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:*
