

Parallel Structure

Parallel structure uses the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas in a sentence have an equal level of importance. Readers expect that a series of elements serving similar purpose will appear in parallel grammatical form. When a sentence is written in parallel form, it reads much more clearly and naturally. Parallel structures can occur at the word, phrase, or clause level.

Correcting Faulty Parallelism

The absence of parallelism is jarring and awkward to read. Consider this example:

Not Parallel: The bowl was filled with **crisp apples, juicy oranges, and bananas that were ripe.**

In *crisp apples* and *juicy oranges*, the descriptive word comes first and the word being described comes second. In *bananas that were ripe*, the order is reversed. To achieve parallelism, give the nonparallel item the same form as the others:

Parallel: The bowl was filled with crisp apples, juicy oranges, and **ripe bananas.**

Here are some additional examples:

Not Parallel: My neighbor likes to **plant a garden, watering it, and even to weed it.**

To plant a garden and *to weed it* are similar in construction. But *watering it* is not. For parallel construction, another *to* is needed.

Parallel: My neighbor likes to plant a garden, **to water it, and even to weed it.**

Not Parallel: The moviegoers **talked and were rattling** popcorn boxes during the film. *Talked*, an *-ed* construction, does not parallel *were rattling*. The problem could be corrected by changing either word group.

Parallel: The moviegoers **talked and rattled** popcorn boxes during the film.

Also parallel: The moviegoers **were talking and were rattling** popcorn boxes during the film.

Correcting Faulty Parallelism: *English Brushup* 2nd edition. By John Langan and Janet M. Goldstein McGraw Hill, Boston 1998. page 160

Proofreading Strategies to try:

*Skim your paper, pausing at the words "and" and "or". Check on each side of these words to see whether the items joined are parallel. If not, make them parallel.

*If you have several items in a list, put them in a column to see if they are parallel.

*Listen to the sound of the items in a list or the items being compared. Do you hear the same kinds of sounds? For example, is there a series of "-ing" words beginning each item? If something is breaking the rhythm or repetition of sound, check to see if it needs to be made parallel.

Proofreading Strategies to try: part of a collection of instructional materials used in the Purdue University Writing Lab. The online version is part of OWL (Online Writing Lab), a project of the Purdue University Writing Lab, funded by the School of Liberal Arts at Purdue. *Purdue University Writing Lab* 2001

EXERCISE 9-1 Edit the following sentences to correct faulty parallelism. Example:

Rowena began her work day by pouring a cup of coffee and ^{checking}~~checked~~ her e-mail.

- a. Police dogs are used for finding lost children, tracking criminals, and the detection of bombs and illegal drugs.
 - b. Hannah told her rock climbing partner that she bought a new harness and of her desire to climb Otter Cliffs.
 - c. It is more difficult to sustain an exercise program than starting one.
 - d. During basic training, I was not only told what to do but also what to think.
 - e. Jan wanted to drive to the wine country or at least Sausalito.
1. Activities on Wednesday afternoons include fishing trips, dance lessons, and computers.
 2. Arriving at Lake Powell in a thunderstorm, the campers found it safer to remain in their cars than setting up their tents.
 3. The streets were not only too steep but also were too narrow for anything other than pedestrian traffic.
 4. More digital artists in the show are from the South Shore than the North Shore.
 5. To load her toolbox, Anika the Clown gathered hats of different sizes, put in two tubes of face paint, arranged a bundle of extra-long straws, added a bag of colored balloons, and a battery-powered hair dryer.