

Parallel Structure

APSU Writing Center Handout

What is Parallelism?

Parallelism ensures words, phrases, and clauses in a sentence follow a consistent grammatical pattern.

Why is Parallelism Important?

Enhance writing clarity and consistency.

Prevent awkward or confusing sentences.

Parallel Words

Ensure multiple items in a list share the same grammatical form.

- **Incorrect:** If students want to improve their writing, they must visit the writing center, be sure to take notes, discussing ideas with tutors, and revising their drafts.
- **Correct:** If students want to improve their writing, they must visit the writing center, take notes, discuss ideas with tutors, and revise their drafts.

Parallel Verbs

All verbs should follow the same tense and form.

- **Incorrect:** The student brainstormed ideas, wrote an outline, and was revising the introduction.
- **Correct:** The student brainstormed ideas, wrote an outline, and revised the introduction.

Infinitive Verbs ("to ___" Verbs)

Apply parallelism by including "to" consistently or only before the first verb.

- **Correct:** The tutor advised the student to outline, to draft, and to proofread.
- **Correct:** The tutor advised the student to outline, draft, and proofread.
- **Incorrect:** The tutor advised the student to outline, draft, and to proofread.

Parallel Phrases

Prepositional phrases (of, from, under, to, etc.) should follow the same structure.

- **Incorrect:** The student revised the introduction, the body paragraphs, and checking the conclusion.
- **Correct:** The student revised the introduction, adjusted the body paragraphs, and checked the conclusion.
- **Incorrect:** During the writing session, the student focused on analyzing the sources, the thesis refinement, and revising structure.
- **Correct:** During the writing session, the student focused on analyzing the sources, refining the thesis, and revising structure.

Common Parallel Structure Errors

Failing to maintain parallel structure can make sentences awkward, unclear, or grammatically incorrect. Paying attention to parallelism ensures ideas are presented consistently and read smoothly.

1. Between/And

The two elements joined by "between" and "and" must have the same grammatical form (e.g., both gerunds, both noun phrases).

- **Incorrect:** The professor explained the difference between developing a strong thesis statement and how to support an argument.
- **Correct:** The professor explained the difference between developing a strong thesis statement and supporting an argument.

2. Both/And

Both elements connected by "both" and "and" must match in structure.

- **Incorrect:** The student focused on both improving clarity and to strengthen analysis.
- **Correct:** The student focused on both improving clarity and strengthening analysis.

3. Neither/Nor

The element closest to the verb determines singular/plural, and both elements should have parallel grammatical forms.

- **Incorrect:** Neither the tutor's suggestions nor what was written in the textbook were helpful.
- **Correct:** Neither the tutor's suggestions nor the textbook explanations were helpful.

4. Not Only/But Also

Ensure the second element mirrors the grammatical form of the first to maintain balance.

- **Incorrect:** The writing center helps not only with understanding grammar but also improving argument structure.

- **Correct:** The writing center helps not only with understanding grammar but also with improving argument structure.

References

Raynes, K. (2006). Parallel structure in writing [PDF]. University of New Hampshire.

<https://www.unh.edu/student-success/sites/default/files/media/2022-07/resources-parallel-structure-writing.pdf>

Walden University Writing Center. (2025). Parallel construction. Walden University.

<https://academicguides.waldenu.edu/writingcenter/grammar/parallelconstruction>