

# PARALLEL CONSTRUCTION

## Maintaining Clarity, Emphasis, and Expression in Words, Phrases, Sentences, and Paragraphs

In all writing, parallel thoughts or ideas need to be expressed in similar grammatical constructions (a) to maintain sentence fluency and coherence, and (b) to emphasize the meaning and equal importance of ideas. This is parallel construction.

To achieve parallel construction in phrases, sentences, and paragraphs, all of the elements in each sentence – nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, modifiers, as well as subjects, predicates, phrases, and clauses -- need to be parallel. Faulty parallel construction will prevent readers from acquiring the intended meaning and importance of ideas writers are trying to emphasize and communicate in their text.

## Parallel Construction in Words, Phrases, and Sentences

1. *When providing a list (in sentences where two or more items are linked by "and" or "or," each element of the list needs to be parallel in form:*

Example 1: Apples, oranges, and pears are her favorite fruits.

Apples  
Oranges        are her favorite fruits.  
Pears

Example 2: The bird flew out of the nest, across the yard, and into the bush.

The bird flew                out of the nest  
                                      across the yard  
                                      into the bush

Example 3: Joe joined the team to become a better player, to get more exercise, and to meet new people.

Joe joined the team        to become a better player  
                                      to get more exercise  
                                      to meet new people

Example 4: We have two choices: to eat at a restaurant or to eat at home.

We have two choices: to eat at a restaurant  
                                      to eat at home

2. When two verbs are used in a sentence, both verbs must be parallel with the same type of verb: infinitive with infinitive (*to* phrases), and gerund with gerund (*-ing* forms):

Faulty: Dan attended the workshop *to meet other engineers, to learn about current theories, and he likes working with new computer technology.*

Parallel: Dan attended the workshop *to meet other engineers, to learn about current theories, and to work with new computer technology.*

Faulty: Ana prefers *jogging* and *to ride* her bike for exercise.

Parallel: Ana prefers *jogging* and *riding* her bike for exercise.

3. When two or more adjectives modify the same noun, then the adjectives need to be parallel in form:

Faulty: Mike is *a good teacher, a good coach, and he's been a good friend.*

Parallel: Mike is *a good teacher, a good coach, and a good friend.*

Faulty: The bag is *big, long, and was hard to carry.*

Parallel: The bag is *big, long, and hard to carry.*

4. When two or more adverbs (*-ly* forms) are present in a sentence, they need to be parallel in form:

Faulty: The students are required to work *quickly, efficiently, and to be quiet.*

Parallel: The students are required to work *quickly, efficiently, and quietly.*

5. When two or more parts of speech or clauses are present in a sentence, they need to be parallel in form:

Faulty: Our business meeting included *walking through the factory, a visit with the production team, and a meal at a fine restaurant.*

Parallel: Our business meeting included *walking through the factory, visiting with the production team, and eating a meal at a fine restaurant.*

Faulty: The solution to balancing the budget is *a tax increase and eliminating unnecessary spending.*

Parallel: The solution to balancing the budget is *a tax increase and an elimination of unnecessary spending.*

## Faulty Shifts in Parallel Construction

To maintain a consistent point of view in each sentence, writers need to be careful to use parallel shifts in sentence constructions. Faulty, unintentional shifts in tense, number, voice, mood, and discourse within a sentence will lead to the reader's incoherence of the writer's point of view.

1. *Tense*: Avoid shifts from the past tense to the present tense or from the present to past tense in a sentence:

Shift: Tom *refused* to sign the petition and *leaves* the office.

Parallel: Tom *refused* to sign the petition and *left* the office.

2. *Number*: The pronouns in a sentence must agree with their antecedents in number (singular or plural):

Shift: If *anyone* is going to attend Wednesday's lecture, *they* should purchase a ticket to reserve a seat. (*anyone* is singular, *they* is plural)

Parallel: If *anyone* is going to attend Wednesday's lecture, *he or she* should purchase a ticket to reserve a seat.

3. *Voice*: Avoid shifts from active to passive voice:

Shift: After we *removed* the books from the boxes, a bookrack *was installed* to store the books.

Parallel: After we *removed* the books from the boxes, we *installed* a bookrack to store the books.

4. *Mood*: Avoid shifts in mood (a shift from a command to a statement):

Shift: Leave the books here and then you should pay for the coffee.

Parallel: Leave the books here and pay for the coffee.

5. *Discourse*: Avoid a shift from a statement to a question (or from a question to a statement):

Shift: Tom inquired if he passed the test or will he have to take it again.

Parallel: Tom inquired if he passed the test or whether he would have to take it again.

## Parallel Construction in Paragraphs

It is also important to maintain parallel construction in paragraphs by using the same grammatical structure throughout the sentences that comprise the paragraph. The repetition of similar words, phrases, and parts of speech, as well as a consistent point of view, will help link the writer's ideas and sentences together for the reader.