

Don't let your modifier dangle, columnist warns

By Esther Towns
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The first grammar quiz I wrote for Our Neighborhood dealt with misplaced or dangling modifiers. A recently received letter signed "L.G. Glim (Let good grammar live in Muncie!)" included evidence that another lesson on that subject might be needed. "Glim" enclosed a newspaper article containing a sentence with a dangling modifier.

In order for a sentence to be clear, modifiers should be as near as possible to the words they modify. When they are not, the modifier is deemed misplaced. When there is no word that the modifier can sensibly modify, then the modifier is said to dangle.

Most misplaced modifiers can be corrected by moving them to the beginning of the sentence or closer to the word modified. Dangling modifiers are often phrases already at the start of the sentence and followed by a comma. They should modify the subject of the sentence which follows the comma.

Dangling modifiers can be corrected by adding a word which the phrase can modify or by changing the phrase to a clause.

Each of the following sentences has a misplaced or a dangling modifier. See whether you can find the modifier and correct the sentence.

1. Pressing the button, the elevator went down to the basement.
2. Sung by a talented singer, we thought the music was entertaining.
3. Exhausted by the trip, it was hard for Jean to get up and go to work.
4. Reserved for the handicapped, we could not park in those spaces.
5. After attending the movie, there was ice cream for the children.
6. Left alone in the house, the lightning scared the child.
7. Trained in all areas of secretarial work, it was easy for her to get a job.
8. I worked for the department store during the entire vacation in the housewares section.
9. The boy visited his neighbors wearing a red sweat suit.
10. Riding my bike, the tires needed more air.
11. Roaring down the track, we saw the train.
12. Hidden behind the billboard, the motorists could not see the policeman.
13. Inside the oven I smelled burned food.
14. She did not hear the phone ringing in the bathtub.
15. Rachel lost the watch at the mall that she had purchased on Friday.
16. We saw two deer on the way to town.
17. The Smiths gave a teddy bear to their baby daughter with brown fur and a green sweater.
18. Rounding the curve, a highway sign cautioned us to go slowly.
19. Topped with ice cream, most people like apple pie.
20. Completely wild, the zookeeper warned us about the animals.

The following sentences show one way to correct the errors.

1. When we pressed the button, the elevator went down to the basement.
2. Sung by a talented singer, the music was entertaining to us.
3. Exhausted by the trip, Jean found it hard to get up and go to work.
4. Because they had been reserved for the handicapped, we could not park in those spaces.
5. After attending the movie, the children had ice cream.

6. Left alone in the house, the child was scared by the lightning.
7. Trained in all areas of secretarial work, she found it easy to get a job.
8. During the entire vacation, I worked in the housewares section of the department store.
9. The boy wearing a red sweat suit visited his neighbors.
10. Riding my bike, I noticed that the tires needed more air.
11. We saw the train roaring down the track.
12. The motorists could not see the policeman hiding behind the billboard.
13. I smelled burned food inside the oven.
14. In the bathtub, she did not hear the phone ringing.
15. At the mall, Rachel lost the watch that she had purchased on Friday.
16. On the way to town we saw two deer.
17. The Smiths gave their baby daughter a teddy bear with brown fur and a green sweater.
18. As we rounded the curve, a highway sign cautioned us to go slowly.
19. Most people like apple pie topped with ice cream.
20. The zookeeper warned us that the animals were completely wild.

Take off 5 points for each error. The grading scale is 90-100, A; 80-89, B; 70-79, C; 60-69, D; below 60, F.

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