Parallelism

Parallelism (also called parallel structure) is formed when you write two or more grammatically equal parts of a sentence. You can use parallelism with any part of speech, any type of phrase, or even whole sentences; the most important part of parallelism is that the words, phrases, or sentences follow the same pattern. Parallel structure makes writing easier to understand because the words and phrases make logical, equivalent groupings.

Parallelism with Words

Parallel verbs should have the same tense and form:

Nonparallel	Parallel
All humans need *to eat*, *to drink*, and *have* shelter.	All humans need to *eat*, *drink*, and *have* shelter. All humans need *to eat*, *to drink*, and *to have* shelter.
I *went* to the store, *buy* food, and *will cook* it.	I *went* to the store, *bought* food, and *cooked* it.
Students spend their time *going* to classes, *studying, working,* and *they wish* they had time for a social life.	Students spend their time *going* to classes, *studying, working,* and *wishing* they had time for a social life.

A linking verb should have parallel adjectives:

Nonparallel	Parallel
By the end of the quarter they *are exhausted, irritable,* and *have learned* a lot.	By the end of the quarter, they are *exhausted, irritable*, and *smarter*.

Parallelism requires an article or preposition applying to all members of a series to appear either before the first item only or in front of each item:

Nonparallel	Parallel
A mark, **a** yen, dollar, or pound	**A** mark, **a** yen, **a** dollar, or **a** pound **A** mark, yen, dollar, or pound
On Monday, Wednesday, or **on** Friday	**On** Monday, Wednesday, or Friday **On** Monday, **on** Wednesday, or **on** Friday

When words that require prepositions appear in parallel structure, include all of the appropriate prepositions, since the first one may not apply to the whole series of items:

Nonparallel	Parallel
His speech was marked by **disagreement** and **scorn for** his opponent's position.	His speech was marked by **disagreement with** and **scorn for** his opponent's position.

Parallelism with Phrases

When creating parallelism between phrases, make sure that the same part of speech begins each phrase:

Nonparallel	Parallel
After *emptying* her purse, searching her apartment, and *she called* all her friends, Amy knew her keys were gone.	After *emptying* her purse, *searching* her apartment, and *calling* all her friends, Amy knew her keys were gone.

Use parallel structure to begin all correlative expressions (both/and; not only/but also; either/or; first, second, third) as well:

Nonparallel	Parallel
A time *not for* words *but action*	A time *not for* words *but for* action
Either you must grant her request *or incur* her ill will.	You must *either grant* her request *or incur* her ill will.
My objections are *first, the* injustice of the measure, and *second, that* it is unconstitutional.	My objections are *first, that* the measure is unjust and *second, that* it is unconstitutional.