

# Modifiers



Dangling modifiers are words that modify nothing in particular in the rest of the sentence. They often seem to modify something that is suggested or implied but not actually present in the sentence. Attached to no specific element, such modifiers dangle, or hang loosely from the sentence. They frequently appear at the beginnings or endings of sentences.

## Don't Dangle Your Modifiers

- **What's wrong with this sentence?**

Driving fifty miles over the speed limit, a dog was hit by a car.

It sounds like the dog was driving the car that hit it. That's not possible. The modifier (driving fifty miles over the speed limit) needs to have the same subject as the rest of the sentence.

Driving fifty miles over the speed limit, I hit a dog with my car.

You could also fix this sentence by turning the modifier into a full clause.

Because I was driving fifty miles over the speed limit, I hit a dog with my car.

- **What's wrong with this sentence?**

Since cutting down on fats, my cholesterol level has dropped.

My cholesterol level has not cut down on fats. I have. *Since cutting down on fats* is a reduced clause, not quite a complete independent sentence. When we combine it with another sentence, both need to have the same subject.

Since cutting down on fats, I have decreased my cholesterol level.

- **What's wrong with this sentence?**

To master dangling modifiers, hard work is required.

**When you use infinitives as modifiers, they need to take the same subject as the rest of the sentence. Is *hard work* the thing mastering dangling modifiers? No, you are!**

To master dangling modifiers, I will have to work hard.

## Practice

- **Fix these sentences:**

- 1) Running down the street, my muscles began to ache.
- 2) In order to get a good job, the boss must like you.
- 3) The teacher failed me on the exam, having not studied.
- 4) Sleeping soundly, the burglar did not awake the inhabitants of the house.
- 5) To write a successful paper, the Connors Writing Center can help.

- **Finish these sentences**

- 1) Hiking to the top of the mountain, \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2) To get into college, \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3) \_\_\_\_\_, having completed this worksheet.
- 4) \_\_\_\_\_, the bear attacked a group of campers.
- 5) Talking loudly, \_\_\_\_\_.

## Answers

When you finish this worksheet, you can make an appointment to come back and meet with a writing assistant to review it. You can also come in to work with a writing assistant on any papers you are writing. In the meantime, you can check some of your answers here.

- **Fix these sentences:**

- 1) Running down the street, I felt my muscles begin to ache.
- 3) I failed my exam, having not studied.
- 5) To write a successful paper, I should go to the Connors Writing Center.

- **Finish these sentences**

- 1) Hiking to the top of the mountain, I discovered a beautiful vista.
- 3) I know everything I need to know about modifiers, having completed this worksheet.
- 5) Talking loudly, the girls gave away all of their secrets.

## Resources

For more information on dangling modifiers and other grammar issues, you can consult these resources:

- *The Bedford St. Martin's Handbook*
- The Online Writing Lab at Purdue, <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>