

PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Parallel structure or parallelism is the rule that words or phrases in a series should be in the same form.

Katniss likes to run, hunt and hike.

Run, hunt and hike is the **series**.

The words *run, hunt and hike* are the **words** (or **phrases** in other cases) in the series.

For this sentence the **form** of the words is present tense verb. *Run, hunt and hike* are all in the same form.

Correct parallel structure is important because it makes a sentence easier to read and understand. Correct parallel structure allows for essays and paragraphs to flow more smoothly for the reader.

To fix an error in parallel structure, the writer must put all the words or phrases in a series in the same form. Here are some examples of errors in parallel structure and how these errors can be fixed.

Incorrect: Marisa stopped at the grocery store, the bank and ran to the library

Correct: *Marissa stopped at the grocery store, the bank and the library.*

In this sentence, the words in the series are all nouns with the word the before the noun. For this sentence to be correct, the last part ran to the library should be changed to the library.

Incorrect: This weekend I have to write an essay, do a book report and a lab.

Correct: *This weekend I have to write an essay, do a book report and complete a lab.*

In this example, each noun in the series comes in a phrase with a verb before it. The last part of the series a lab does not match because it lacks a verb. This can be fixed by adding a verb to come before a lab. The verb complete has been added to make the phrase parallel to the others.

Incorrect: Attaining a college degree is neither cheap nor will it be easy.

Correct: *Attaining a college degree is neither cheap nor easy.*

The series in this sentence contains two phrases cheap and will it be easy. To make the phrases parallel, the writer can get rid of will it be.

Incorrect: Every night before bedtime, Ivy reads a book, singing a song and says a prayer.

Correct: *Every night before bedtime, Ivy reads a book, sings a song and says a prayer.*

The phrases in this series involve a verb and a noun. All the nouns are in present tense except for singing which is in the present progressive or *-ing* form. In order for this sentence to be correct, singing must be changed to sings to match the rest of the sentence.

Sometimes it can be unclear to a writer whether or not something in a sentence constitutes a series. Here are some ways one can identify a series and make sure parallel structure is used **correctly**.

1. Series exist in sentences that use **coordinating conjunctions**. **Coordinating conjunctions** are words that connect words, phrases or clauses in sentences. The acronym **FANBOYS** can help one remember the coordinating conjunctions. The coordinating conjunctions are **for, and, or, but, nor, yet, so**. Here are some examples of sentences with coordinating conjunctions where parallel structure is used **correctly**.

We need to buy peaches, strawberries, **and** melons from the farmer's market

Sally's cat is fat **but** he is feisty

I don't know where he went **or** when he will be back.

I will not go to the store **nor** will I make you a pie.

2. Parallel structure must take place in sentence with correlative conjunctions. Correlative conjunctions are like coordinating conjunctions because they link words, phrases and clauses in a series. However, correlative conjunctions consist of two words paired together. Some common correlative conjunctions are: *not only... but also, neither/either... or, whether... or, as many as*. Here are some examples of sentences with correlative conjunctions where parallel structure is used **correctly**.

Not only was she tired, **but** she was **also** sick to her stomach.

Neither snow **nor** rain can keep me from you.

I do not know **whether** the recipe calls for baking soda **or** baking powder.

There are **as many** desks **as** there are students.

3. When making comparisons, a sentence must be parallel. Here are some examples of sentences with comparisons that have **correct** parallel structure.

I would rather take the train than take the bus.

Sam's car is faster than Alex's car.

Strawberries are just as tasty as blueberries.

The *Harry Potter* series is just as good as *The Hunger Games* series.

PRACTICE

Please review the following sentences for errors in parallel structure. Correct the sentence by rewriting it. Not all sentences are incorrect. Answers may vary.

1. My dog is not only friendly but he is also playful.
2. We can go to the park or out dancing.
3. Jeremy likes to read historical, realistic and speculative fiction.
4. Tell Michael I said he can either do homework now or later.
5. Buying a car is not a decision to take lightly nor be careless about.
6. Tyler is for the legalization not criminalization of marijuana.
7. Sally needs a new stove, dishwasher and knives for her kitchen.
8. My first grade teacher taught me how to write, how to read and play tic-tac-toe.
9. She will not admit it nor will she be apologizing.
10. The whole wheat pasta is better than enriched wheat pasta.
11. Literature classes teach students to analyze texts, think critically, and have better writing
12. Beets are just as nutrient rich as rutabagas even though they are not in season.

ANSWER KEY

1. Correct. Friendly and playful are both adjectives
2. Incorrect. We can go to the park or to a dance.
3. Correct. Historical, speculative and realistic are all adjectives.
4. Correct. Now and later are both adjectives.
5. Incorrect. Buying a car is not a decision to take lightly or carelessly.
6. Correct.
7. Incorrect. Sally needs a new stove, dishwasher and set of knives for her kitchen.
8. Incorrect. My first grade teacher taught me how to read, how to write and how to play tic-tac-toe.
9. Incorrect. She will not admit it nor will she apologize.
10. Correct.
11. Literature classes teach students to analyze texts, think critically, and improve writing skills.
12. Correct.