



Modifiers

Dangling modifiers are words that modify nothing in particular in the rest of the sentence. They often seem to modify something that is suggested or implied but not actually present in the sentence. Attached to no specific element, such modifiers dangle from the sentence—not grounded with any subject or object. They frequently appear at the beginnings or endings of sentences.

Don't Dangle Your Modifiers

- **What's wrong with this sentence?**

Driving fifty miles over the speed limit, a squirrel was bit by a car.

It sounds like the squirrel was driving the car that hit it. But, of course, that's not possible. The modifying phrase (driving fifty miles over the speed limit) needs to have the same subject as the rest of the sentence.

Driving fifty miles over the speed limit, I hit a squirrel with my car.

You could also fix this sentence by turning the modifier into a full clause.

Because I was driving fifty miles over the speed limit, I hit a squirrel with my car.

- **What's wrong with this sentence?**

Since cutting down on fats, my cholesterol level has dropped.

My cholesterol level has not cut down on fats; I have. *Since cutting down on fats* is a reduced clause, not quite a complete independent sentence. When we combine it with another sentence, both need to have the same subject.

Since I cut down on fats, I have decreased my cholesterol level.

- **What's wrong with this sentence?**

To master dangling modifiers, hard work is required.

When you use infinitives as modifiers, they need to take the same subject as the rest of the sentence. *Hard work* is not the thing mastering dangling modifiers; you, the implied subject, are.

To master dangling modifiers, you will have to work hard.

Practice

Fix these sentences:

1. Running down the street, my muscles began to ache.
 2. In order to get a good job, the boss must like you.
 3. The teacher failed me on the exam, having not studied.
 4. Sleeping soundly, the burglar did not awake the inhabitants of the house.
 5. To write a successful paper, the Connors Writing Center can help.
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Answers

1. Running down the street, I felt my muscles begin to ache.
 2. In order to get a good job, you must make the boss like you.
 3. I failed an exam, having not studied.
 4. As they slept soundly, the burglar did not awake the inhabitants of the house.
 5. To write a successful paper, you should go to the Connors Writing Center.
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Resources

For more information on dangling modifiers and other grammar issues, you can consult these resources:

- *The Bedford St. Martin's Handbook*
- Purdue University's Online Writing Lab (OWL): search Google for "Purdue OWL" or visit <https://owl.purdue.edu/>

