

Notes on Writing

Errors in Syntax

Dangling Modifier

- 1. All subjects were geriatric patients and of white non-Hispanic ethnicity, due to cultural differences that may occur.
 - What is “due to cultural differences...”? The phrase should go as near as possible to whatever it modifies.
- 2. ...158 participants were chosen from those entering an outpatient clinic that qualified as having probable or possible Alzheimer’s Disease.
 - Who or what “qualified as having AD”? Not the clinic.

Errors in Syntax - 2

- 3. When analyzing the results, several findings were reported.
 - The *findings* did not do the *analyzing*.
 - Better: When analyzing the results, the researchers found...
- 4. When examining cognitive functioning, the MMSE was administered
 - Who examined cognitive functioning?
 - Improved: The Mini Mental Status Exam (MMSE) was administered to determine the cognitive functioning of the patients.

Errors in Syntax - 3

- 5. Using these measures, the patients were then classified according to the presence or absence of Capgras syndrome, which resulted in many important findings between the two groups.
 - Who used the measures? The investigators, not the patients. Last part of sentence is uninformative and unnecessary.
- 6. For ten years, Jan, a 30-year-old male, has been haunted by a car crash in which another man died through the help of a psychotherapist. (Ad for a psychology film.)
 - Would you want to be treated by this psychotherapist?

Errors in Syntax - 4

- 7. By searching the number of times it was cited in Psych Info database, gauging its importance was possible as 1,291 sources resulted.

→ The Psych Info database shows 1,291 citations of ...

Nonparallel construction

- 8. Gall' s method of investigation was inductive, based on observation, and studied individual differences.
 - Who studied individual differences?

Nonparallel Constructions

- 1. Similar forms of misidentification are commonly reported in individuals with Alzheimer' s disease (AD) such as the belief that others are in one' s home, that television images are real, and an inability to recognize one' s reflection in the mirror.
- Sentence rewritten: ... such as the belief that others are in one' s home, that television images are real, or that one' s reflection in the mirror is someone other than oneself.

Nonparallel Constructions - 2

- 2. The experiment included two lists (one containing associated words and one with unrelated words), five orienting tasks, if the words were learned intentionally or incidentally, and there were two controls.
 - “The experiment included ... if the words were learned ... “ is not syntactically correct.
- Sentence rewritten: The experiments included three independent variables: the nature of stimulus lists, participants’ expectation of a recall test, and presence or absence of an orienting task during learning.

Nonparallel Constructions - 3

- The words in a list were either unrelated or were associated in some way. Half of the participants were informed about the upcoming recall test while the other half were simply asked to read the words silently. During list presentation, participants were asked to perform one of four different orienting tasks or were asked to read the words silently.

Nonparallel Constructions - 4

- Participants each performed five tasks on the group of words which included pleasant-unpleasant word rating on a 5 point scale; estimating the frequency of usage on a 5 point scale; E – G checking where participants made a check if either E or G or both letters appeared; parts of speech decision where they decided whether the word was a noun, verb, adjective or other; and sentence frames where participants had to decide whether the word fit best into sentence one or two.

Nonparallel Constructions - 4

- Participants each performed five tasks on the group of words which included pleasant-unpleasant word rating on a 5 point scale;
 - Too many ideas in one sentence.
 - Each participants performed only one task, not five tasks.
 - Phrase beginning “which included...” is misplaced.
 - Five-point scale

Nonparallel Constructions - 5

- ... which included ... word rating ... estimating ... E – G checking ... parts of speech decision where they decided whether the word was a noun, verb adjective or other; and sentence frames where participants had to decide whether the word fit best into sentence one or two.
 - Underlined sections should have similar syntactical form

Nonparallel Constructions - 6

Improved version

- During list presentation, participants performed one of five different orienting tasks on the words. Participants either rated the pleasantness of each word, estimated its frequency of usage, checked to determine whether it contained an *e* or *g*, indicated its part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, adverb etc.), or noted whether the word fit into sentence frames suitable for either a mass noun or a count noun.

