## Modifiers

A **modifier** changes or "modifies" a word by describing it. A modifier can be a single word, like an adjective. In the sentence below, the adjective "American" is modifying the noun "delegation."

e.g. The <u>American</u> <u>delegation</u> left the conference early.
        **modifier    noun**

## Modifying Phrases

Modifiers can also be groups of words known as **modifying phrases**. Modifying phrases often start with verbs that end in *–ing* or *–ed*.

e.g. <u>Having signed an immunity agreement,</u> <u>Luc Leclerc</u> testified at the inquest that he had
        **modifying phrase            noun**
      accepted more than a half of a million dollars in bribes.

e.g. <u>Astonished by the news</u>, <u>journalists</u> rushed to the courthouse to cover the story.
        **modifier          noun**

As these examples show, the word being described by the modifying phrase must also be the person or thing that performs the action in the rest of the sentence. In the first example, Luc Leclerc both signed the immunity agreement *and* testified at the inquest. In the second example, the journalists were both astonished *and* rushed to the courthouse.

## Dangling Modifiers

If it isn't clear which word is being described by the modifier, this will result in a **dangling modifier**. A dangling modifier "dangles" because it is not logically attached to the rest of the sentence. This grammatical error often leads to confusion. In the example below, for instance, it seems as if the father—not the child—refused to eat his vegetables.

e.g. <u>Having refused to eat his broccoli</u>, the father sent his child to bed without dessert.
        **dangling modifier**

Common sense tells us that it's really the child who didn't eat his broccoli, but because of the dangling modifier, we can't be sure.

There are a few ways to rewrite this sentence so that the meaning is clear. In most of the solutions below, we turned the modifying phrase into a clause (see *Clauses* handout). However, if you decide to begin your sentence with a modifying phrase, make sure that the word it modifies appears directly after it. Notice that in the first solution, we fixed the problem by putting the word "child" closer to the modifier.

e.g. Having refused to eat his broccoli, the child was sent to bed without dessert.
e.g. After the child refused to eat his broccoli, he was sent to bed without dessert.
e.g. The child refused to eat his broccoli, so his father sent him to bed without dessert.
e.g. The child who refused to eat his broccoli was sent to bed without dessert.