

6 DANGLING AND MISPLACED MODIFIERS

Modifiers may be phrases and clauses as well as single words. As you write, position your modifiers as close as possible to the word or words they describe so that your reader will clearly understand your meaning.

DANGLING MODIFIERS

A dangling modifier does not logically modify anything in the sentence. Its meaning is implied, but not stated clearly.

Dangling: Having already prepared a fabulous meal, the mountain of dirty dishes was left in the sink until morning.

Obviously, the dirty dishes did not prepare the meal; a person did. The sentence should be revised so that the intended subject is expressed.

Clear: Having already prepared a fabulous meal, Mason decided to leave the mountain of dirty dishes in the sink until morning.

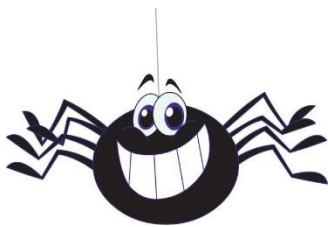
OR

Since he had already prepared a fabulous meal, Mason decided to leave the mountain of dirty dishes in the sink until morning.

MISPLACED MODIFIERS

A misplaced modifier does not modify what the writer wants it to modify.

Misplaced: Clinging to the wall, I was terrified of the spider.



Am I clinging to the wall, or is the spider?

Clear: Clinging to the wall, the spider terrified me.

OR

The spider clinging to the wall terrified me.

Other misplaced modifiers can cause ambiguity. Note how the meaning changes with the shifting of one word:

Ex: Only he saw his girlfriend on Friday.

Ex: He saw only his girlfriend on Friday.

Ex: He saw his only girlfriend on Friday.

Ex: He saw his girlfriend on Friday only.