

Dangling Modifiers

Definition:

A dangling modifier is a word or phrase that modifies a word not clearly stated in the sentence. A modifier describes, clarifies, or gives more detail about a concept.

Consider this sentence:

Having finished the assignment, Jill turned on the TV.

"Having finished" states an action but does not name the doer of that action. In English sentences, the doer must be the subject of the main clause that follows. In this sentence, it is Jill. She seems logically to be the one doing the action ("having finished"), and this sentence therefore does not have a dangling modifier.

Now consider this sentence:

Having finished the assignment, the TV was turned on.

Having finished is a [participle](#) expressing action, but the doer is not the TV set (the subject of the main clause): TV sets don't finish assignments. Since the doer of the action expressed in the participle has not been clearly stated, the participial phrase is said to be a dangling modifier.

Examples of dangling modifiers and revisions:

dangling modifier:

After reading the original study, the article remains unconvincing.

(The article--the subject of the main clause--did not read the original study.)

possible revisions:

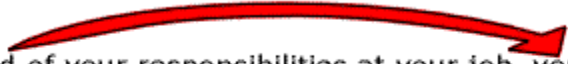
After reading the original study, I find the article unconvincing.

-or-

The article remains unconvincing in light of the original study. (*no modifying phrase*)

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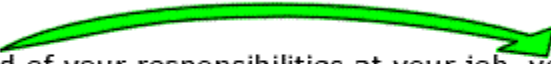
dangling modifier:



Relieved of your responsibilities at your job, your home should be a place to relax.

(Your home--the subject of the main clause--is not relieved of your responsibilities.)

possible revision:

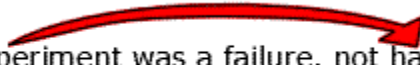


Relieved of your responsibilities at your job, you should be able to relax at home.

Characteristics of dangling modifiers:

They most frequently occur at the beginning of sentences (often as [introductory clauses or phrases](#)) but can also appear at the end.

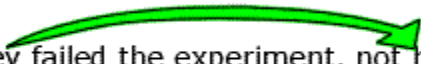
dangling modifier at end of sentence:



The experiment was a failure, not having studied the lab manual carefully.

(The experiment--the subject of the main clause--is not supposed to study the lab manual.)

possible revision:



They failed the experiment, not having studied the lab manual carefully.

They often have an [-ing word \(gerund\)](#) or a [to+verb \(infinitive\)](#) phrase near the start of the sentence.

Squinting modifiers:

Related to dangling modifiers, squinting modifiers occur when the word modified is not clear or could be more than one word. These problems can usually be solved by rearranging the elements already present in the sentence.

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squinting modifier:

The mystery has been solved after **ten years** of **the missing portrait**.

possible revisions:

After ten years, the mystery of the missing portrait **has been solved**.

The mystery of the missing portrait **has been solved after ten years**.

Strategies for revising dangling modifiers:


1. Name the appropriate or logical doer of the action as the subject of the main clause:

<p>dangling modifier:</p>	<p>Having arrived late for practice, a written excuse was needed.</p> <p><i>Who arrived late? This sentence says that the written excuse arrived late. To revise, decide who actually arrived late.</i></p>
<p>possible revision:</p>	<p>Having arrived late for practice, the captain of the team needed a written excuse.</p> <p><i>The main clause now names the person (the captain) who did the action in the modifying phrase (arrived late).</i></p>

2. Change the phrase that dangles into a complete introductory clause by naming the doer of the action *in that clause*:

<p>dangling modifier:</p>	<p>Without knowing his name, it was difficult to introduce him.</p> <p><i>Who didn't know his name? This sentence says that "it" didn't know his name. To revise, decide who was trying to introduce him.</i></p>
<p>possible revision:</p>	<p>Because Maria did not know his name, it was difficult to introduce him.</p> <p><i>The phrase is now a complete introductory clause; it does not modify any other part of the sentence, so is not considered "dangling."</i></p>

3. Combine the phrase and main clause into one:

<p>dangling modifier:</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">  </p> <p style="text-align: center;">To improve his results, the experiment was done again.</p> <p><i>Who wanted to improve results? This sentence says that the experiment was trying to improve its own results. To revise, combine the phrase and the main clause into one sentence.</i></p>
<p>possible revision:</p>	<p>He improved his results by doing the experiment again.</p>