Parallel Structure

**Parallel structure** is 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 structure is with the use of coordinating conjunctions, such as “and” or “or”.

**Sentence-level Parallel Structure**

**Words and Phrases**

- With the –ing form (gerund) of words
  
  *Parallel:* Mary likes hiking, swimming, and cycling.

- With infinitive phrases
  
  *Parallel:* Mary likes to hike, to swim, and to ride a bicycle.

- Do not mix forms
  
  *Not Parallel:* Mary likes hiking, swimming, and to ride a bicycle.
  
  *Parallel:* Mary likes hiking, swimming, and riding a bicycle.

**Clauses**

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

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

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. (last clause is 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. (all clauses are active)

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

Not Parallel: The dictionary can be used for these purposes: to find word meanings, pronunciations, correct spellings, and looking up irregular verbs. (last clause is passive).

Parallel: The dictionary can be used for these purposes: to find word meanings, pronunciations, correct spellings, and irregular verbs. (all clauses are plural nouns)

Proofreading Strategies
• 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? 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.

Theme-Based Parallel Structure
If your introduction or thesis contains a certain number of elements, structure your paper so that it is parallel to the order in which those elements appear:

Thesis: Wordsworth uses themes of hallucination, sleep, and death to illustrate the ties between reality and the world of the mind.

Paragraph 1: focus on hallucination
Paragraph 2: focus on sleep
Paragraph 3: focus on death

Within each paragraph, parallel structure can be used to organize thoughts and examples:

Paragraph 1: Topic – Explanation of Wordsworth’s use of hallucination in poetry.
Structure – Quotations from poems. Connection between hallucination and ties reality and the mind.
Paragraph 2: Topic – Explanation of Wordsworth’s use of **sleep** in poetry.
   Structure – Quotations from poems. Connection between **sleep** and ties between reality and the mind.

Paragraph 3: Topic – Explanation of Wordsworth’s use of **death** in poetry.
   Structure – Quotations from poems. Connection between **death** and ties between reality and the mind.