

# The Dangling Modifier

Recognize a *dangling modifier* when you see one.

Modifiers are words, phrases, or clauses that add description. In clear, logical sentences, you will often find modifiers right next to—either in front of or behind—the target words they logically describe. Read this example:

***Horried, Mom*** snatched the ***deviled eggs*** from ***Jack, whose fingers were covered in cat hair.***

Notice that ***horried*** precedes ***Mom***, its target, just as ***deviled*** sits right before ***eggs***. ***Whose fingers were covered in cat hair*** follows ***Jack***, its target.

Sometimes, however, an inexperienced writer will include a modifier but forget the target. The modifier thus dangles because the missing target leaves nothing for the modifier to describe.

Dangling modifiers are errors. Their poor construction confuses readers. Look at the samples below:

Hungry, the leftover pizza was eaten with gusto.

***Hungry*** is a single-word adjective. Notice that there is no one in the sentence for this modifier to describe.

Rummaging in her giant handbag, the sunglasses escaped detection.

***Rummaging in her giant handbag*** is a participle phrase. In the current sentence, no word exists for this phrase to modify. Neither ***sunglasses*** nor ***detection*** has fingers to make rummaging possible!

With a sigh of disappointment, the expensive dress was returned to the rack.

***With a sigh of disappointment*** is a string of prepositional phrases. If you look carefully, you do not find anyone in the sentence capable of feeling disappointed. Neither ***dress*** nor ***rack*** has emotions!

To fix a dangling modifier, revise the sentence so that the modifier has a target word to describe:

Hungry, ***we*** ate the leftover pizza with gusto.

Rummaging in her giant handbag, ***Frieda*** failed to find her sunglasses.

With a sigh of disappointment, ***Charlene*** returned the expensive dress to the rack.

