

What to call this?

Margarita Pillado-Miller recently asked Mathilda Liberman, Director of the Writing Lab, what to call the following sentence:

Although detective stories are often read as merely entertainment, several key elements can be found in the majority of writings on this genre.

Liberman replied:

Kevin Crim's search through our reference books has failed to yield a precise grammatical term for the "although" clause you showed me. The best treatment is Fowler's; he calls it an "illogical usage of adversative conjunctions" (those that imply a sharp contrast). In other words, such sentences are a variety of non sequitur. Even if there were a handy label, like "dangling modifier," the student still wouldn't see the error in the construction--you have to provide a simpler version of the bad sentence so that the student could see what went wrong: "Although my dog likes meat, I plan to read *Moby Dick*."