

## PARALLEL STRUCTURE

### What is Parallelism?

Parallelism is the use of similar structure in related words, clauses, or phrases. It creates a sense of rhythm and balance within a sentence. As readers, we often correct faulty parallelism—a lack of parallel structure—intuitively because an unbalanced sentence sounds awkward and poorly constructed.

#### A. Ideas in Pairs

The relationship between paired ideas is reinforced when the elements are presented in parallel balance. There are three primary methods of connecting paired ideas.

##### **(1) Pairings with coordinating conjunctions**

Coordinating conjunctions connect closely related or equivalent ideas. The relationship is made clearer when elements linked by a conjunction (**and, but, or, for, so, and yet**) are presented in parallel balance:

**Faulty parallelism:** When I walk the dog, I like to listen to music and talking to friends on the phone.

**Correct parallelism:** When I walk the dog, I like listening to music and talking to friends on the phone.

##### **(2) Pairings with correlative conjunctions**

Correlative conjunctions join equivalent elements and come in pairs:

<i>both . . . and</i>	<i>just as . . . so</i>	<i>not only . . . but also</i>
<i>either . . . or</i>	<i>neither . . . nor</i>	<i>whether . . . or</i>

**Faulty parallelism:** This committee needs to decide whether the company should reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lowering workers' wages.

**Correct parallelism:** This committee needs to decide whether the company should reduce its workforce, cut its benefits, or lower workers' wages.

##### **(3) Comparisons connected by *than* or *as***

Parallel balance should be maintained between elements linked in comparisons using *than* or *as*:

**Faulty parallelism:** Swimming in the ocean is more difficult than a pool.

**Correct parallelism:** Swimming in the ocean is more difficult than swimming in a pool.

#### B. Parallel Constructions for Ideas Presented in a Series

When three or more grammatical elements are presented in a series, the writer must take care to maintain parallel balance. The items in the list must be all nouns, all infinitives, all prepositional phrases, all gerunds, or all clauses.

**Faulty parallelism:** Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and to have good eyesight.

**Correct parallelism:** Driving a car requires coordination, patience, and good eyesight.

##### **Use parallelism with lists, headings, and outlines**

Headings that divide a paper into sections should be parallel. Likewise, parallel structure should be applied to elements in paper outlines.

###### **Not parallel**

Origin of homeopathy  
Initial reception  
Rising to popularity in the 19th century  
Recent studies show lack of evidence

###### **Parallel**

Origin of homeopathy  
Initial reception  
Rise to popularity in the 19th century  
Lack of evidence in recent studies

#### C. Reinforce Parallel Structure by Repeating rather than Mixing Articles, Conjunctions, or Prepositions

When you write a series involving articles, conjunctions, or prepositions, be consistent. Try to repeat rather than vary the word that begins each phrase or clause.

**Correct:** The states regulate the noise created **by** motor vehicles but not **by** commercial aircraft.

**Correct:** Pesticides cannot be sold if they have a harmful effect **on** humans, **on** animal life, or **on** the environment.

## Parallelism: Exercises

**In each of the following lists, one element does not fit with the others. Circle the non-parallel element.**

**Example:** a) A tall building      b) a huge park      c) a friend of mine

1. a) on the sidewalk      b) under the tree      c) my house
2. a) a hamburger      b) French fries      c) lots of fun
3. a) to wash the dishes      b) cleaning the bathroom      c) to vacuum the carpet
4. a) he called his sister      b) he went home      c) determination to do the right thing
5. a) easily      b) noiselessly      c) without looking
6. a) angry      b) social      c) emotional

**Underline the parallel elements in the following sentences. Mark the beginning of the parallelism with // . Circle elements in lists that are not parallel. Write "P" beside sentences with good parallelism and "F" beside sentences with faulty parallelism.**

Example: F *Urban wildlife includes animals like // raccoons, skunks, and bigger animals.*

1. \_\_\_ Raccoons like to forage for garbage at night, play on city streets at dusk, and during the day they sleep.
2. \_\_\_ Many people think urban wildlife is a problem, but others believe we should protect these animals.
3. \_\_\_ A raccoon can be recognized by its black facial mask, ringed tail and its thick black coat.
4. \_\_\_ Raccoons are insatiably curious, extremely intelligent, and love shiny
5. \_\_\_ These animals are so clever that they wash or wipe their food before eating it.
6. \_\_\_ They eat insects, fruit, and garbage in the city.
7. \_\_\_ In the wild, they prefer to eat frogs, fish, and shellfish.
8. \_\_\_ From November to January, a raccoon will find an abandoned building building, hollow tree, or a bush to shelter from the cold.

**For each sentence below specify the type of FAULTY parallelism: (a) coordinate conjunctions, (b) correlative conjunctions, (c) elements in a series, or (d) elements in a comparison. Revise each sentence so that the joined elements are parallel to one another.**

1. Our baseball coach taught us how to hit, tag out runners, and base stealing.
2. The instructor advised me to use the rear-view mirror often, and I should observe the speed limit.
3. Bruce not only enjoys singing; he enjoys playing the guitar as well.
4. Vampires are advised to avoid garlic, drink blood regularly, and stay out of the sun.
5. Football is more popular in Europe than North America
6. Pedro explained to the immigration officer that his visa had expired and of his applying to have it renewed.
7. More students fail from improper study habits than any other cause.

**Cross out the unbalanced part of each sentence. Then rewrite the unbalanced part so that it matches the other item or items in the sentence.**

1. Zach listened to his iPod, was text messaging his friends, and surfed online all at the same time.
2. My homemade pesto recipe calls for extra-virgin olive oil, several sprigs of fresh basil, and pine nuts that were roasted.
3. When I want to relax, I grab a cold soda, open a bag of chips, turn on the TV, and I like to watch whatever sports game is on.
4. The mail brought utility bills, monthly statements from the bank, and credit card applications.

**Complete the following statements. The first two parts of each statement are parallel in form; the part that you add should be parallel in form as well.**

**EXAMPLE:** Three things I could not live without are my cell phone, my laptop, and my morning coffee.

1. The new reality TV show is disappointing: The premise is absurd, the cast members are uninteresting, and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. As a parent, I promise to love my child unconditionally, to provide for my child's needs, and \_\_\_\_\_.
3. As the students waited for the professor to arrive for class, they rummaged through their backpacks, silenced their phones, and \_\_\_\_\_.
4. During my first year in my own apartment, I learned how to fix leaky toilets and torn screens, how to survive on instant ramen and frozen pizzas, and \_\_\_\_\_.
5. Language learning courses involve the memorization of new vocabulary and \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Another student reported that at college she learned how to study, how to think, and \_\_\_\_\_.
7. Some students like to study with others in study groups, but \_\_\_\_\_.

**Read carefully the short paragraph below , underline, and then correct the five instances of faulty parallelism.**

Running is an exercise that can be good for you mentally, physically, and also be helpful for your emotions. A beginning runner should keep three things in mind: the warm-up session, the actual time that you are running, and the cool-down period. Never start a run without first having warmed up through stretching exercises. Stretching reduces muscle stiffness, decreases the possibility of injury, and it's a good method to gradually increase the heart rate. During the run itself, move at a comfortable pace. Your breathing should be steady and with depth. Finally, remember to cool down after a run. An adequate cool-down period allows time for the body to relax and the normalizing of the heart rate.