

## Writing Workshop #11: 'Only' and Other Misplaced Modifiers

“Only” is the most commonly misplaced modifier in English

See: <http://people.physics.illinois.edu/Celia/MsP/Only.pdf>

Here's a science example:

“A transition only occurred at 130 K in underdoped samples”

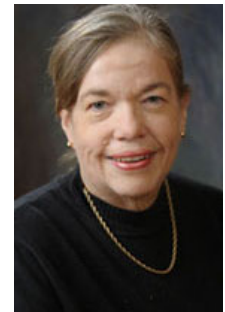
What does this sentence mean?

Did the transition only occur (it didn't persist)?

Did the transition occur only at 130 K?

Did the transition occur only in underdoped samples?

– Celia Elliott



**Hint:** “Only” immediately before a verb is usually in the wrong place!  
Put modifiers right before the nouns they're meant to modify!

Other common misplaced modifiers: almost, hardly, just, merely, nearly

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**Original:** Only the shortest chain molecules melt, whereas the longer ones only show a softening in the studied temperature interval  $0 < T < 900$  K.

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**Original:** Only the shortest chain molecules melt, whereas the longer ones only show a softening in the studied temperature interval  $0 < T < 900$  K.

**One Solution:** The shortest chain molecules melt, whereas the longer molecules show only a softening in the studied temperature interval  $0 < T < 900$  K.

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**Original:** The sub-Ohmic spin-boson model possesses a quantum phase transition at zero temperature between a localized and a delocalized phase, whose properties have so far **only** been extracted by numerical approaches.

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**Original:** The sub-Ohmic spin-boson model possesses a quantum phase transition at zero temperature between a localized and a delocalized phase, whose properties have so far **only** been extracted by numerical approaches.

**One Solution:** The sub-Ohmic spin-boson model possesses a quantum phase transition at zero temperature between a localized and a delocalized phase. **The** properties **of this transition** have so far been extracted **using only** numerical approaches.