



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.

Parallel: Mary likes to **hike**, **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.

Not Parallel: The production manager was asked to write his report **quickly**, **accurately**, and **thorough**.

Parallel: The production manager was asked to write his report **quickly**, **accurately**, and **thoroughly**.

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 reports 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 reports in a careless manner, and **lacked** motivation.

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.

