

Lesson 11. Parallelism

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Learning Objectives

After this lesson, students will be able to:

- Define what parallel and parallelism mean.
- Identify other terms used to refer to parallelism.
- Understand the rules of parallelism.
- Recognize the relevance of paralleling elements in sentences.
- Repair sentences with faulty elements which do not make it parallel.
- Make observing the rules of parallelism.

Lesson 11. Parallelism

Sentence elements that are alike in function should also be alike in construction. These elements should be in the same grammatical form so that they are **parallel**.

Using parallel structure in your writing will help with

- 1) economy 2) clarity 3) equality 4) delight.

Here are some examples of parallel elements:

words	infinitives	prepositional phrases	subordinate clauses
thinking	to see	at the time	because I care
running	to understand	in the house	after they met

These elements, on the other hand, are not parallel

words	infinitives	prepositional phrases	subordinate clauses
thinking	to see	at the time	because I care
to run	since I understand	being here	to meet

Lesson 11. Parallelism

The balance between two or more similar words, phrases or clauses is called parallelism in grammar. Parallelism is also called parallel structure or parallel construction. Parallel construction prevents awkwardness, promotes clarity and improves writing style and readability.

➔ Nancy likes *playing the piano, the trumpet and play the guitar.*

➔ Nancy likes *the piano, the trumpet and the guitar.*

➔ Nancy likes *playing the piano, the trumpet and the guitar.*

➔ She *played basketball, had a shower and gone to school.*

➔ She *played basketball, had a shower and went to school.*

➔ The company is looking for a candidate who is *friendly, organized, meticulous, and is going to arrive to work on time.*

➔ The company is looking for a candidate who is *friendly, organized, meticulous, and punctual.*

PARALLEL

NOT PARALLEL

Lesson 11. Parallelism

1. With elements joined by coordinating conjunctions, especially ***and***, ***but***, and ***or***.

Examples of **parallel words**:

Thinking *or* **running** is not my cup of tea.

Thinking *and* **running** often accompany one another as I exercise.

*coordinating
conjunction*

Examples of **parallel phrases**:

She likes **to look** *but* not **to listen**.

You will find the light bulbs **in the closet** *or* **under the kitchen counter**

Examples of **parallel clauses**:

Please bring the bill **after we have had some coffee** *or* **when your shift is over**

We wondered **who he was** *and* **what he was doing**.

Lesson 11. Parallelism

The examples below show how to **repair** “faulty” parallelism.

My uncle likes *to eat in expensive restaurants* and *visiting museums*.

My uncle likes *to eat in expensive restaurants* and *to visit museums*.

My uncle likes *eating in expensive restaurants* and *visiting museums*.

My friends never judged me *by my words* or *what I did*.

My friends never judged me *by my words* or *my actions*.

My friends never judged me *by what I said* or *(by) what I did*.

NOT PARALLEL

PARALLEL



Lesson 7. Inversion

Revise each sentence so that the elements joined by the coordinate conjunction are parallel to one another.

1. What I said or my actions upset everyone in the room.
2. She suggested that I write a memoir and to send it to a good publisher.
3. The instructor advised me to use the rearview mirror often, and I should observe the speed limit.
4. People are paying more now for health insurance but to get less coverage.
5. Doing strenuous exercise and poor nutrition habits can lead to illness.
6. We put the pictures and what our itinerary was into the album.
7. Many young people like to skateboard and watching the techniques of other skateboarders.
8. Joe wants to buy a vest that has buttons or closes with a zipper.
9. Her ideas are usually sound and of importance.
10. Good sense and being thoughtful are two valuable assets.

Lesson 11. Parallelism

2. Use parallel structure with elements in lists or in a series.

A series is a group of **three or more** elements in a row. The last element in the series is connected to the others with one of these coordinating conjunctions: *and*, *or*, *but (not)*, or *yet (not)*. Commas (,) should be placed between each element in the series and before the coordinating conjunction.

