

## MISPLACED AND DANGLING MODIFIERS

Misplaced and dangling modifiers keep sentences from expressing clear, straightforward ideas. When you discover a misplaced or dangling modifier in a sentence, you will need to rearrange and/or revise the sentence parts to untangle the idea you want to express.

*Think of the modifier as an arrow shot from a bow and the word it describes as a bull's eye. For clear, logical sentences, writers aim modifiers so that they strike as close to the intended targets as possible.*

### Misplaced Modifiers—Recognizing & Fixing Them

When a writer's aim is off and too much distance separates the modifier from its target, the result is a **misplaced modifier**:

EXAMPLE: The policemen finally stopped the criminal **using pepper spray and handcuffs**.

“[U]sing pepper spray and handcuffs” should describe “The policemen,” but since that noun is so far away, the phrase seems to be modifying “the criminal,” who (we hope) is not using pepper spray and handcuffs on the policemen!

**Rearranging sentence parts will often fix a misplaced modifier.** Remember that most modifiers should come as close to their targets as possible:

CORRECT: **Using pepper spray and handcuffs**, the policemen finally stopped the criminal.

After we move things around, the modifier hits the right target.

### Dangling Modifiers—Recognizing & Fixing Them

If the sentence fails to include a target, the modifier is **dangling**:

EXAMPLE: **Before engaging in strenuous belly dancing**, warm-up activities are necessary.

EXAMPLE: **Upon entering the doctor's office**, a skeleton caught my attention.

We assume that *someone* is doing some belly dancing, but notice that that person is not in the sentence. Thus, the modifier is dangling, hanging out there with nothing to attach to. Likewise,

who is “entering the doctor’s office”? Is it the skeleton? Probably not. The word “my” signals who it is stepping into the office and seeing the skeleton, but this sentence needs “I” or “me” in it so the modifier, “Upon stepping into the doctor’s office,” has a word to modify.

To fix a dangling modifier, you will need to **add a target to the sentence and then tweak the remaining words to make sense:**

CORRECT: Before engaging in strenuous belly dancing, **the performers** need to warm up with exercises.

CORRECT: Upon entering the doctor’s office, **I** found my attention caught by a skeleton.

With the addition of targets, “the performers” and “I,” the meaning of the sentences becomes clear.