



# San Diego BOOK AWARDS ASSOCIATION

## Suffering Syntax!

Compiled by Larry M Edwards — freelance book editor, judge for San Diego Book Awards.

Awkward construction, dangling participles and misplaced modifiers sometimes give us a good laugh, but they confuse readers and sully a writer's reputation.

When editing your work, watch out for these traps that may trip your readers.

- “Walking along the beach, the sun rose majestically over the ocean.”  
I hope the sun enjoyed its walk on the beach; I know I did.  
The fix: She walked along the beach as the sun rose majestically over the ocean.
- “He was shot in the head while being interviewed by a sniper.”  
When did snipers start interviewing their victims?  
The fix: He was shot in the head by a sniper while being interviewed.
- “Pitbulls attack officers, one shot.”  
Pit bulls with guns. Now that *is* a dangerous combination.  
The fix: Pit bulls attack officers, one dog shot.
- “Two cars were reported stolen by the Farmingdale police yesterday.”  
So, the police are doing a little moonlighting? Good thing there were no pit bulls involved.  
The fix: The Farmingdale police reported yesterday that two cars were stolen.
- “The ground smelled like rotting vegetation in the air.”  
Did the rotting vegetation levitate?  
The fix: The air smelled like rotting vegetation.
- “He stared up at the buildings like an aluminum Stonehenge.”  
Don't get into a stare-down contest with this guy. He's a rock!  
The fix: He stared up at the buildings, which looked like an aluminum Stonehenge.
- “After rotting in the cellar for weeks, my brother brought up some oranges.”  
That's one considerate ghost.  
The fix: My brother brought up some oranges that had been rotting in the cellar for weeks.
- “She had a gorgeous face with long blond hair.”  
Apparently she needs a shave.  
The fix: Her long blond hair framed a gorgeous face.
- “The patient was referred to a psychologist with several emotional problems.” I've always suspected psychologists had emotional problems of their own. The fix: The patient, who had several emotional problems, was referred to a psychologist.
- This last one is my all-time favorite, gleaned from a FoxNews story (read this aloud, but be sure to enunciate each word carefully): “Men may still be left holding their peanuts at the ballpark while waiting for their dates in the ladies room.”  
Men are holding their peanuts in the ladies' room because ...?  
The fix: Men may still be left holding their peanuts at the ballpark while they wait for their dates, who are in the ladies' room.