

Parallel Structure

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, accurate ly, 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.

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 for these purposes: to find word meanings, pronunciations, correct spellings, and looking up irregular verbs.

Parallel:

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

The examples below show how to repair faulty parallelism.

Example #1

FAULTY: My uncle likes **to eat** in expensive restaurants *and* visiting museums.

CORRECT: My uncle likes **to eat** in expensive restaurants *and* **to visit** museums.

CORRECT: My uncle likes eating in expensive restaurants *and* **visiting** museums.

Example #2

FAULTY: My friends never judged me by **my words** *or* what I did.

CORRECT: My friends never judged me by **my words** *or* my actions.

CORRECT: My friends never judged me by what I said *or* (by) **what I did**.

Directions: Each sentence below contains faulty parallelism with coordinate conjunctions. Revise each sentence so that the elements joined by the coordinate conjunction are parallel to one another.

1. What I said or my actions upset everyone in the room.

Ex. What I said or what I did upset everyone in the room.

2. She suggested that I write a memoir and to send it to a good publisher.

3. The instructor advised me to use the rearview mirror often, and I should observe the speed limit.

4. People are paying more now for health insurance but to get less coverage.

5. Doing strenuous exercise and poor nutrition habits can lead to illness.

6. We put the pictures and what our itinerary was into the album.

7. Many young people like to skateboard and watching the techniques of other skateboarders.

8. Joe wants to buy a vest that has buttons or closing with a zipper.

9. Her ideas are usually bright and of importance.

10. Good sense and being thoughtful are two valuable assets.

Use parallel structure with elements in lists or in a series. A series is a group of **three or more** elements in a row. The last element in the series is connected to the others with one of these coordinating conjunctions: *and, or, but (not), or yet (not)*.

Series of words

She wanted three things: **money, power, and security.**

Series of infinitives

There was no opportunity **to do** my taxes, **to request** an extension, *or* **to explain** my situation.

Series of prepositional phrases

He found cleaning supplies **in the closet, under the sink, but not in the garage.**

Series of clauses

The company doesn't care about **who you are, how you got here, or why you have come.**

Directions: Each sentence below contains faulty parallelism with elements in a series. Revise each sentence so that the elements are parallel to one another.

1. The students have dissected frogs, cats, and how to dissect human torsos.

Ex.: The students have dissected frogs, cats, and human torsos.

2. At the store my duties are to keep the shelves stocked, to work the registers, and assisting customers.

3. Original, imaginative, and seeming almost fantastic describe the techniques of Dali's paintings.

4. My brother enjoys three activities: checkers, welding, and he collects baseball cards.

5. Later that day, Mike took the fishing rods to the lake, caught several fish, and he fell asleep.

6. The nanny was supposed to feed the children, walk the dog, and some dusting in the living room.

7. The condominium board's goals include building up a reserve fund, keeping the community informed, and property assessment.

8. Our baseball coach taught us how to hit, tag out runners, and base stealing.

9. We want a candidate who has a sense of commitment, a good record in public office, and who has experience in foreign affairs.

10. Reading mystery novels, exercising in the park, and crossword puzzles occupy a good deal of my retirement time.

Use parallel structure with elements being compared. (**X** is *more than / better than* **Y**)

When we compare things, we often use words such as *more, less, better, and worse*. We connect the items being compared with words like *as* and *than*.

Driving to New York *can actually take less time than* **flying** there.

Miriam's ability to come up with projects *far exceeded* **her resolve to work** on them.

How you live your life *is just as important as* **how much money you make**.

Directions: Each sentence below contains faulty parallelism with elements in a comparison.. Revise each sentence so that the elements are parallel to one another.

1 It is harder to tie a slip knot than tying a square knot.

Ex.: It is harder to tie a slip know than to tie a square knot.

2. We enjoyed water skiing much more than when we swam in the lake.

3. Driving will get you there more quickly than to walk.

4. A big car is not necessarily better than one that is small.

5. Hearing her sing in person was ten times better than if you heard her on the radio.

6. He felt that being a good listener was just as important as to talk well.

7. Her excuses bothered me more than she was absent.

8. It is better to learn the material slowly than cramming on the night before the test.

9. What you actually do is a better indication of your true motives than your words.

10. One is more likely to slip on a banana peel than when an orange peel is on the floor.

When we talk about **parallel structure**, or "faulty parallelism" as some call it, we're dealing with a balancing act. The idea isn't too hard, but most people don't think about it.

So what are we balancing? . . . *pairs* of words or *series* of words. Look at the following:

Pairs
a and b
a or b

Series
a, b, and c
a, b, or c

Looks kind of like an algebra equation, doesn't it? Have no fear! This is a math free zone! Just think of the letters as standing for *words* or *groups of words*. Any words or groups of words that you plug in have to be the same kinds of words or word patterns. That's all there is to it! Let's see how the "*formula*" works:

Pairs
running and jumping, bothered and bewildered, open or shut, laughing or crying

Series
broken, bedraggled, and bone-tired
an old shoe, a stuffed bear, and a chewed-up blanket

Which of the following paired sentences are parallel? Put a checkmark in the box.