Series of Words	Series of infinitives	Series of prepositional phrases	Series of Clauses
She wanted three things: money , power and security .	There was no opportunity to do my taxes, to request an extension, <i>or</i> to explain my situation.	He found cleaning in the closet , under the sink, <i>but not in the</i> garage .	The company doesn't care about who you are , how you got here , <i>or</i> why you have come .

coordinating conjunction

Lesson 11. Parallelism

As the examples below show, a series whose components are not in parallel format sounds awkward and may cause misunderstanding.

The tribe emphasized **collective survival, mutual aid, and being responsible for one another.**

The tribe emphasized **collective survival, mutual aid, and responsibility for one another.**

The frustrated customer wanted **to exchange the articles, to obtain a refund, or she wanted to speak** to the manager.

The frustrated customer wanted **(to) exchange the articles, (t)o obtain a refund, or (to) speak to the manager.**

Note that in the corrected versions of example #2, you may choose to repeat the "to" or to omit it.

NOT PARALLEL

PARALLEL



Lesson 7. Inversion

Revise each sentence so that the elements joined by the coordinate conjunction are parallel to one another.

1. The students have dissected frogs, cats, and how to dissect human torsos.
2. At the store my duties are to keep the shelves stocked, to work the registers, and assisting customers.
3. Original, imaginative, and seeming almost fantastic describe the techniques of Dali's paintings.
4. My brother enjoys three activities: checkers, welding, and he collects baseball cards.
5. Later that day, Mike took the fishing rods to the lake, caught several fish, and he fell asleep.
6. The nanny was supposed to feed the children, walk the dog, and some dusting in the living room.
7. The condominium board's goals include building up a reserve fund, keeping the community informed, and property assessment.
8. Our baseball coach taught us how to hit, tag out runners, and base stealing.
9. We want a candidate who has a sense of commitment, a good record in public office, and who has experience in foreign affairs.
10. Reading mystery novels, exercising in the park, and crossword puzzles occupy a good deal of my retirement time.

Lesson 11. Parallelism

3. Use parallel structure with elements being compared. (**X** is *more than / better than* **Y**). When we compare things, we often use words such as *more, less, better, and worse*. We connect the items being compared with words like *as* and *than*.

Note the comparison methods in the examples below:

Driving to New York *can actually take less time than* **flying** here.

Miriam's ability to come up with projects *far exceeded* her **resolve to work on them**.

How you live your life *is just as important as* **how much money you make**.

The elements being compared are parallel to one another:

driving is parallel to ***flying***

Miriam's ability to is parallel to ***her resolve to***

How you live is parallel to ***how much money you make***

Comparing items without using parallel structure **may cause confusion** about what is being compared to what.

Lesson 11. Parallelism

Repair faulty parallelism in comparisons by making one element of the comparison parallel to the other.



I like **swimming** better than **to dive**.

I like **swimming** better than **diving**.

I like **to swim** better than **to dive**.

Note that you may choose to change either element to match the other.

NOT PARALLEL

PARALLEL



Lesson 11. Parallelism

Revise each sentence so that the elements joined by the coordinate conjunction are parallel to one another.

1. It is harder to tie a slip knot than tying a square knot.
2. We enjoyed water skiing much more than when we swam in the lake.
3. Driving will get you there more quickly than to walk.
4. A big car is not necessarily better than one that is small.
5. Hearing her sing in person was ten times better than if you heard her on the radio.
6. He felt that being a good listener was just as important as to talk well.
7. Her excuses bothered me more than she was absent.
8. It is better to learn the material slowly than cramming on the night before the test.
9. What you actually do is a better indication of your true motives than your words.
10. One is more likely to slip on a banana peel than when an orange peel is on the floor.

Lesson 11. Parallelism

4. Use parallel structure with elements joined by a **linking verb** or a **verb of being**.
Joining elements with linking verbs or verbs of being suggests a completing of the first item by the second one. Often, in fact, an equality between the two is being set up, as the examples below illustrate.

