

# Parallelism

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Parallel construction (parallelism) is the use of similar grammatical elements within sentences. Elements sharing the same function within a sentence should also share the same grammatical form. Just as the top and bottom lines in an = sign share the same form and function, so too should closely related elements in your writing.

## USING PARALLELISM:

Effective use of parallelism can add unity, force, clarity and balance to your writing. Be aware, however, that all words, phrases and clauses used in parallel structure must share the same grammatical form.

Incorrect (faulty) parallelism:

- **Jogging, a well-balanced diet, and exercise** all contribute toward a healthy body.
- The victims of the disease have **sore throats, a fever and their head aches**.

Correct parallel structure:

- **Jogging, eating a well-balanced diet, and exercising** all contribute toward a healthy body.
- The victims of the disease have **sore throats, fevers, and headaches**.

The grammatical forms parallel structure can share can include many different parts of speech. Here are some examples.

- **Nouns:** I ate **jambalaya, gumbo, and etouffe** when I was in New Orleans.
- **Adverbs:** My dog growled **deeply, loudly and menacingly**.
- **Verbs:** Our teacher **handed** back tests, **gave** a lecture, and **assigned** some homework.
- **Adjective Phrases:** **Playful as a kitten** but **wise as a street Tom**, the old cat played with the string while keeping a watchful eye on the mouse hole.
- **Prepositional Phrases:** The eerie, unearthly scream seemed at the same time to be coming **from outside the house, under the floorboards, and inside my head**.

Several correlative conjunctions also require parallel structure.

- This soup is both **spicy** and **sweet**. (both . . . and)
- You should either **speed up** or **slow down**. (either . . . or)
- Renaldo is not only **a cheat** but also **a liar**. (not only . . . but also)
- Grace would rather **sleep** than **work**. (rather . . . than)

## **EFFECTIVE USE OF PARALLELISM:**

Language can become much stronger and more vibrant with proper, effective use of parallelism. Use the rhythm of parallel phrases and clauses for impact. The deliberate use of word forms, word groups, and sounds can create a rhythm underlining the message the sentence delivers. Look at this excerpt from M.L. King, Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech. The deliberate use of "go back to" within each phrase creates a rhythm, drawing the reader's (or listener's) attention forward.

Key words can also be repeated to begin parallel elements. Sometimes it is possible to enhance the effect of parallelism or make parallel structures clearly stand out through the repetition of certain words used to begin parallel phrases. Such words include (but are not limited to) prepositions, articles (a, an, the) and the "to" form of the verb (infinitive). King's speech makes use of repetition as well.

- **Go back to** Mississippi, **go back to** Alabama, **go back to** South Carolina, **go back to** Georgia, **go back to** Louisiana, **go back to** the slums and ghettos of the northern cities, knowing that somehow this situation can and will be changed.

*Keep in mind that continual use of repetition can create dull prose. For this technique to work, the repetition must be mixed with a variety of word choices and sentence patterns.*

Parallel elements can also be arranged in an order that enhances the effect. Elements arranged in order from the least to the most important are arranged in climactic order--the order builds to a climax.

- You can fool **some** of the people **all** of the time, and **all** of the people **some** of the time, but you can't fool **all** of the people **all** of the time --Abraham Lincoln.

This quote builds one thought upon another from the use of the phrases "some . . . all" and "all . . . some" to "all . . . all."

Parallel forms can also take the form of balanced sentences. Balanced sentences use parallel structure to enhance the message of compared or contrasted ideas. Look at this quote by J.F.K. Notice how—like a set of scales—the sentence is balanced equally to either side of the comma; the same or similar words (your country can do . . . you can do . . .) are used to express compared ideas.

- Ask not what **your country can do** for you; ask what **you can do** for your country. --John F. Kennedy