

PARALLEL STRUCTURE

WHAT IS A PARALLEL STRUCTURE?

Parallel structure is the use of matching words, phrases, clauses, or sentence structures to express similar ideas and to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. Parallel structure occurs when two or more ideas in the sentence perform the same function. The usual way to join parallel structures is with the use of coordinating conjunctions such as “and” or “or.”

Using parallel structures effectively can increase coherence and comprehension in a paragraph; sentences become easy to follow and emphasize relationships among equivalent ideas. Lack of parallelism can create awkward sentences that confuse readers and have little meaning.

PARALLEL STRUCTURE USAGE

Parallel structure coordinates items in a series, paired items, and elements in lists and outlines.

ITEMS IN A SERIES:

- **Correct:** This weekend Rachel wants to go **hiking, biking, and swimming.**
*the -ing of each verb in the series creates parallel structure.
- **Incorrect:** Rachel wants to go **hiking, for a bike ride, and swimming.**
*the three items are not in the same form, making this incorrect.

PAIRED ITEMS:

In order to graduate, she needs to take **English** and **History.**

Mercury and **Venus** are planets in the universe.

Brian did not want **eggs** or pancakes for breakfast.

*Paired items linked by correlative conjunctions (**not only/but also, both/and, either/or, neither/nor, and whether/or**) should be presented in parallel form.

Professor Merry not only needs to grade papers, but also needs to create two tests.

Neither Mercury nor Venus is an inhabitable planet.

I would love to go to either Egypt or Italy.

*Parallel structure also shows the contrast between paired elements linked by **than** or **as**. The verbs in this sentence are parallel because they are both in the infinitive form.

Heather chose to stay in Virginia than to move to Washington, D.C.

ELEMENTS IN LISTS & OUTLINES:

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

PARALLEL NOUNS:

Police officers, nurses, and fire fighters are all life-saving occupations.

I bought a pen, a pack of paper, and a notebook.

PARALLEL VERBS:

During the 21st century, scientists found a vaccine for the flu and discovered a cure for measles.

*“Found” and “discovered” are both verbs in the simple past tense.

PARALLEL PHRASES:

You can be successful as a lawyer by working hard, reading the latest court cases, staying up-to-date on laws and regulations, and giving a lot of time to your clients.

*“Working, reading, staying, and “giving” are all gerunds that begin four phrases in this series. Thus, the sentence is parallel.