Nonparallel Constructions – 7

- During list presentation, participants performed one of five different orienting tasks on the words: rating pleasantness of the words, estimating frequency of usage, checking for the presence of *e* or *g*, indicating the part of speech, or deciding whether a word fit into a sentence frame.
- You then need a sentence or two explaining or describing each task.

Incomplete Sentences

- 1. The researchers found a link between Capgras Syndrome and other types of delusions. Which means they are a part of delusions experienced by Alzheimer's patients.
 - To what does *they* refer? *Which*?
 - There is no logical connection between the two sentences. You must explain the logic of the conclusion you reach.
- 2. That the channel was only capable to run one input to flow through the limited capacity channel.
 - Capable of processing only one input channel at a time???

Comparisons not Clear

- 1. Participants with CS were shown to have lower MMSE scores and higher BDS scores.
 - Lower than whom or what?
- 2. Patients with CS were more likely to possess other types of delusions.
 - More likely than whom or what?

Antecedents

- *This, it, they, which* etc. refer to nouns
- Syntax (not context) must indicate referent
- Antecedent (referent) in the same or immediately preceding sentence.
- Ambiguity must be resolved easily.
- Do not start a paragraph with the words “this” or “these”.

Antecedents - 2

- Incorrect: ...158 participants were chosen from those entering an outpatient clinic that qualified as having probable or possible Alzheimer's Disease.
- Who or what "qualified as having AD"? Not the clinic as the syntax would suggest.
- "Who" or "whom" refers to a person; "that" refers to an object.
- Improved: ... 158 participants *who had probable or possible Alzheimer's Disease* were chosen

Antecedents - 3

- Incorrect: Capgras syndrome is when a person believes that imposters have replaced people such as family members. They understand that the person resembles their doctor or husband for example, but cannot come to terms that it is actually them and not some imposter.
- To whom do the underlined *they*, *their* and *them* refer? Who is *the person*?
- **Definitions** usually first give the class to which the defining object belongs and then some properties which differentiate the object from other objects in the class.
- E.g. Capgras syndrome is a delusional disorder which frequently accompanys Alzheimer's disease

Antecedents - 4

- The frequency and behavioural disturbances of CS in a sample of AD patients was examined in this cross-sectional study. (Abbreviations not defined. No previous mention of the study.)
- ...whether the patient believes that someone such as their spouse is an imposter.
- Pronouns must agree in gender and number with their antecedents. Use *his* or *her* here, or use the plural (... *patients* ... *their*....)
- But some grammarians consider “their” to be acceptable because it is gender neutral.

Antecedents - 5

- ...patients with psychosis exhibit a more rapid decline in cognitive functioning. They further explained that
- According to the rules of syntax, *they* refers to *patients* in the previous sentence. However, the author intended *they* to refer to the authors of the article who were mentioned earlier in the paragraph.

Antecedents - 6

- Considering the outpatient setting, this could cause a greater proportion of CS patients, and could be different than the prevalence in the real world.
- Who is “considering the outpatient setting”? To what does *this* refer? What could cause a greater proportion of CS patients? Greater than what? And what could be different from the prevalence in the real world?

Antecedents - 7

- Working memory is the memory you use for storing information that you are actively working on.
- Better: ... information *on which* you are actively working.
- ..information actively being processed.
- The person I loaned the book to has moved away and taken my book
- Better: The person *to whom* I loaned the book
- Note: Usage is changing.

Compound Verbs - 8

- Watch out for compound verbs.
- This type of behaviour is something I won't put up with.
- Not: This type of behaviour is something up with which I will not put.
- (*Put up with* can be considered a verb which has a different meaning from the verb *put*.)
- Better: Find one word that means the same as the compound verb.
- E.g., This type of behaviour is something I will not tolerate.

