

Dangling & Misplaced Modifiers



Modifiers, whether words or word groups, are supposed to make writing clearer. For example, to clarify the word *dog*, a writer might use the modifier *brown*. Word groups can also act as modifiers: Brown is the color that I like best. *That I like best* is modifying the color by providing additional information.

Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier is a phrase or a clause that is not clearly attached to any word in the sentence.

Dangling: Playing soccer, a dog walked by.

It is fairly obvious that a dog was not walking by playing soccer. Playing soccer should refer to a subject that is doing the action, but it does not; the subject is not in the sentence at all. To clarify the sentence, make sure the modifying phrase attaches to a specific subject.

Correct: While Dan and Grandpa played soccer, a dog walked by.

Playing soccer, Dan and Grandpa watched a dog walk by.

Here is another example.

Dangling: While speeding down the road, the tire went flat.

This example would suggest that the tires of the car were speeding down the road. The modifier *while speeding down the road* is missing its real subject.

Correct: While I was speeding down the road, the tire went flat.

Misplaced Modifiers

As a result of being placed in the wrong part of a sentence, some modifiers attach themselves to the wrong subject.

Misplaced: Having flown out of the nest, the girl couldn't find the bird.

The girl didn't fly out of the nest—the bird did. Because *the girl* immediately follows the modifying phrase *having left the nest in the tree*, the modifying phrase naturally attached itself to *the girl*. In order to clarify what exactly is leaving the nest, rewrite the sentence and place the modifier next to what it is modifying.

Correct: The girl couldn't find the bird because it had flown out of the nest.

Here is another example.

Misplaced: The car was advertised in yesterday's paper that is only two years old and is in excellent condition.

In this example it is the car that is only two years old, not the paper, but the modifier is misplaced.

Correct: The car, which is only two years old and is in excellent condition, was advertised in yesterday's paper.