

AP LITERATURE GRAMMAR REVIEW

Dangling Participle.

A present participle is a **verb** ending in *-ing*, and is called *dangling* when the subject of the *-ing* verb and the subject of the sentence do not **agree**. An example is “Rushing to finish the paper, Bob's printer broke.” Here the subject is *Bob's printer*, but the printer isn't doing the *rushing*. Better would be “While Bob was rushing to finish the paper, his printer broke.”

- The robber ran from the policeman, still holding the money in his hands.
- After being whipped fiercely, the cook boiled the egg.
- Flitting gaily from flower to flower, the football player watched the bee.

One way to tell whether the participle is dangling is to put the phrase with the participle right after the subject of the sentence: “Bob's printer, rushing to finish the paper, broke” doesn't sound right.

Not all words ending in *-ing* are participles: in the sentence “Answering the questions in chapter four is your next assignment,” the word *answering* functions as a noun, not a verb. (These nouns in *-ing* are called *gerunds*.)

The Comma Splice

Recognize a **comma splice** when you see one.

A comma splice, also called a run-on, occurs when a writer has connected two main clauses with a comma alone. A main clause makes a complete thought, so you should not find a wimpy comma struggling to join two such powerful clauses.

The problem looks like this:

main clause + , + main clause .

Here is an example:

Fanning the slice of pizza with a napkin, Jolene waited for it to cool, she had already burned the roof of her mouth with the fried cheese sticks.

The first main clause is *Jolene waited for it to cool*, and the second is *she had already burned the roof of her mouth with the fried cheese sticks*. Notice that the two clauses have only a comma connecting them.

Fixing a comma splice is easy. All you have to do is pick one of the four available strategies.

First, you can break the error into two separate sentences, like this:

*Fanning the slice of pizza with a napkin, Jolene waited for it to **cool**. **She** had already burned the roof of her mouth with the fried cheese sticks.*

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Another good option is to connect the two main clauses with a comma and a **coordinating conjunction**:

*Fanning the slice of pizza with a napkin, Jolene waited for it to **cool, for** she had already burned the roof of her mouth with the fried cheese sticks.*

You can also use a **semicolon**, a mark of punctuation as powerful as a period:

*Fanning the slice of pizza with a napkin, Jolene waited for it to **cool; she** had already burned the roof of her mouth with the fried cheese sticks.*

Your last option is to use a **subordinate conjunction**. This method reduces one of the two clauses to an *incomplete* thought:

*Fanning the slice of pizza with a napkin, Jolene waited for it to **cool since she** had already burned the roof of her mouth with the fried cheese sticks.*

Misplaced Modifiers

This is a common problem in American speech. Writing has to be more precise than speaking, or it will be misunderstood.

A **misplaced modifier** is simply a word or phrase describing something but not placed near enough the word it is supposed to modify. The modifying word or phrase is not **dangling**; no extra words are needed; the modifier is just in the wrong place.

Sentence #1: The patient was referred to a psychologist with several emotional problems.

What the writer thinks it says: The patient has emotional problems.

What the sentence really says: The psychologist has emotional problems.

Correction: The patient with several emotional problems was referred to a psychologist.

Sentence #2: Sam found a letter in the mailbox that doesn't belong to her.

What the writer thinks it says: Sam found a letter that doesn't belong to her.

What the sentence really says: The mailbox doesn't belong to Sam.

Correction: Sam found a letter that doesn't belong to her in the mailbox.

Sentence #3: Two cars were reported stolen by the Farmingdale police yesterday.

What the writer thinks it says: The Farmingdale police reported two stolen cars.

What the sentence really says: The police stole the two cars.

Correction: Yesterday, the Farmingdale police reported that two cars were stolen.