Parallel Structure

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Similar Ideas and Parallel Structure

- Parallel structure is used by writers and speakers in order to place similar (or coordinate) ideas together into a logical pattern.

- When similar ideas are placed into a logical pattern, people will more easily and quickly understand the similarities.
Parallel Ideas

Like parallel roads, parallel ideas are easier to understand and result in fewer problems.

**Unparallel structure**
Critical thinking skills are used to write paragraphs, essays, and doing research.

**Unparallel Ideas:**
to write paragraphs
essays
doing research

**Parallel Structure**
Critical thinking skills are used to write paragraphs, to create essays, and to do research.

**Parallel Ideas:**
to write paragraphs
to create essays
to do research
When to Use Parallel Structure

Parallel structure should be used when joining similar items with:

- coordinating conjunctions
- correlative conjunctive pairs
- comparisons beginning with the words “than” and “as”
- other structures
Coordinating Conjunctions

- Parallel structure is needed when joining **two or more similar ideas** with coordinating conjunctions (**fanboys**).
- If two words or phrases are joined, no comma is needed.
- If three or more words or phrases are joined, commas are needed.

```plaintext
fanboys

for
and
nor
but
or
yet
so

, , and
```
Coordinating Conjunction

Example

Nonparallel

The classroom had thirty desks, new computers, and the cabinets were painted green.

Parallel

The classroom had thirty desks, new computers, and green cabinets.

If the similar ideas being joined by a coordinating conjunction are two clauses, rather than words or phrases, a comma is needed: The classroom had thirty desks, and the new computers were green.
Correlative Conjunctive Pairs

- Parallel structure is needed when joining two similar ideas with correlative conjunctive pairs.
- A similar idea is placed after each one of the paired conjunctions.

either ___ or ___
neither ___ nor ___
whether ___ or ___
both ___ and ___
not only ___ but also ___
Correlative Conjunctive Pair

Example

Nonparallel

Not only will teachers have skills but also police officers should be able to write well.

Parallel

Not only teachers but also police officers should be able to write well.

either__ or __

neither__ nor __

whether__ or __

both__ and __

not only__ but also__
Items Being Compared and/or Contrasted

Parallel structure is needed when joining two similar ideas with “than” or “as.”

___ than ___

___ as ___
Items Being Compared and/or Contrasted Example

**Nonparallel**
Marginal notes more easily can be added to a page by using a pencil than if we write with a highlighter.

**Parallel**
Marginal notes more easily can be added to a page by using a pencil than by using a highlighter.
Other Structures

Parallel structure is needed when joining **two or more similar ideas** in many different structures, including lists, headings, and clauses joined with semi-colons.
Other Structures Example

Nonparallel

In the kitchen, the light fixtures were brand new, and they all had energy-efficient fluorescent bulbs; the lamps in the living room were antiques, but they still all had new light bulbs that saved energy.

Parallel

In the kitchen, the light fixtures were brand new, and they all had energy-efficient fluorescent bulbs; in the living room, the lamps were antiques, but they all still had new energy-saving light bulbs.
Three Methods of Finding Parallel Structure Errors

1. Compare the joined items.
2. Analyze each item.
3. Check the function words.

Nonparallel Structure:
People can learn by writing ideas down, to listen to lectures, and we all love to practice tasks.
Compare the Joined Items

1. Compare each of the joined (coordinated) items to the other coordinate items in the sentence, list, or series of headings.

2. Pay particular attention to the **beginnings** and **endings** of each coordinate item.

People can learn:

- by writing ideas down
- to listen to lectures
- we all love to practice tasks

People can learn:

- by writing down ideas
- by listening to lectures
- by practicing tasks
Analyze Each Item

Analyze each coordinate item separately to see if it fits correctly with the rest of the sentence.

Nonparallel Structure:
Emphasis can be added either with a pretty highlighter or bright pen.

Analysis of one coordinate item:
Emphasis can be added with a pretty highlighter.

Analysis of another coordinate item:
Emphasis can be added bright pen.

Revision with Parallel Structure:
Emphasis can be added either with a pretty highlighter or with a bright pen.
A **function word** indicates an upcoming grammatical structure. For example, a preposition indicates an upcoming prepositional phrase.

Check all of the **function words** to ensure that repetition of grammatical structures is happening.

- **Nonparallel**
  - The book was placed **on the table, near the pencil and lamp.**

- **Parallel**
  - The book was placed **on the table, near the pencil, and beside the lamp.**
More Information

The Writing Center at the Community College of Rhode Island has more online resources.
Contact Information

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