Misplaced and Dangling Modifiers

A modifier is a word or word group functioning as an adjective or adverb to describe another word or word group.

Misplaced Modifier

A misplaced modifier is a modifier that is placed too far away from the word it modifies. To prevent confusion, you need to remember to place your modifiers as closely as possible to the words which they describe. The lines from Mary Poppins provides us with a good example of a misplaced modifier.

Jane to Michael: I know a man with a wooden leg named Smith

Michael: Really, what’s the name of his other leg?

Jane could have avoided a lot of confusion had she said: I know a man named Smith with a wooden leg. The participial phrase “named Smith” is a modifier that describes “a man,” therefore, Jane should have placed the modifier closer to the word it modified.

• Incorrect: I am taking my suit to the tailor with the bad fly.
  Correct: I am taking my suit with the bad fly to the tailor.

• Incorrect: The plane ascended into the night sky loaded with passengers and fuel.
  Correct: The plane, loaded with passengers and fuel, ascended into the night sky.

• Incorrect: I bought a car from the salesman with low mileage and cruise control.
  Correct: I bought a car with low mileage and cruise control from the salesman.

Always place your modifiers as closely as possible to the words which they modify.

Dangling Modifier

A dangling modifier is a modifier that does not logically modify any word or word group in the sentence.

• Incorrect: After reading the book Green Hills of Africa, a trip to the Serengeti was planned.
  In this example, the phrase “after reading the book Green Hills of Africa” does not clearly modify any word or word group in the sentence. We do not know who read the book. We can fix this sentence by adding a subject to the main clause.
  Correct: After reading the book Green Hills of Africa, Ashley planned a trip to the Serengeti.

• Incorrect: To finish the marathon, much endurance will be required.
  Correct: To finish the marathon, I will need much endurance.

• Incorrect: Driving down the New Jersey Turnpike, thousands of cars could be seen.
  Correct: Driving down the New Jersey Turnpike, George could see thousands of cars.

If your modifiers have nothing to modify, then they are dangling and your sentence needs revision.