

Dangling Modifiers and How To Correct Them

Summary: This resource explains what a dangling modifier is and how to correct the problem.

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A dangling modifier is a word or phrase that modifies a word not clearly stated in the sentence. A modifier describes, clarifies, or gives more detail about a concept.

Having finished the assignment, Jill turned on the TV.

"Having finished" states an action but does not name the doer of that action. In English sentences, the doer must be the subject of the main clause that follows. In this sentence, it is Jill. She seems logically to be the one doing the action ("having finished"), and this sentence therefore does not have a dangling modifier.

The following sentence has an incorrect usage:

Having finished the assignment, the TV was turned on.

"Having finished" is a participle expressing action, but the doer is not the TV set (the subject of the main clause): TV sets don't finish assignments. Since the doer of the action expressed in the participle has not been clearly stated, the participial phrase is said to be a dangling modifier.

Strategies for revising dangling modifiers:

1. Name the appropriate or logical doer of the action as the subject of the main clause:

Having arrived late for practice, a written excuse was needed.

Who arrived late? This sentence says that the written excuse arrived late. To revise, decide who actually arrived late. The possible revision might look like this:

Having arrived late for practice, the team captain needed a written excuse.

The main clause now names the person (the captain) who did the action in the modifying phrase (arrived late).

2. Change the phrase that dangles into a complete introductory clause by naming the doer of the action in that clause:

Without knowing his name, it was difficult to introduce him.

More examples of dangling modifiers and their revisions:

INCORRECT: After reading the original study, the article remains unconvincing.

REVISED: After reading the original study, I find the article unconvincing.

INCORRECT: Relieved of your responsibilities at your job, your home should be a place to relax.

REVISED: Relieved of your responsibilities at your job, you should be able to relax at home.

INCORRECT: The experiment was a failure, not having studied the lab manual carefully.

REVISED: They failed the experiment, not having studied the lab manual carefully

Source: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/597/01/>

Name: _____

My revisions

Incorrect	Revised

My peer revisions

Incorrect	Revised