

Parallel Structure

Parallel structure gives similar grammatical form to sentence elements with similar function and importance. Parallel structure should be used whenever your writing includes any of the following:

- Linked elements joined by coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so*—To help you remember these, take the first letter of each to spell “fanboys.”)
- Linked elements joined by correlative conjunctions (*either...or, neither...nor, not only...but also, not...but*)
- Comparison and contrast statements

In the following examples, parallel elements are underlined while conjunctions are **boldfaced**.

- During the party, the ice sculpture was melting **and** shrinking.
- As a kid, my sister would **neither** eat her vegetables **nor** clean her room.
- Some say it is better to plan for tomorrow than to live for today.

Parallel Structure Errors

Not parallel: Of all desserts, I prefer cake, pie, **and** how Anni makes strawberries dipped in chocolate.

Parallel: Of all desserts, I prefer cake, pie, **and** Anni’s chocolate-dipped strawberries.

In the first example, *cake* and *pie* are nouns but *how Anni makes strawberries dipped in chocolate* is a clause (subject + verb = clause), so the structure is not parallel. In the second example, the three words *cake*, *pie*, and *strawberries* are all nouns (and *Anni’s* and *chocolate-dipped* are just modifiers and don’t count), so the structure is parallel.

Not parallel: The presentation was **not only** engaging and informative, **but I also** found it challenging.

Parallel: The presentation was **not only** engaging and informative, **but also** challenging.

In the first sentence, while *engaging* and *informative* are both adjectives, *I found it challenging* is a clause, so the sentence is not parallel. In the second sentence, *engaging*, *informative*, and *challenging* are all adjectives, so the sentence is parallel.

Not parallel: The teacher said he was a poor student because he waited until the last minute to study for the exam, completed his lab problems carelessly, **and** his motivation was low.

Parallel: The teacher said he was a poor student because he waited until the last minute to study for the exam, completed his lab problems carelessly, **and** lacked motivation.

In the first sentence, *waited until the last minute to study for the exam* and *completed his lab problems carelessly* are verb phrases, but *his motivations was low* is an entire clause; therefore, the structure is not parallel. In the second, *waited until the last minute to study for the exam*, *completed his lab problems carelessly*, and *lacked motivation* are all verb phrases, so the sentence has parallel structure.