

DANGLING MODIFIERS

Modifiers make sentences more descriptive and interesting. Modifiers may be single words, phrases or clauses, but it is important to place them as close to the word being modified as possible and to ensure that the word being modified is actually included in the sentence. When the word being modified is not clearly stated or the modifier is awkwardly separated from the word it modifies, illogical or ridiculous ideas may unintentionally be expressed. This type of faulty construction in sentences is called a **dangling modifier**.

Here are examples of dangling modifiers and ways to correct them. (**REMEMBER: Modifiers describe or reveal information about other words. To avoid confusion, they should be placed as close to the word or phrase they modify as possible.**)

a. Participial Phrases:

Incorrect: *Written by Shakespeare, Snodgrass enjoyed reading Hamlet. (Snodgrass was not written by Shakespeare.)*

Correct: *Written by Shakespeare, Hamlet was enjoyed by Snodgrass. (Moving the title, Hamlet closer, clarifies the sentence meaning.)*

Incorrect: *Having graduated from college, finding a job was necessary. (Who graduated from college?)*

Correct: *Having graduated from college, I needed to find a job. (Naming the subject makes the sentence clearer.)*

b. Infinitive Phrases:

Incorrect: *To be a doctor, anatomy is studied. (Who studied anatomy?)*

Correct: *To be a doctor, I studied anatomy.*

c. Prepositional Phrases:

Incorrect: *After changing into my graduation cap and gown, my mother and I joined the family for the photo shoot. (Did mother put on the graduation cap and gown?)*

Correct: *After **I** changed into my graduation cap and gown, my mother and I joined the family for the photo shoot.*

Incorrect: *After taking a shower, a large dog walked into my room. (Did the dog take a shower?)*

Correct: *A large dog walked into my bedroom after **I** took a shower.*

These can also be considered **gerund phrases** because the –ing verb is the object of the preposition and therefore must be a noun (gerund).

d. Elliptical Clauses:

Incorrect: *When in Rome, New York seems far away. (Is New York in Rome?)*

Correct: *Now that **I** am in Rome, New York seems far away.*

CORRECTING DANGLING MODIFIERS

1. One way to correct a dangling modifier is to leave the modifier as it is and to **rewrite the rest of the sentence**.

Dangling: *Frightened by the bull, my knees were weak. (Who was frightened?)*

Correct: *Frightened by the bull, I felt weak in the knees.*

2. Another way to correct dangling modifiers is to **expand the dangling phrases or elliptical clauses into dependent clauses**.

Dangling: *Eating my dinner, the siren sounded. (Was the siren eating?)*

Correct: *While I was eating my dinner, the siren sounded.*

Dangling: *When only seven years old, my mother took me to a dancing class. (Was mother seven?)*

Correct: *When I was only seven years old, my mother took me to a dancing class.*

3. Misplaced modifiers are similar to dangling modifiers. Unlike dangling modifiers, **misplaced modifiers can be corrected merely by moving the modifier to its proper place in the sentence**.

Misplaced: *John and Mary talked while I studied in whispers. (Who was whispering?)*

Correct: *John and Mary talked in whispers while I studied.*

Misplaced: *We rented a cabin near the lake that had two bedrooms. (Did the lake have two bedrooms?)*

Correct: *We rented a cabin that was near the lake and that had two bedrooms.*