Inappropriate Use of Passive Voice

- In the article ... by Harwood, Barker, Ownly, and Duara, it was tested to see the prevalence of Capgras Syndrome in patients with Alzheimer's disease.
 - Better to say, Harwood ... investigated the prevalence ...

Passive Voice - 2

- It has been discussed that the emotional system, comprised of the amygdala and connecting circuits, which is responsible for associating a feeling of familiarity, is damaged in patients with CS.
 - Too many ideas in one sentence. Why is *which* there? To what does it refer—connecting circuits or emotional system?
- Always write as concisely as possible.
- Better: The emotional system, which includes the amygdala and connecting circuits and which is necessary for experiencing a feeling of familiarity, is damaged in patients with CS.

Passive Voice - 3

- It can be suggested that patients exhibiting psychosis have more fast paced decline in cognition than those without.
- Better: The data suggest that patients exhibiting psychosis exhibit a faster decline
Or: Patients exhibiting psychosis were found to have
- Also, it was noticed that considerably more auditory words were recalled on partial-recall trials than on the total-recall trials.
- Omit terms such as, “it was found...” or “it was suggested...” Say who found or who suggested.

Passive Voice - 2

- Do use the passive in the Method section of a research report. “Participants were shown 20 lists of words”, rather than, “The experimenter showed participants 20 lists of words.”

Mass Nouns vs Count Nouns

- Mass nouns : mashed potatoes, research, sand
- Count nouns: baked potatoes, boiled eggs, rocks
- Fewer baked potatoes, fewer boiled eggs,
- Less mashed potato, scrambled eggs, research, or sand.
- Number of baked potatoes & boiled eggs, Amount of mashed potato
- Many baked potatoes, much mashed potato.

Split Infinitives

- I will not attempt to physically describe her.
 - Improved: I will not attempt to describe her physically.
- I asked her to not speak so quickly.
 - Improved: I asked her not to speak so quickly.
- She really tried to tremendously improve her spelling. (Delete *tremendously*.)
 - She really tried very hard to improve her spelling.

Split Infinitives

- ... the ability to spatially represent language
- → ... the ability to represent language spatially

Dash

- An explanation offered for our naked skin – entirely dubious but which Morris deems ingenious – is the idea of an aquatic ape.

APA Format

- Use past tense to describe method and results.
 - The participants saw 10 lists of 25 words. (not *would see*.)
 - Smith and Jones (date) interpreted their findings as showing...
- Use present tense to show how results support conclusions.
 - The significant effect of orienting task shows that orienting tasks (such as estimating frequency of usage or rating pleasantness) which draw attention to the meaning of words produce better subsequent free recall than tasks such as spelling or syntactical function which draw attention to superficial properties.

APA Format - 2

- Numbers
 - Numbers $<$ or $=$ 10 are written as words.
 - Numbers at the beginning of a sentence are written as words.
 - One hundred fifty-eight patients with known or suspected Alzheimer's Disease were recruited for the study.
 - Numbers in measurements are always written as numerals.
 - 5 ft, 6 miles, 2 seconds etc.

APA Format - 2

Reporting or Describing Results

- Deal with main effects first, then interactions.
- Some interactions affect the interpretation of the main effect.
 - No effect or opposite effect of one variable depending on the level of another variable.
 - E.g. Presence or absence of distracting task at end of list interacts with serial position. Distracting task affects only items from the end of the list.
 - Hyde & Jenkins: Orienting task and list type interacted. The effect of orienting task was larger for semantic than non-semantic tasks.

The Word *Only*

- *Only* goes as close as possible to the word it modifies.
- Vitz *only* critiqued theories derived from humanist psychologists. (What else could he do to the theories?)
- Does the speaker mean that Vitz was the *only* person critiquing those theories, or does he mean that the *only* theories Vitz critiqued were derived from humanist psychologists.

The Word *Only*

Compare the following:

- *Only he was asked to read a short passage.*
- *He was only asked to read a short passage.*
- *He was asked only to read a short passage.*
- *He was asked to read only a short passage.*