-
- | | |
|--------------------------|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | She likes to listen to music and reading the latest novels. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | She likes listening to music and reading the latest novels. |
-

-
- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | He spent his time studying Spanish, working at the convenience store, and jogging every afternoon. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | He spent his time studying Spanish. working at the convenience store, and he jogged every afternoon. |
-

- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The dog was excited: running, barking, and he chased after the boys. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The dog was excited: running, barking, and chasing after the boys. |
-
- | | |
|--------------------------|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The apartment was filled with old newspapers, broken bottles, and the ashtrays were overflowing. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | The apartment was filled with old newspapers, broken bottles, and overflowing ashtrays. |
-

2. Make the following sentences parallel by writing in the correct form above the sentence.

Mary wanted to paint her office, to add some new draperies, and the carpet need cleaning.

Last year, my brother dropped out of school, was looking for work, and needed a place to stay.

He watched the latest version of *King Lear*, studied for his math test, and was talking on the phone.

Parallel Structure Worksheet

Each of the following sentences starts well but then goes off the track. Rewrite the italicized part to make it *parallel* with the rest of the sentence. Change or add things as necessary.

1. We were dirty, hungry, and *without a penny*.
2. My roommate liked to repair things around the house and *his own cooking*.
3. During the day, we went on long hikes, rowed around the lake, or *just leisure time*.
4. She returned to pay the rent and *because she had left some of her things*.
5. Two things that I found hard to learn as a freshman were to get enough sleep and *trimming expenses*.
6. He asked me about my courses and *where I was planning to be next year*.
7. The doctor said that I should rest and *not to get excited or upset*.
8. Hitler's followers considered other nations to be racially inferior and *were fit only for slave labor*.
9. The best way to combat juvenile delinquency is not to set up more social agencies but *by restoring old-fashioned discipline in the home*.
10. The book told how to build a gun cabinet, how to build a bookcase, and *all types of furniture that you can make*.
11. When I was a member of the basketball team, everyone met me with a happy smile, made lively conversation, and *I was invited to many parties*.
12. Fires, caused by unheeding persons, have destroyed valuable forests and *thereby decreasing our lumber resources*.
13. In basketball, there is never a dull moment, any team can win, and *a fine display of teamwork*.
14. My parents liked peace and quiet and *to relax in the evening at home*.
15. Esther is a helpful person and *who makes friends easily*.
16. Yosemite is a park with spectacular scenery and *which has half-tame bears*.
17. My friends were always going off to jog in the park or *a game of tennis*.
18. The manager asked me to file an application and *would I leave my number*.
19. We went to rallies to protest against pesticides, oppose nuclear power, or *other current causes*.
20. My roommate was a smart dresser, a good student, and *really knew how to talk*.

WORKSHEET 13

Using Parallel Structure (Rule 10 f)

Exercise a Most of the following sentences are out of balance because they lack parallel structure. On the lines provided, rewrite each sentence, giving it parallel structure. If a sentence already has parallel structure, write C.

EXAMPLE 1. Being compassionate and because she knows a lot about animals,

Jessica will make a good veterinarian. Because she is compassionate

and knows a lot about animals, Jessica will make a good veterinarian.

1. Rafael delivered his speech with confidence and enthusiastically. _____

2. In 1923 Garrett Morgan patented a traffic light with red, yellow, and green lights that looked very different from today's traffic lights. _____

3. Mrs. Shapiro had heard about the new hockey league but not that there would be a team in Greensboro. _____

4. The selection at the downtown CD store is better than going to the mall. _____

5. I have traveled by bus, by train, and by subway, but never by boat. _____

6. Thelma likes playing the clarinet, to march in the band, and watching the football games. _____

7. The advertisement claims that this toothpaste kills more germs and prevents more cavities than any other toothpaste. _____

Continued 

Language Handbook **10** **Worksheet 13** (continued)

8. My friend Ray is loyal, fun-loving, and shows kindness to everyone. _____

9. The doctor told Uncle Lawrence that he should eat more healthful foods and to start an exercise program. _____

10. I want a new lathe, a good workbench, and to have enough time to finish making the table. _____

Exercise b Below each of the following incomplete sentences are two expressions. Complete each sentence by choosing the expression that makes the sentence parallel. On the line provided, write the letter (*a* or *b*) of the expression you choose.

EXAMPLE 1. A volcano is an opening in the earth's crust through which a .

- a. lava, rocks, ashes, and gases escape b. it throws rocks and ashes, and lava and gases escape

1. Volcanoes have inspired both fascination and _____.
 a. people feared them throughout history b. fear in people throughout history
2. This fear is caused partially by our lack of understanding of the causes of volcanoes and _____.
 a. partially by our inability to control them b. partially because we are unable to control them
3. Not only are volcanoes very destructive, _____.
 a. they provide benefits b. they also can be very beneficial
4. Lava rock is used in building roads, and _____.
 a. pumice, a glass that comes from lava, is used for grinding and polishing materials b. they use pumice, a glass that comes from lava, for grinding and polishing materials
5. Countries with many volcanoes, such as Italy, Mexico, and New Zealand, use underground steam as a source of energy, and _____.
 a. homes in Reykjavik, Iceland, are heated with water from volcanic hot springs b. Reykjavik, Iceland, uses water from volcanic hot springs to heat homes