

Garden Sentences

APSU Writing Center Handout

Garden Path Sentences

Garden path sentences mislead the reader into interpreting them incorrectly at first glance.

They are grammatically correct but can confuse the reader.

Avoid them in academic or professional writing to maintain clarity.

Examples

1. **Confusing:** The horse raced past the barn fell.

- **Fixed:** The horse racing past the barn fell.
- **Explanation:** The original makes it seem like the horse “raced past the barn” is the full action.

2. **Confusing:** The student who attended the workshop improved quickly learned new skills.

- **Fixed:** The student who attended the workshop learned new skills quickly.
- **Explanation:** It seems like “improved quickly” is the main verb, but the real action is “learned new skills quickly.”

3. **Confusing:** The essay revised by the tutor contained several errors.

- **Fixed:** The essay, which had been revised by the tutor, still contained several errors.
- **Explanation:** The original sentence could mislead the reader into thinking the tutor revised it and made errors.

How to Avoid Garden Path Sentences

1. Identify Confusion

Reread your sentence carefully. Could a reader misinterpret it?

2. Reorder or Rephrase

Add clarifying words like that, which, who, and whose.

3. Break the Sentence Down

Split long or complex sentences into shorter ones.

Use commas to clearly separate ideas or clauses.

4. Check Form vs. Function

Form refers to what a word is.

- **Example:** “write” is a verb.

Function refers to what a word does in a sentence.

- **Example:** “write” can function as both a verb (I write daily) and a noun (A good write requires practice).

5. Get Feedback

Ask a peer to read through your writing, they may spot confusing phrasing you missed.

References

Baillif, C. (2022). *Garden Path Sentences*. San Jose University Writing Center.

<https://www.sjsu.edu/writingcenter/docs/handouts/Garden%20Path%20Sentences.pdf>

Nelson, N. (2020, October 22). *Garden Paths and Brick Walls*. *Fiction Writers Review*.

<https://fictionwritersreview.com/essay/garden-paths-and-brick-walls/>