

Troublesome Adverbs Can Take You to Court

Make sure descriptive or qualifying words or phrases come as close to the words they describe as possible. Misplaced words and phrases can obscure meaning. The most frequently misplaced words in business or technical documents are the adverbs almost, only, nearly, just, and even. Notice the difference in meaning in the following sentences when these adverbs are moved around:

The operator ONLY altered the table in his report about the company's inefficiency.

The operator altered ONLY the table in his report about the company's inefficiency.

Joseph Holland has the authority JUST to revise the specifications.
(He has authority only to revise.)

Joseph Holland has authority to revise JUST the specifications. (He can revise the specifications only--he cannot revise anything else.)

ALMOST all manufacturers were able to meet our test criteria in all these areas.

All manufacturers were ALMOST able to meet our test criteria in all these areas.

All manufacturers were able to meet our test criteria in ALMOST all these areas.

Small words. Great power. Pinpoint the correct spot to place them.
