

## Dangling Modifiers

A modifier is a word, phrase or clause that adds description to a target idea. A **dangling modifier** occurs when a modifier is not clearly targeting the idea.

### Examples of Dangling Modifiers

A dangling modifier can crop up in two ways. The first is when there is not a subject for the modifier to describe.

*Example: Hungry, the leftover pizza was devoured.*

*“hungry” = modifier*

Who devoured the pizza? This sentence doesn’t tell us, so there is no one for “hungry” to describe.

The second way a dangling modifier occurs is when the modifier is distant or incorrectly placed and appears to modify the wrong noun.

*Example: They saw a fence behind the house made of barbed wire.*

*“made of barbed wire” = modifier*

The way this sentence is structured, the modifier seems to be targeting the house. However, logic says the fence should be the subject that is “made of barbed wire”.

### Correcting Dangling Modifiers

To correct a dangling modifier, the writer should first **identify** and **include** a logical subject.

*Example: Hungry, I devoured the leftover pizza.*

Here, we added the subject “I” to clarify who ate the pizza.

If the subject is already there, the writer should put the modifier closer to what it is modifying.

*Example: They saw a fence made of barbed wire behind the house.*

By placing the modifier “made of barbed wire” right after the word it is meant to describe (“fence”), the meaning of the sentence is more clear.

## **Conclusion**

Sometimes as writers work on a first draft or have in their mind exactly what they mean to say, it can be easy to inadvertently put a modifier in an unclear position in the sentence. Rereading a draft aloud can help to catch misplaced modifiers, and so can getting a friend or Writing Center tutor to read your draft.