

DANGLING MODIFIERS

A dangling modifier is a phrase or clause that either modifies no word in the sentence or refers to the wrong word. Dangling modifiers cause the sentence to lack *coherence*. Recognize the following types of dangling modifiers and their corrections.

DANGLING PARTICIPLE PHRASE:

Smoking my cigar, a fire engine came roaring around the corner.

Revision 1:

As I was *smoking my cigar*, a fire engine came roaring around the corner.

Revision 2:

Smoking my cigar, I saw a fire engine roaring around the corner.

DANGLING GERUND PHRASE:

After drilling my tooth, my cavity stopped aching.

Revision 1:

After the dentist drilled my tooth, my cavity stopped aching.

Revision 2:

After drilling my tooth, my dentist stopped my cavity from aching.

DANGLING INFINITIVE PHRASE:

To become a physician, aptitude and hard work are needed.

Revision:

To become a physician, one needs to have aptitude and to work hard.

DANGLING ELLIPTICAL CLAUSE:

When *fishing*, my hook is always baited.

Revision 1:

When *fishing*, I always bait my hook.

Revision 2:

When I am fishing, my hook is always baited.

NOTE: Some verbal phrases do not modify any single portion of the main clause but rather the whole of the clause. These are called *absolute constructions* and are not dangling modifiers. For example:

Service on the subway having been halted, we had to walk.

The air being hot and humid, we went swimming.

SEE REVERSE SIDE FOR EXERCISES

EXERCISES

Below are sentences with dangling modifiers. Correct them according to the methods just shown.

1. To become a good photographer, the camera must be used carefully.
2. Driving up the rock-strewn mountain, the tire went flat.
3. While taking a shower, Jerry pounded on my door.
4. Riding in a swiftly moving vehicle, the landscape becomes blurred.
5. To play the guitar well, practice is necessary.
6. In checking the records, the error became clear.
7. If potted, the chicken tasted better.
8. Crashing on the shore, I could hear the waves.
9. To become a movie star, talent and luck must come into play.
10. While treading water, the fish swam in lazy circles.
11. Coming home late, the house was dark.
12. To find out the facts, an encyclopedia must be consulted.
13. Listening to the concert, the Ramones seemed very funky.
14. While hurrying to class, my briefcase dropped into a manhole.
15. After releasing the report, new data were supplied to the committee.