



Dangling Modifiers

What is a Dangling Modifier?

A dangling modifier is a word or phrase within a sentence that does not clearly refer to a specific subject.

How can a Dangling Modifier be recognized?

- Dangling modifiers are most often found as the opening phrase of a sentence. However, they can be found at the end of sentences as well.
- Dangling modifiers frequently contain verbs ending in “-ing” or begin with the word “to.”

Examples:

Dangling Modifier: To be excused from class, a doctor's note is required.

- ✓ This sentence does not clearly state who needs a doctor's note in order to be excused.
- ✓ The dangling modifier begins with the word “to.”

Correction: To be excused from class, students are required to present a doctor's note.

- ✓ This sentence now clearly states that students need a doctor's note in order to be excused from class.

Dangling Modifier: After using the MLA format for several papers, this citation method became familiar and uncomplicated.

- ✓ This sentence does not clearly state who is using MLA format for their papers.
- ✓ The dangling modifier includes a verb ending in “-ing” (using).

Correction: After using the MLA format for several papers, Matt found that this citation method became familiar and uncomplicated.

- ✓ This sentence now clearly states that Matt is writing the papers and becoming familiar with MLA format.

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How can a Dangling Modifier be fixed?

Option A: *Identify the subject performing the action within the independent clause.*

Example:

Dangling Modifier: Having studied for ten straight days, the test was very easy to pass.

- ✓ This sentence gives the impression that it was the test that studied for ten straight days and not a student.
- ✓ The dangling modifier includes a verb ending in “—ing” (having).

Correction: Having studied for ten straight days, Justin found the test very easy to pass.

- ✓ The sentence now clearly states that Justin found the test easy to pass after studying.
- ✓ The person performing the action is found within the independent clause, following the opening phrase.

Option B: *Identify the subject performing the action within the dangling modifier.*

Example:

Dangling Modifier: After trying out many different recipes, the cookies were deemed perfect by the children as they ate them all.

- ✓ This sentence does not make it clear who tried out the various cookie recipes.
- ✓ The dangling modifier includes a verb ending in “—ing” (trying).

Correction: After Theresa tried out many different recipes, the cookies were deemed perfect by the children as they ate them all.

- ✓ The sentence now clearly states that Theresa tried out many different recipes.
- ✓ The person performing the action is found within the modifying phrase.

The following resource was consulted in the design of this handout:

Harris, Muriel. *Prentice Hall Reference Guide to Grammar and Usage*. 6th ed. Upper Saddle, River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2006.

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