Careful writers always seek to avoid the lack of clarity that a dangling modifier causes. The goal of this sheet is to help you learn to identify and correct dangling modifiers.

**Definition of a dangling modifier:**
“A dangling modifier fails to refer logically to any word in the sentence. Dangling modifiers are usually introductory word groups (such as verbal phrases) that suggest but do not name an actor. When a sentence opens with such a modifier, readers expect the following clause to name the actor. If it doesn’t the modifier dangles” (from Hacker, Diana. *Rules for Writers, 3rd Ed.* Bedford: 1996).

An understanding of the following might prove useful:

Example sentence: *Unaware of his bike’s flat tires, Patrick began to pedal but fell.*

**Subject:** The noun or pronoun that indicates what a sentence is about, and which the verb refers to or elaborates. *Patrick* is the subject of this sentence. Because he is a person who, in this sentence, acts, *Patrick* is what we refer to as an “actor.”

**Independent clause:** A group of words which has both a subject and a verb, and which can stand alone as a sentence. In the example sentence above, “*Patrick began to pedal but fell*” is an independent clause.

**Modifier:** a word or word group that qualifies, describes, or limits the meaning of a word, phrase, or clause. In the example sentence above, the word group “*Unaware of his bike’s flat tires*” is a modifier.

**How to identify dangling modifier:**

Question 1: Does the opening phrase suggest, but fail to name, an actor?
   If yes, then ask yourself Question 2.

Question 2: does the subject of the independent clause name an actor?
   If no, then revise the dangling modifier.
Examples of sentences with dangling modifiers:

1. Rollerblading frantically to keep up with the others, the hill proved too steep for Manuel, and he fell to the ground.

2. Too sleepy to turn it off, P.J.’s alarm clock continued to ring for nearly twenty minutes.

3. Because he was so protective, Oliver’s car had an overly elaborate security system.

4. Without the aid of his standard weekend of preparation, the chemistry test was slightly difficult for Claus.

Because of their dangling modifiers, these sentences wrongly imply that the hill rollerbladed frantically, that P.J.’s alarm clock was too sleepy to turn itself off, that Oliver’s car was overly protective, and that the chemistry test lacked its standard weekend of preparation.

Ways to revise a dangling modifier:

1. Change the subject of the independent clause so that it names the actor implied by the opening word group, or modifier.
2. Turn the modifier into a word group that includes the actor.

For example, the following sentence contains a dangling modifier: “Because they were elsewhere, Sid goodheartedly mocked his friends.” Revise as follows: “Because he knew they were elsewhere, Sid goodheartedly mocked his friends” OR “Because they were elsewhere, Sid’s friends because victims of his goodhearted mockery.” Notice the agreement between the actor in the opening word group and the subject of the independent clause in the revised sentences.

Revised examples:

1. Rollerblading frantically to keep up with the others, Manuel fell on the steep hill.

2. Too sleepy to turn it off, P.J. allowed his alarm clock to ring for nearly twenty minutes.

3. Because he was so protective, Oliver installed an overly elaborate security system in his car.

4. Without the aid of his standard weekend of preparation, Claus encountered slight difficulty on his chemistry test.

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Exercises:

1. Once seated by a hostess, menus would be given to the guests.

2. After reading through the essay a few times, the fourth sentence began to resemble a thesis statement.

3. Going away from home, one of the first crucial tasks is to make new friends.

4. As a champion track athlete, Carl Lewis’ credibility provides this new line of sportswear with a fair amount of marketability.

5. Before reaching the age of sixteen, driving a car was my favorite daydream.

6. Unwilling to believe that Karl Benz invented the first car, Henry Ford is the person most Americans name as the automobile’s inventor.

7. After losing both games, the drive home was quite unpleasant for our team.