

Parallel Structure

What is parallel structure?

The most common form of parallel structure is found in sentences that employ the same pattern of words in a list. The coordinating conjunctions *and* and *or* are usually used to form these parallel structures. These conjunctions should always connect similar elements, e.g., noun to noun, verb to verb, and sentence to sentence.

Why is crafting parallel structure in your writing important?

The use of parallel structure brings balance and order to your writing. Repeating word patterns make your texts easier to read, thus increasing their clarity.

Parallel structure in lists: words

- a. From the menu, you can choose ice cream (noun) or to eat cake (infinitive + noun). **X**

From the menu, you can choose ice cream (noun) or cake (noun). **✓**

- b. Our new apartment is bright (adjective), sunny (adjective), and has five rooms (verb phrase). **X**

Our new apartment is bright (adjective), sunny (adjective), and spacious (adjective). **✓**

- c. The teacher said Mark was a poor student because he waited (past tense verb) until the last minute to study, completed (past tense verb) his homework during class, and was talking (past progressive verb) with his friends in class. **X**

The teacher said Mark was a poor student because he waited (past tense verb) until the last minute to study, completed (past tense verb) his homework during class, and talked (past tense verb) with his friends in class. **✓**

Parallel structure in lists: phrases, clauses, and sentences

- a. Claire looked under her bed (prepositional phrase), in the closet (prepositional phrase), and she even looked in the trash (sentence) for her lost laptop. **X**

Claire looked under her bed (prepositional phrase), in the closet (prepositional phrase), and even in the trash (prepositional phrase) for her lost laptop. **✓**

- b. My parents thought that I would finish (simple form of verb) university, get (simple form of verb) a good job in Quebec, and that they would see me often (clause). X

My parents thought that I would finish university (clause), that I would get a good job in Quebec (clause), and that I would visit them often (clause). ✓

My parents thought that I would finish (simple form of verb) university, get (simple form of verb) a good job in Quebec, and visit (simple form of verb) them often. ✓

- c. The interns wore protective gear in the laboratories (active sentence), they followed the lab protocols precisely (active sentence), and their work stations were kept spotless during use (passive sentence). X

The interns wore protective gear in the laboratories (active sentence), they followed the lab protocols precisely (active sentence), and they kept their work stations spotless during use (active sentence). ✓

The interns wore (simple past verb) protective gear in the laboratories, followed (simple past verb) the lab protocols precisely, and kept (simple past verb) their work stations spotless during use. ✓

Parallel structure in lists: following a colon*

Baking a loaf of bread requires four ingredients: flour (*noun*), yeast (*noun*), water (*noun*), and to love (*infinitive*) baking. ✓

Baking a loaf of bread requires four ingredients: flour (*noun*), yeast (*noun*), water (*noun*), and love (*noun*). ✓

**Parallel structure is also employed when making bulleted lists. See the highlighted words – all simple present verbs - in the next section.*

How to avoid faulty parallelism in lists

When editing your texts,

- **scan** for coordinating conjunctions, particularly *and* and *or*;
- **check** the word environment on both sides of the conjunction to assure that the same grammatical structure is found to the left and the right of it;
- **scan** for any colons followed by lists;
- **assure** that all items in those lists have the same grammatical structure;
- **check** your thesis statement carefully as it is a common sentence in which to find faulty parallelism.

