Dangling Modifiers

“I don’t think it means what you think it means”

* Inigo Montoya (*The* *Princess Bride)*

# Explanation

A dangling modifier occurs when the information at the beginning of the sentence, set off by commas, does not accurately describe (modify) the subject in the main sentence. Modifiers give additional information related to the subject, but when that subject is not provided, the reader can be confused (left “hanging or dangling.”)

# Examples

1. Exhausted, the couch seemed like a perfect place to relax. **[sentence contains a dangling modifier]**

The word *exhausted* is the modifier for the subject of the main sentence. *Couch* is the current subject in the main sentence. The couch is exhausted? No, that would be impossible. The subject must be a person. Once you figure out who is really exhausted, you will need to rephrase the sentence.

**CORRECT**: *Exhausted, Jane felt the couch would be a perfect place to relax.*

1. Having traveled so far, dinner was eaten very quickly. **[sentence contains a dangling modifier]**

The phrase, *Having traveled so far,* is the modifier for the subject of the main sentence. The question is, “Who did the traveling?” Dinner cannot travel (unless it is on a food truck!). Once a correct subject is provided and the main sentence is reworded a bit, the sentence is grammatically correct.

**CORRECT:** *Having traveled so far, George ate dinner very quickly.*

# Exercises

*Can you rewrite the following sentences with dangling modifiers so the modifiers describe the correct subjects?*

1. Pulling cars and buildings into its wake, the Johnson family tried desperately to avoid the tornado.
2. Inflicting constant harassment, the newly hired office assistant was unable to continue working for his boss.

References:

“Dangling Modifiers.” YouTube, uploaded by Khan Academy, 23 August 2016, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjunMcrXgE0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SjunMcrXgE0)

“Dangling Modifiers and How to Correct Them.” Owl Purdue, Purdue University,

<https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/general_writing/mechanics/dangling_modifiers_and_how_to_correct_them.html>