

## Putting Modifiers in Their Proper Place Act Two: Dangling Modifiers

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What's the difference between the items placed in a trinket box and the stuff thrown in a junk drawer? The things in your trinket box hold emotional value. They're connected to an event in your life, and therefore, evoke memories. The items in the junk drawer are thrown in there with no thought to value. They're just there—clutter without purpose. Or, if there is a purpose, we don't actually know what it is. The same holds true for dangling modifiers in a sentence. They're just there—clutter with no apparent purpose. The dangling modifier was meant to serve a purpose, but the purpose is not clear, which is why it's dangling...and causing confusion. So, let's clear the confusion, get rid of the clutter, and make that modifier mean something valuable by using it correctly.

### Dangling Modifiers

A modifier further identifies a subject by describing, clarifying, or qualifying that subject. The subject is the doer of the action. Not being able to identify the doer creates a *dangling* modifier. A **dangling modifier** is a word or phrase that does not clearly modify a subject. This happens because the modifier is connected to the wrong thing. It could be that the intended subject is not there and in its place there's another subject that's not meant for that modifier, or the dangling modifier could be misplaced within the sentence. Although most dangling modifiers are typically part of the introductory phrase at the start of the sentence, they can sometimes be at the end of the sentence.

Examples:

1) By opening the winders, it allowed the stale air to circulate.

- Who's the doer? Who opened the windows? Since "it" is the subject, it sounds as if "it" opened the windows. But "it" is not the doer of the action. Someone opened the windows.

#### **Correction:**

By opening the windows, Sally allowed the stale air to circulate.

#### **Or...revise the sentence:**

Sally opened the windows to allow the stale air to circulate.

2) Running to the car, the keys jiggled in her hands.

- Who's the doer? Who's doing the running? Since "keys" is the subject, it sounds as if "keys" is running.

#### **Correction:**

As Karen ran to the car, the keys jiggled in her hands.

#### **Or...Revise the sentence:**

The keys jiggled in Karen's hands as she ran to the car.

3) Before finishing her coffee, it grew cold.

- Who didn't finish the coffee? It sounds as if "it" didn't finish the coffee.

**Correction:**

Before Debbie finished her coffee, it grew cold.

**Or...Revise the sentence:**

The coffee grew cold before Debbie finished it.

4) At ten years old, we moved into our new house.

- It's written as "we" is the doer. That means everyone (we) was ten years old. But the truth is, I was ten years old, my sister was four years old, and my parents were much older.

**Correction:**

When I was ten years old, we moved into our new house.

**Or...**

When I was ten years old, my family and I moved into our new house.

**Or...**

We moved into our new house when I was ten years old.

5) While walking down the street, the weather turned stormy.

- It's written as if the "weather" was walking down the street and then turned stormy.

**Correction:**

While we were walking down the street, the weather turned stormy.

**Or...**

The weather turned stormy while we were walking down the street.

6) To be excused from PE, a signed waiver is required.

- Who's being excused from PE? Who's the doer?

**Correction:**

To be excused from PE, Students need to have the required waiver signed by their parents.

**Or...**

For a student to be excused from PE, a signed waiver is required from their parents.

When the modifier clearly identifies the subject doing the action, there is no confusion as to what's happening in the sentence. The modifier become valuable to the meaning of the sentence. But a dangling modifier does not contribute any value to the sentence, only confusion. To avoid the clutter of dangling modifiers, go back to the sentence and identifier who the doer is. If it's not clear who the doer is, revise and make it clear. You want all your sentences to be in your trinket box and not tossed aside in the junk drawer.