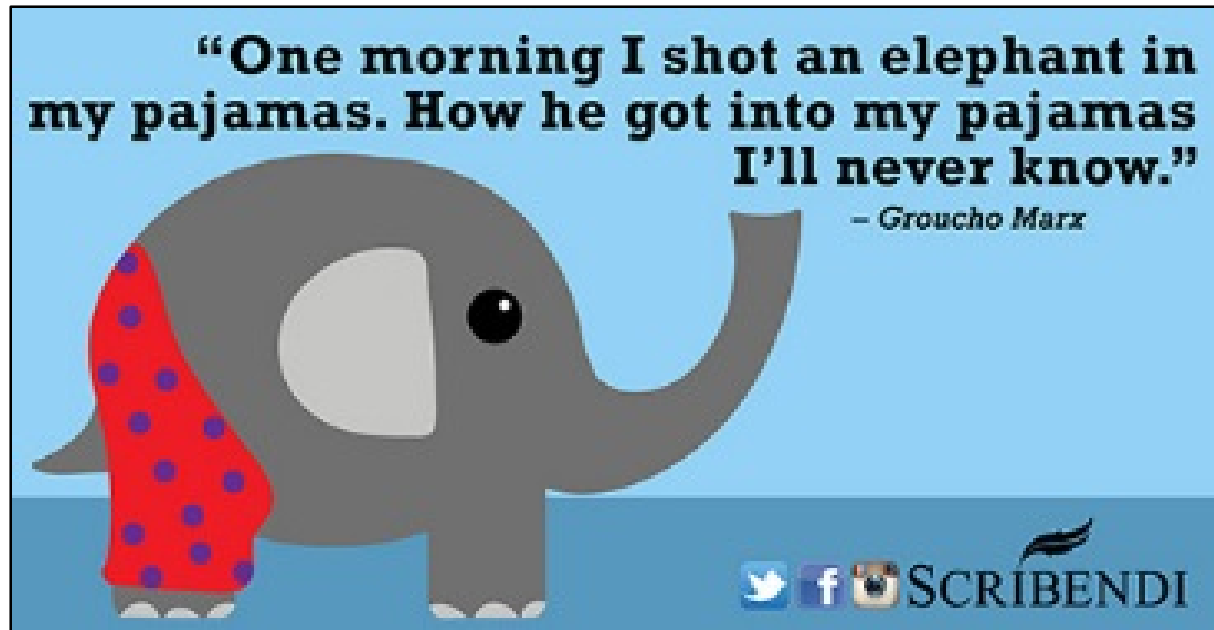
When a modifier is not placed correctly, it can cause confusion for the reader and result in a sentence that has multiple interpretations.

MM - BY JRAIMONDI76

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Dangling or Misplaced Modifier



Rewrite the introductory phrase as an introductory clause to include the noun or pronoun:

Incorrect:

One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas.

Correct:

One morning while still in my pajamas, I shot an elephant.



Misplaced Modifier

Preventing misplaced modifiers:

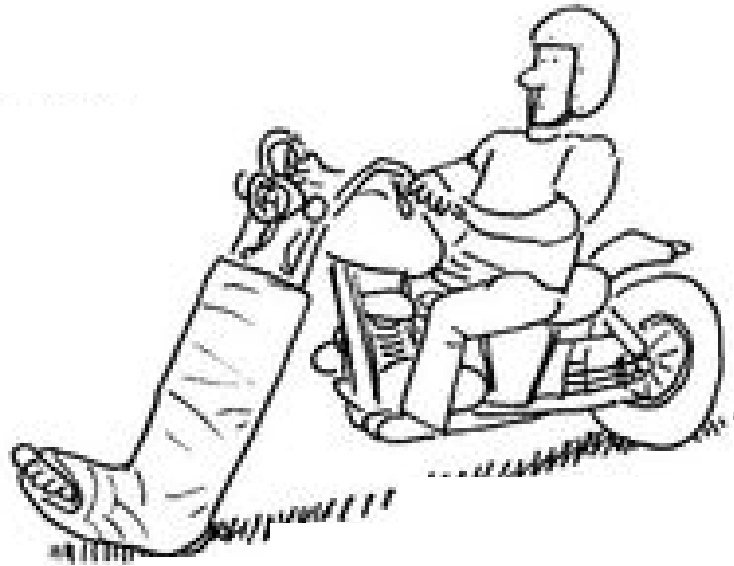
Insert the noun/pronoun being modified immediately after the introductory modifying phrase:

Incorrect:

Today I saw a man riding a motorcycle with a broken leg.

