THE DANGLING MODIFIER

Recognize a dangling modifier when you find one.

Modifiers are words, **phrases**, or **clauses** that add description. In clear, logical sentences, you will often find modifiers right next to—either in front of or behind—the target words they logically describe.

Read this example:

> **Horrified**, Mom snatched the **deviled** eggs from Jack, **whose fingers were covered in cat hair**.

Notice that **horrified** precedes **Mom**, its target, just as **deviled** sits right before **eggs**. **Whose fingers were covered in cat hair** immediately follows **Jack**, its target.

Sometimes, however, an inexperienced writer will include a modifier but forget the target. The modifier thus *dangles* because it has nothing in the sentence to describe.

Dangling modifiers are *errors*. This poor method of sentence construction confuses readers.

Review the examples below:

> Hungry, the leftover pizza was devoured.

Hungry is a single-word **adjective**. Notice that there is no one in the sentence for this modifier to describe.

> Rummaging in her giant handbag, the sunglasses escaped detection.

Rummaging in her giant handbag is a **participle phrase**. In this sentence, no word exists for this phrase to modify. Neither **sunglasses** nor **detection** has fingers to make rummaging possible!

> With a sigh of disappointment, the expensive dress was returned to the rack.

With a sigh of disappointment is a string of **prepositional phrases**. If you look carefully, you do not find anyone in the sentence capable of feeling disappointed. Neither *dress* nor *rack* has emotions!

Know how to fix a dangling modifier.

Fixing a dangling modifier will require more than rearranging the words in the sentence. You will often need to add something *new* so that the modifier finally has a target word to describe:

Hungry, we devoured the leftover pizza.

Rummaging in her giant handbag, Frieda failed to find her sunglasses.

With a sigh of disappointment, Charlene returned the expensive dress to the rack.