

Dangling Modifiers

Unlike a misplaced modifier, which needs to be moved closer to the word it modifies, a dangling modifier has no word to modify.

✗ With a wave of his wand, the rabbit was pulled from the magician's hat.

The phrase "with a wave of his wand" has no word in the sentence to modify. The only two possibilities are *rabbit* and *magician's hat*, neither of which is likely to wave a wand. To fix the misplaced modifier, you have to put *magician* in the sentence. The easiest way to fix a dangling modifier is to give it a word to modify. Place the word immediately after the dangling modifier.

✓ With a wave of his wand, *the magician* pulled a rabbit from his hat.

The sentence may also be reconstructed.

✓ As the magician waved his wand, he pulled a rabbit from his hat.

✗ Waking from a nightmare, Makeisha's alarm buzzed loudly.

Obviously, it is Makeisha who has had a nightmare, not her alarm. The easiest way to fix the sentence is to put the word *Makeisha* (not the possessive form *Makeisha's*) immediately after the modifier.

✓ Waking from a nightmare, *Makeisha* heard her alarm buzz loudly.

But it is also permissible to reconstruct the sentence entirely.

✓ The alarm buzzed loudly as Makeisha awoke from a nightmare.

✓ Makeisha's alarm buzzed loudly as she awoke from a nightmare.

✗ By carefully constructing a résumé, the potential employer is impressed.

It is not the employer who constructs the résumé but the applicant. The sentence can be fixed by indicating, immediately after the modifier, who constructed the résumé.

✓ By carefully constructing a résumé, an applicant can impress a potential employer.

The sentence can also be reworked entirely.

✓ A carefully constructed résumé can impress a potential employer.

✗ Listless and feverish, the pediatrician suspected the flu.

Sometimes, the only solution is to reconstruct the sentence. If you try putting “the child” after *listless* and *feverish*, you will probably change the meaning of the sentence.

✓ The pediatrician suspected that the listless and feverish child had the flu.

✓ Because the child was *listless* and *feverish*, the pediatrician suspected the flu.

Practice: Correcting Dangling Modifiers

Correct the dangling modifiers in the following sentences.

1. Walking across the tile floor, the coffee cup slipped from my hand.
2. Unhappy with his current job, Malcolm’s résumé was updated and employment ads scanned.
3. Embarrassed at being the center of attention, a bright red blush crept up Anton’s neck and onto his cheeks.
4. By spending hours in the library, careful research for a term paper can be done.
5. Whistling cheerfully, the luggage was loaded into Quinton’s trunk.