Correct:

Today I saw a man with a broken leg riding a motorcycle.



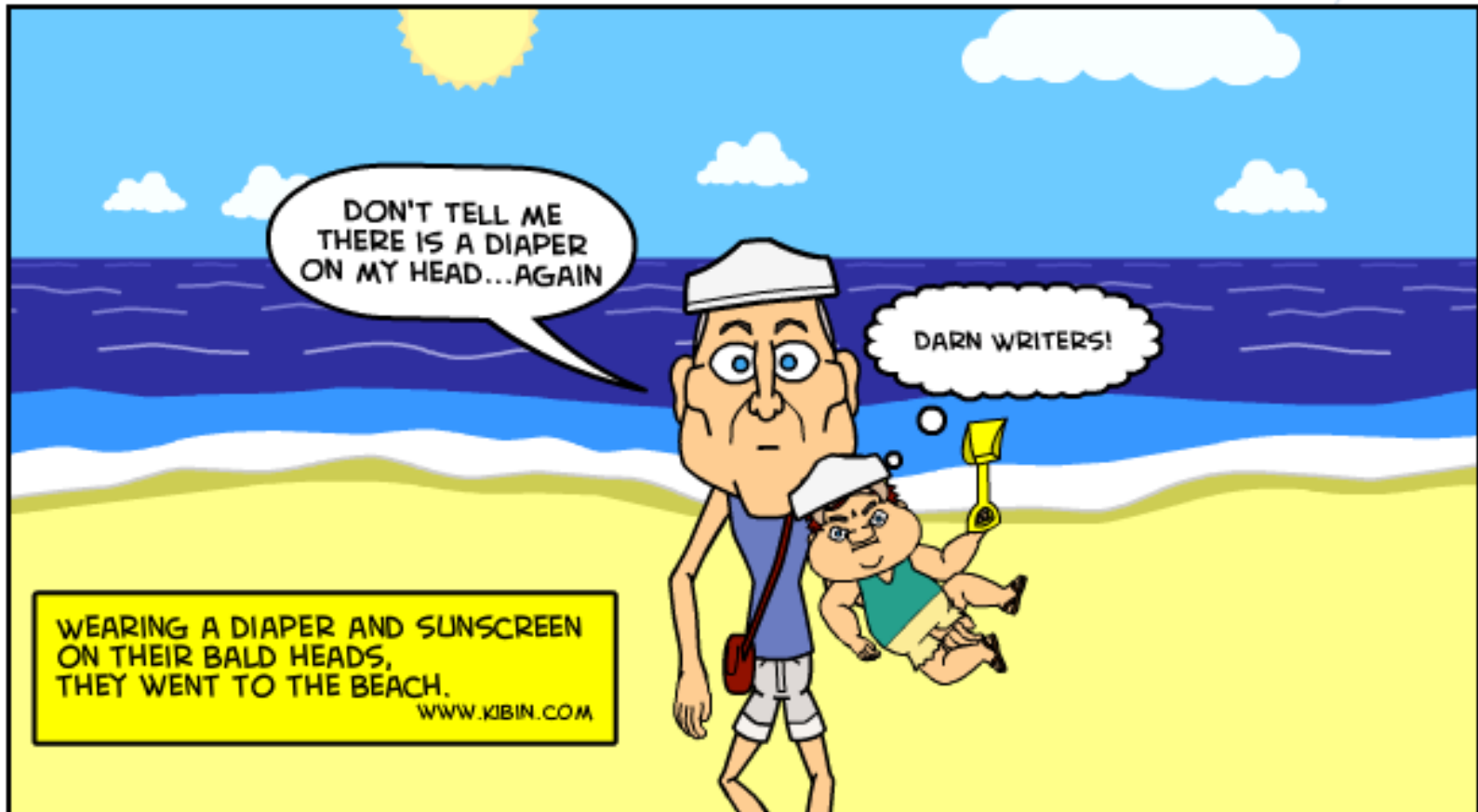
MISPLACED MODIFIER: THE BEAR



Kibin

Look at the next slide and see if you can brainstorm ways to revise the modifier confusion...

DANGLING MODIFIER: THE DIAPER



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Don't be one of those 'darn writers'...watch your modifiers!



“That’s all Folks!”