Figure 1 The Writing Center and Academic Resource Center logo

# Parallelism

When two items are parallel, they share similar components. Parallelism in writing concerns the similarity in structure between ideas and grammatical form. Phrases and clauses that have the same grammatical structure are said to be parallel. If you write single words in a list, you should keep the list as single words.  Verb tenses should also remain the same throughout the sentence. If a writer fails to keep parallel form, the sentence(s) or list will feel awkward to the reader; that is, when parallelism is not achieved, it can create a jarring effect for the reader, as well as a grammatically incorrect structure.

Parallel structure is important when *writing a series/list, when presenting ideas as pairs, and when writing verb tenses.*

## Parallelism in a series or list

In a series or list, all of the items should keep the same grammatical form.

**Correct Parallelism:** Wizards tend to have the same personality traits: craftiness,
*Noun*
resourcefulness, rebelliousness, and determination.
    *Noun*                    *Noun*                    *Noun*

**Faulty Parallelism:** Wizards tend to have the same personality traits: craftiness,
                                                                                                *Noun*
resourcefulness,  rebelliousness, and they are determined.
    *Noun*                    *Noun*            *Pronoun / To Be Verb / Noun* (not parallel)

## Parallelism with ideas presented as pairs

When connecting two independent clauses, an independent clause and phrase, and an independent clause and dependent clause, the grammatical structure should remain the same in both pairs.

1

You can parallel ideas that come in pairs in four ways:

1) Using a coordination conjunction (FANBOYS): For, And, Nor, But, Or, Yet, So

2) Using correlative conjunctions: either, not only, but also, etc

3) Using a word introducing a comparison: Than

4) Using prepositions before and after the FANBOYS

● *Parallel ideas connected with a coordinating conjunction (FANBOYS):*

**Correct Parallelism:** Tutors are <u>finding</u> ways to improve their workshops *and* <u>creating</u> ways to increase students' retention of the material.

**Faulty Parallelism:** Tutors are <u>finding</u> ways to improve their workshops *and* <u>create</u> ways to increase students' retention of the material.

● *Parallel ideas connected with correlative conjunction:*

When connecting two ideas using either/or, neither/nor, not only/but also, both/and, and whether/or, the second part of the pair should have the same grammatical structure.

**Correct Parallelism:** The movie I saw was <u>not only</u> too long <u>but also too</u> violent.

**Faulty Parallelism:** The movie I saw was <u>not only</u> too long <u>but was also extremely</u> violent.

*In this sentence, repeating the to be verb "was" is unnecessary.*

● *Comparisons connected with **than**:*

When using *than*, the items compared should be grammatically parallel.

**Correct Parallelism:** It is easier <u>to lead</u> a simple existence <u>than to question</u> your
                              *Infinitive form*                          *Infinitive form*
programmed beliefs.

**Faulty Parallelism:** It is easier <u>to lead</u> a simple existence <u>than questioning</u> your
                             *Infinitive form*                        *ing* (not parallel)
programmed beliefs.

● *Using prepositions before and after coordinating conjunctions (FANBOYS)*:

2

**Correct Parallelism:** Writing Center reference books are used <u>for teaching</u> new tutors

<div align="center"><i>parallel</i></div>

Advanced grammar rules and <u>for teaching</u> students the basic grammar rules.
*parallel*

**Faulty Parallelism:** Writing Center reference books are used <u>to teach</u> new tutors

<div align="right"><i>Prep "to"</i> (not parallel) with "for"</div>

advanced grammar rules and <u>for teaching</u> students the basic grammar rules.


## <u>Parallelism with verb tenses</u>

Verb tenses in a sentence should remain the same:

**Correct Parallelism:** I <u>walked</u> home from work on Friday, so I <u>picked</u> up food from a

<div align="center"><i>Past</i>        <i>Past</i></div>

stand near my house.

**Faulty Parallelism:** I <u>walked</u> home from work on Friday, so I <u>pick</u> up food from a stand

<div align="center"><i>Past</i>       <i>Present</i> (Not Parallel)</div>

near my house.

**Correct Parallelism 2:** <u>They have been waiting</u> to get tickets to the concert since January,

<div align="center"><i>present perfect progressive (verb)</i></div>

and <u>they have also been looking</u> for a ride to this concert.
*present perfect progressive (verb)*

**Faulty Parallelism 2:** <u>They have been waiting</u> to get tickets to the concert since January,

<div align="center"><i>present perfect progressive (verb)</i></div>

and <u>they will be looking</u> for a ride to this concert.
*future progressive (verb)* not parallel


**Parallelism Exercise I**

**Read the following sentences for parallel grammatical structure.  Revise the**

**sentences so that they follow proper parallel structure.**

1) The computer system has multiple functions such as correcting spelling mistakes,
checking for grammatical errors, and can check paragraph structure.

2) English professors are developing new methods for teaching literary theory and

improve their syllabus for the Fall Semester.

3) The Writing Center tutors are not only trained in different writing techniques but are
   also trained to teach students MLA Format.

4) It is greater to achieve something difficult than achieving something easy.

5) I rode two buses home yesterday, and I walk the final two blocks home.

**Parallelism Exercise II**

**Read the following paragraph for parallel grammatical structure.  Revise any underlined sections that do not contain proper parallel structure.**

Many college courses require students to write essays as part of the class curriculum.  An academic essay for a college course should contain a thesis, body, and <u>to conclude</u>.  It is important for students to perform some type of pre-writing or <u>to cluster</u> before they start typing on the computer.  Pre-writing will usually help students <u>to find</u> and expand new ideas for the paper.   After pre-writing, students should type a rough draft using their previous cluster.  Students are always nervous in writing the rough draft and <u>started</u> the paper.  It is better for students to write to the end of the rough draft <u>than stopping</u> every few sentences to check the grammar.  If students do not expand their rough draft, the essay will not only be short but <u>will be</u> also disorganized.  Revising the essay for a strong thesis, organization, and <u>proper supporting </u>is the most important part of the writing process. This is what separates the strong writers from the weak writers.  The final step in writing a college paper is editing.  This is where students will check the paper for grammatical errors, proper <u>punctuating</u>, and spelling errors.  A strong writing process will allow students to write a proper college essay.