

MISPLACED and DANGLING MODIFIERS

Modifiers are words that describe or qualify other words or word groups. Basically, every word in the sentence is a modifier except the subject, verb, and direct object (if there is one).

The **dangling modifier** is a common modifier error. It is a word, phrase, or clause that does not modify anything clearly or logically. It may have been awkwardly separated from the word on which its meaning depends, or that word may be missing altogether.

Example: *Having been soaked by the rain, Dana laid the newspaper out on the floor to dry.*

This sentence leaves the reader wondering whether perhaps Dana should lay himself out on the floor to dry. It is not clearly and logically written. To correct it, some rewording is necessary.

Corrected: *Dana laid the newspaper that had been soaked by the rain out on the floor to dry.*
Or *Dana laid the rain-soaked newspaper out on the floor to dry.*

Now consider this sentence:

Example: *After working on it all day, my room was finally clean.*

This sentence seems to say that the room had been working all day; clearly that cannot be the case. The person who had been working should be represented by the word *I*, which does not appear here.

Corrected: *After working on it all day, I finally had my room clean.*

Thus, a dangling modifier cannot be corrected by simply moving it around in its sentence. You must rewrite; either attach it clearly and logically to the word in the sentence to which it refers, or add the missing noun or pronoun that it should be associated with.

It is important to recognize when a dangling modifier is causing a sentence to be vague or illogical and then correct it because it is a writer's responsibility to be precise.

One way to correct this type of error is to leave the modifier as it is and rewrite the rest of the sentence:

Dangling: *Late for work, a good excuse was needed.*
Corrected: *Late for work, Sam needed a good excuse.*

Another way to correct dangling modifiers is to expand them into dependent clauses.

Dangling: *After taking my shower, the neighbor's dog wandered into my bathroom.*
Corrected: *After I finished taking my shower, the neighbor's dog wandered in.*

It may be that some words have been added that do not need to be in the sentence.

Dangling: *Having completed the exercise successfully, I assume you will do well on the test.*
Corrected: *Having completed the exercise successfully, you should do well on the test.*

Practice Exercises

Directions: Rewrite the following sentences by correctly placing the MISPLACED MODIFIERS.

1. Professor Atkins is an expert on volcanoes from the University of Colorado.

2. Rosa received flowers from Fred that will never wilt.

3. Lola selected a donut from the bakery filled with banana cream.

4. Have you noticed that on TV, everything seems to exactly cost \$19.95?

5. Janice presented her new book to the faculty, which was full of academic anecdotes.

Directions: Rewrite the following sentences to correct the DANGLING MODIFIERS.

6. To impress his instructor, Derek's essay was written on a computer.

7. At five years of age, my parents gave me a tricycle.

8. Running up the three flights of stairs, my heart felt as though it might burst.

9. When on vacation, the bills piled up.

10. Swimming in the ocean, my eyes were irritated by the salt water.

Directions: Rewrite the following sentences to correct the MISPLACED or DANGLING MODIFIERS.

11. Emily told Jim that she loved him last Monday.

12. Being polluted, my father did not swim in the lake.

13. There was a noisy disturbance when the politician made her speech at the back of the hall.

14. I baked a cake for our faculty which was full of fruits and nuts.
