Parallel Structure

Summary: This handout describes and provides examples of parallel structure (similar patterns of words).

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 and Phrases

With the -ing form (gerund) of words:

Parallel: Mary likes hiking, swimming, and bicycling.

With infinitive phrases:

Parallel: Mary likes to hike, to swim, and to ride a bicycle.
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.)

Do not mix forms.

Example 1

Not Parallel:
Mary likes hiking, swimming, and to ride a bicycle.
Parallel:
Mary likes hiking, swimming, and riding a bicycle.

Example 2

Not Parallel:
The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and in a detailed manner.
Parallel:
The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and thoroughly.

Example 3

Not Parallel:
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.
Parallel:
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 motivation.

**Clauses**

A parallel structure that begins with clauses must keep on with clauses. Changing to another pattern or changing the voice of the verb (from active to passive or vice versa) will break the parallelism.

**Example 1**

**Not Parallel:**

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

**Parallel:**

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

— or —

**Parallel:**

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.

**Example 2**

**Not Parallel:**

The salesman expected *that he would present* his product at the meeting, *that there would be* time for him to show his slide presentation, and *that questions would be asked* by prospective buyers. *(passive)*

**Parallel:**

The salesman expected *that he would present* his product at the meeting, *that there would be* time for him to show his slide presentation, and *that prospective buyers would ask* him questions.

**Lists After a Colon**

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

**Example 1**

**Not Parallel:**

The dictionary can be used to find: *word meanings, pronunciations, correct spellings*, and *looking up irregular verbs*.

**Parallel:**

The dictionary can be used to find: *word meanings, pronunciations, correct spellings*, and
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? Or do you hear a rhythm being repeated? If something is breaking that rhythm or repetition of sound, check to see if it needs to be made parallel.

SOURCE: Driscoll, Dana Lynn. "Parallel Structure." The Writing Lab & The OWL at Purdue and Purdue University. 8 October 2012 <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/623/1/>
Parallel Structure

Parallel structure adds both clout and clarity to your writing. When you use parallel structure, you increase the readability of your writing by creating word patterns readers can follow easily.

Understanding Parallel Structure

Parallel structure (also called parallelism) is the repetition of a chosen grammatical form within a sentence. By making each compared item or idea in your sentence follow the same grammatical pattern, you create a parallel construction.

Example

Not Parallel:
Ellen likes hiking, the rodeo, and to take afternoon naps.

Parallel:
Ellen likes hiking, attending the rodeo, and taking afternoon naps.

OR
Ellen likes to hike, attend the rodeo, and take afternoon naps.

Using Parallel Structure

With Coordinating Conjunctions
When you connect two or more clauses or phrases with a coordinating conjunction (for, and, nor, but, or, yet, or so), use parallel structure.

Example

Not Parallel:
My best friend took me dancing and to a show.

Parallel:
My best friend took me to a dance and a show.

With Correlative Conjunctions
When you connect two clauses or phrases with a correlative conjunction (not only…but also, either…or, neither…nor, if…then, etc.), use parallel structure.

Example

Not Parallel:
My dog not only likes to play fetch, but also chase cars.

Parallel:
My dog not only likes to play fetch, but he also likes to chase cars.

OR
My dog likes not only to play fetch, but also to chase cars.

With Phrases or Clauses of Comparison
When you connect two clauses or phrases with a word of comparison, such as than or as, use parallel structure.

Example

Not Parallel:
I would rather pay for my education than financial aid.

Parallel:
I would rather pay for my education than receive financial aid.
With Lists
When you are comparing items in a list, use parallel structure.

Example

Not Parallel:
John Taylor Gatto criticizes public schools because they are compulsory, funded by the government, and destroy students' humanity.

Parallel:
John Taylor Gatto criticizes public schools because they are compulsory, government-funded, and normalizing.

OR
John Taylor Gatto criticizes public schools because they require students to attend, receive money from the government, and destroy students' humanity.

Exercise
Read the following example sentences and revise any that do not use parallel structure. Remember that there are many ways to revise a sentence to reflect parallel structure; if possible, rewrite each incorrect sentence in more than one way.

Some helpful hints on how to revise sentences for parallel structure:
1) Figure out what parts of the sentence are being compared.
2) Decide whether they are parallel, i.e. arranged or constructed in the same way.
3) If they are not, make them parallel by making the grammatical construction the same in each part.

Examples

I would rather eat potatoes than to eat rice.

Global warming affects humans, the environment, and is scary.

It's harder to do long division than dividing with a calculator.

Pirates ransacked the mansion, but they didn’t steal all the silver.

Merchants receive either money or trade goods with their clients.

Bruce Wayne enjoys donning his Batman costume, answering the Commissioner's phone calls, and saving Gotham City from cruel villains like the Penguin.

EXERCISE 3-1  Parallelism

Edit the following sentences to correct faulty parallelism. Example:

Rowena began her work day by pouring a cup of coffee and checking 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.