



NOVA SOUTHEASTERN  
UNIVERSITY

College of Undergraduate Studies

## Tutoring and Testing Center

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# PARALLEL STRUCTURES

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Parallel structure means using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. This can happen at the word, phrase, or clause level. The usual way to join parallel structures is with the use of coordinating conjunctions such as "and" or "or."

### Words

A parallel structure that begins with a word must continue with similar words and word endings.

He gave me **the sun, the moon, and the stars.** (nouns)

Mary likes **hiking, swimming, and bicycling.** (gerunds)

I love **green, red, and white** balloons. (adjectives)

She spoke **quietly, slowly, and clearly.** (adverbs)

### Phrases

A parallel structure that begins with a phrase must continue with similar phrases.

He walked **around the house, through the garden, and out of the gate.** (prepositional phrase)

Mary likes **to hike, to swim, and to ride** a bicycle. (infinitive phrase)

OR

Mary likes to hike, swim, and ride a bicycle.

(Note: You can use "to" before all the verbs in a sentence or only before the first one.)

### Clauses

A parallel structure that begins with a clause must continue with clauses.

The coach told the players that they should **get a lot of sleep, not eat too much, and do some warm-up exercises before the game.**

### Lists

Be sure to keep all the elements in a list in the same form.

The dictionary can be used for these purposes: to find **word meanings, pronunciations, correct spellings, and irregular verbs.**

The toys were everywhere -- **under the table, on the couch, and in the closet.**

## Mixed structures are not parallel

Switching to a different pattern within a sentence or changing the voice of a verb (from active to passive or vice versa) will break the parallelism. To check if the structure is parallel, line up the lead-in word with each separate section of the pattern.

1. Mary likes **hiking, swimming**, and to **ride** a bicycle.  
likes hiking  
likes swimming  
likes to ride [does not match the pattern of gerunds; can be changed to 'riding']

Mary likes **hiking, swimming**, and **riding** a bicycle.

2. The production manager was asked to write his report **quickly, accurately**, and in a **detailed** manner.  
write quickly  
write accurately  
write in a detailed manner [does not match the pattern of adverbs; can be changed to 'thoroughly' & have the same meaning]

The production manager was asked to write his report **quickly, accurately**, and **thoroughly**.

3. The teacher said that he was a poor student because he **waited** until the last minute to study for the exam, **completed** his lab problems in a careless manner, and his **motivation** was low.  
he waited  
he completed  
his motivation was low [does not match the pattern of verbs; can be changed to 'lacked']

The teacher said that he was a poor student because he **waited** until the last minute to study for the exam, **completed** his lab problems in a careless manner, and **lacked** the motivation.

## Parallel Structures Practice Exercises

1. She likes to jog in the park and shopping.
2. John encourages his brother to play basketball, spend time practicing soccer, and learns to play piano.
3. Students not only want good grades but also to have fun.
4. The meeting will discuss human resource problems and how employee motivation is decreasing.

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### Suggested Answers (may vary)

1. She likes jogging in the park and shopping.
2. John encourages his brother to play basketball, practice soccer, and learn piano.
3. Students want good grades and fun experiences.
4. The meeting will discuss human resource problems and employee motivation decreases.