

# quicktips

## PARALLELISM

### Problem

Parallelism, or parallel construction, means the use of the same pattern of words for two or more ideas that have the same level of importance. When a sentence or passage lacks parallel construction, it is likely to seem disorganized. The reader may have to reread it to grasp the meaning or may misunderstand the relationship among ideas.

### Solutions

#### KNOW WHEN PARALLEL STRUCTURE IS REQUIRED.

- For items in a list
- For words or phrases joined by a coordinating conjunction: *and, but, yet, or, nor, for, so*
- For words or phrases that follow each half of a correlative conjunction such as *both/and, not only/but also, (n)either/(n)or, whether/or*
- For words or phrases introduced by a comparison word, usually *than* or *as*

#### PUT STRUCTURALLY EQUIVALENT WORDS OR PHRASES IN THE SAME PART OF SPEECH.

*Not parallel:* The position required experience, friendly, and get up early.

Parallel (all nouns): The position required experience, friendliness, and a willingness to get up early.

Parallel (all adjectives): They wanted someone who was experienced, friendly, and willing to get up early.

Parallel (all verbs): They wanted someone who had experience, was friendly, and liked to get up early.

#### PUT STRUCTURALLY EQUIVALENT VERBS IN THE SAME FORM.

*Not parallel:* Good health requires eating right **and** exercise regularly.

Parallel: Good health requires eating right **and** exercising regularly.

Parallel: I have always eaten right **and** exercised regularly.

Parallel: It is just **as important** to eat right **as** to exercise regularly.

Parallel: A person should **not only** eat right **but also** exercise regularly.

Parallel: My overworked boss **neither** eats right **nor** exercises regularly.

## USE CLAUSES OR COMPLETE SENTENCES CONSISTENTLY.

*Not parallel:* Three reasons were given for the concert's cancellation: the lead singer was sick, low ticket sales, and because the drummer had left the band.

*Parallel Sentences:* Three reasons were given for the concert's cancellation: the lead singer was sick, ticket sales were low, and the drummer had left the band.

*Not parallel:* The county explained when the cleanup would begin and it would be funded by a referendum.

*Parallel Clauses:* The county explained **when** the cleanup would begin **and how** it would be funded.

*Parallel Clauses:* The county explained **that** the cleanup would begin in June **and that** it would be funded by a referendum.

## As you work on the overall style or flow of your writing, CONSIDER USING PARALLELISM TO STRENGTHEN THE RELATIONSHIP AMONG SENTENCES.

Here parallel sentence openings and participial clauses link examples:

Writing is a rigorous activity. **It requires you to** think deeply, expending both mental **and** emotional energy. **It also requires you to** pay careful attention to details, double checking both word choice **and** punctuation.

*For more information:*

Anson, Chris M., and Robert A. Schwegler. *The Longman Handbook for Writers and Readers*. New York: Longman, 2000. 387–398.

Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference*. 5th ed. Boston/New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. 81–84.