

Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier is a phrase or clause that is not clearly and logically related to the word or words it modifies. In most cases, the modifier appears at the beginning of the sentence, although it can also come at the end. Sometimes the error occurs because the sentence fails to specify anything to which the modifier can logically refer. At other times, the modifier is positioned next to the wrong noun or noun substitute.

Examples of Dangling Modifiers

- ❖ “Looking toward the horizon, a funnel-shaped cloud was stirring up the dust.”

This sentence is faulty because it does not specify anything to which “looking toward the horizon” can logically refer. The phrase is trying to modify the subject “cloud,” but a cloud cannot look toward the horizon- a person can, but not a cloud. Thus, the sentence will have to be rewritten to state who is looking toward the horizon.

- ❖ “As I looked toward the horizon, a funnel-shaped cloud was stirring up the dust.”

Now the sentence is correct because we know who is looking to the horizon – “I” am.

- ❖ **Faulty Sentence:** “Walking toward the movies, a cloudburst drenched me.” – A cloudburst cannot walk.

Corrected Version: “As I was walking toward the movies, a cloudburst drenched me.”

(More on Back)

- ❖ **Faulty Sentence:** “Tossing a wrapper on the sidewalk, a policeman ticketed me for littering.” – Did the policeman litter and then ticket me?

Corrected Version: “After I tossed a wrapper on the sidewalk, a policeman ticketed me for littering.”

Further Examples

Please note that sometimes the dangling modifier is tagged on at the end of a sentence:

- ❖ “He struck the fish bowl with his head, which fortunately was empty.”

Was the gentleman’s head empty? This sentence is faulty.

- ❖ He struck the fortunately-empty fish bowl with his head.

Now we know the fish bowl was empty. This is a correct sentence.

Here are some further examples:

- ❖ **Faulty Sentence:** Sharon found a cake mix that didn’t require eggs at the supermarket.

Corrected Sentence: At the supermarket, Sharon found a cake mix that didn’t require eggs.

- ❖ **Faulty Sentence:** The ambassador’s wife wore gold clips in her ears from Vienna.

Corrected Sentence: The ambassador’s wife wore gold clips from Vienna in her ears.