Dangling and Misplaced Modifiers

In written English, every modifier should clearly modify something. Both dangling modifiers and misplaced modifiers lead to sentences that do not mean what their writers intended. Although dangling and misplaced modifiers can pose some serious problems in writing, they can be fun to read.

A dangling modifier fails to refer logically to any word in the sentence.

Examples:

Dangling  Riding my bicycle, a dog chases me. (*Riding* modifies nothing, and it cannot logically modify *dog*; certainly, *the dog is not the one riding the bicycle.*)

Revised  While I was riding my bicycle, a dog chased me.

Dangling  Sitting in the back row of the theater, the actors could hardly be heard.

Revised  Sitting in the back row of the theater, we could hardly hear the actors.

Dangling  Although only four years old, my father insisted that I learn to read.

Revised  Although I was only four years old, my father insisted that I learn to read.

A misplaced modifier does modify a word, but not the one the author intended.

Examples:

Misplaced  He bought a Great Dane from a neighbor that was already housebroken. (The author actually intended to modify the dog; we would certainly hope that the neighbor had been housebroken long before this point.)

Revised  He bought a Great Dane that was already housebroken from a neighbor.

Misplaced  I read your editorial about juvenile delinquents with enthusiasm.

Revised  I read with enthusiasm your editorial about juvenile delinquents.

Misplaced  The king returned to the clinic where he had undergone heart surgery in 1986 in a limousine sent by the White House.

Revised  Traveling in a limousine sent by the White House, the king returned to the clinic where he had undergone heart surgery in 1986.