

DANGLING MODIFIERS

Dangling modifiers are words that modify nothing in particular in the rest of a sentence. They often seem to modify something that is implied but not actually present in the sentence. Dangling modifiers frequently appear at the beginnings or ends of sentences. In order for your writing to be clear and direct, it is important to edit for dangling modifiers and revise sentences according to the following guidelines.

Examples of Dangling Modifiers

Original sentence: Reluctantly, the hound was given away to a neighbor.

Revised: Reluctantly, our family gave away the hound to a neighbor.

Why revise it? In the original sentence, was the dog reluctant, or was someone else reluctant who is not mentioned?

Original sentence: As a young boy, his grandmother told stories of her years as a country schoolteacher.

Revised: When he was a young boy, his grandmother told stories of her years as a country schoolteacher.

Why revise it? His grandmother was never a young boy.

Original sentence: Thumbing through the magazine, my eyes automatically noticed the perfume ads.

Revised: My eyes automatically noticed the perfume ads as I was thumbing through the magazine.

Why revise it? Eyes cannot thumb through a magazine.

Editing techniques

- Identify all the modifiers in each sentence, and draw an arrow from each modifier to the word it modifies.
- If a modifier is far from the word it modifies, try to move the two closer together.
- Does any modifier seem to refer to a word other than the one it is intended to modify? If so, move the modifier so that it clearly refers to only the intended word.
- If you cannot find the word to which a modifier refers, revise the sentence: supply such a word, or revise the modifier itself so that it clearly refers to a word already in the sentence.

Adapted from: Lunsford, Andrea A. *The Everyday Writer*, 2nd ed. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's) 2002.