What you *is* what you get.

What you = what you get.

EXAMPLES

Being Jim's friend *means* being constantly alert.

Being Jim's friend = being constantly alert.

To know her *is* to love her.

To know her = to love her.

Lesson 11. Parallelism

Repair faulty parallelism in comparisons by making one element of the comparison parallel to the other.



To succeed is **opening** a new activity.

To succeed is **to open** a new activity.

Succeeding is **opening** a new activity.

NOT PARALLEL

PARALLEL



Lesson 11. Parallelism

Identify the faulty elements and revise each sentence so that the elements joined by the coordinate conjunction are parallel to one another.

1. To take the fifth amendment is refusing to incriminate yourself.
2. What she said was her meaning.
3. Doing well on the GRE means to assure yourself acceptance into a good graduate school.
4. Many people mistakenly think that being wealthy is the same thing as to be happy.
5. Marrying Major Boundy meant to leave her family and to travel all over the world.

Lesson 11. Parallelism

5. Use parallel structure with elements joined by a **correlative conjunction**.

These are the major correlative conjunctions:

either / or

neither / nor

both / and

not only / but also

Correlative conjunctions work in pairs.

Important: Whatever grammatical structure follows one **must be parallel** to the grammatical structure that follows the other.

EXAMPLES

either/or
neither/nor

We were told to **either** reduce the staff **or** find new customers.
Agnes was **neither** going to classes **nor** doing her assignments.

both/and

I would like **both** to buy a new house **and** to purchase a new car.
I would like to buy **both** a new house **and** a new car.

not only/but
also

As young recruits, we were told **not only** what to do **but also** what to think.
Sam hoped **not only** to go to France for the summer **but also** to live there later on.

Lesson 11. Parallelism

Repair faulty parallelism with correlative conjunctions by making one structure parallel to the other as shown below.

either/or

You are either **for us** or **you are against us**.

You are either **for us** or **against us**.

Either **you are for us** or **you are against us**.

neither/nor

Mary is neither **a Democrat** nor **she is a Republican**.

Mary is neither **a Democrat** nor **a Republican**.

Neither **is Mary a Democrat** nor **is she a Republican**.

both/and

The show is both **enjoyable** and **it is educational**.

The show is both **enjoyable** and **educational**.

not only/

but also

The author not only wants **fame** but also **money**.

The author not only **wants fame** but also **wants money**.

The author wants not only **fame** but also **money**.

NOT PARALLEL

PARALLEL



Lesson 11. Parallelism

Revise each sentence so that the elements joined by the coordinate conjunction are parallel to one another.

1. Either ask Ben or Marianne to prepare the agenda for tonight's meeting.
2. The director for special projects not only visited our regional center in Baltimore but also our main office in New York.
3. The exercise both toned my muscles and it helped me to lose weight.
4. At my training session, I was not only taught how to work the register, but also how to treat customers courteously.
5. Either work today, or you will have to work tomorrow.
6. My friends are neither anxious to see the items in the museum nor are they happy about the admission price.
7. She is both happy about the raise and she is nervous about the extra responsibility.
8. They not only ate all the food in the house but they also didn't clean up their mess.
9. Bert will meet us either at the restaurant or he will be at the taxi stand.
10. The doctor promised neither to cause pain during the procedure nor leave a scar.

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Answer the following questions and make sure parallelism rules are being followed. In your sentences, identify the parallel elements and share it in class.

1. *How does your best friend look like?*
2. *What would the choices you have if you suddenly lost your job? (either/or)*
3. *Talk about the things that you learned at school. (not only, but also)*
4. *Why are a lot of people hooked to Social Media?*
5. *Compare your life from 5 years ago and now.*
6. *What does it mean to succeed?*
7. *How do you find learning English?*
8. *Talk about things you aren't or don't possess which made you not qualified to achieve something. (neither/nor)*
9. *What do you suggest people who do grievous crimes be punished with?*
10. *What are the most effective ways to improves one's English speech?*

The End