

LOOKING AT YOURSELF AS A WRITER

Dangling modifiers

Most writers encounter occasional problems with dangling modifiers. Here are a few of the most common causes and cures.

CAUSE You are trying to avoid using the word *I*, so you write a sentence like this: *At the age of twenty, my father let me drive his restored Mustang.*

CURE Don't be afraid to use the word *I* in a personal narrative or in other writing that is clearly about you: *When I turned twenty, my father let me drive his restored Mustang.*

CAUSE You are writing in the passive voice, with the subject of your sentence receiving the action instead of doing it, like this: *To finance the rescue effort, thousands of dollars were donated.*

CURE Write in the active voice unless you have a good reason for choosing the passive: *To finance the rescue effort, citizens donated thousands of dollars.* (See W3-a.)

CAUSE To achieve sentence variety, you are putting certain modifiers up front in a sentence—without noticing that they dangle.

CURE Keep the modifier up front, for variety, but add an actor to it. Or change the subject of the sentence so that it names the actor.

CAUSE You think your sentence is clear even though the modifier dangles.

CURE In fact, you may be right. Be aware, though, that some readers—especially English professors—find dangling modifiers distracting.