

Parallel Structure

What is parallel structure?

Parallel structure repeats the same grammatical form in a sentence or adjoining sentences at the word, phrase or clause level. The coordinating conjunctions *and* and *or* are usually used to form these parallel structures by connecting 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, **find** (*simple form of verb*) a good job in Quebec, and **that they would see me often** (*subordinate clause*). **X**

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

My parents thought that I would **finish** (*simple form of verb*) university, **find** (*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. **X**

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 bolded 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.

