**What is it?**

**Parallelism** means that similar ideas in a sentence are expressed in similar grammatical form. It means balancing words with words, [phrases](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#p) with phrases, and [clauses](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#c) with clauses. Use parallelism to make your sentences flow smoothly and your thoughts easy to follow.

In each of the following pairs of sentences, notice which sentence is easier to read:

The horse was large, had a bony frame, and it was friendly.

The horse was large, bony, and friendly.

Maria enjoys swimming and drag races cars.

Maria enjoys swimming and drag racing.

The second sentence in each pair is balanced grammatically. *Large, bony,* and *friendly* are all [adjectives.](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#a) *Swimming* and *drag racing* are both [nouns](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#n) ending in *-ing.* This parallelism makes the second sentence in each pair sound better than the first.

**How to find errors**

1. [**Nouns**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#n)**in a series should be parallel.**

A thesis statement that is clear, strong supporting paragraphs, and a conclusion that should be interesting are all elements of a well-written essay.

(The nouns *statement, paragraphs,* and *conclusion* are not parallel in this sentence because the [modifiers](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#m) used to describe them are not grammatically balanced.)

1. [**Adjectives**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#a)**in a series should be parallel.**

The concertgoers were rowdy and making a great deal of noise.

(The noun *concertgoers* is modified in this sentence with one adjective, *rowdy,* and one adjective [phrase,](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#p) *making a great deal of noise.)*

1. [**Verbs**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#v)**in a series should be parallel.**

The sports fans jumped and were applauding.

(The verbs *jumped* and *were applauding* are in different [tenses.)](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#t)

1. **Phrases and**[**clauses**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#c)**within a sentence should be parallel.**

The parents who supervised the new playground were pleased about the preschoolers’ playing together and that everyone enjoyed the sandbox.

*(About the preschoolers’ playing together* and *that everyone enjoyed the sandbox* are not parallel; the first is a phrase and the second is a clause.)

1. **Items being compared should be parallel.**

It is usually better to study for an exam over a period of time than cramming the night before.

(The words *better…than* show that two items are being compared. The forms *to study and cramming* are not parallel.)

**How to correct errors**

1. **If**[**nouns**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#n)**in a series are not parallel, rewrite the sentence so that the nouns in the series are grammatically balanced.**

A *clear* thesis statement ~~that is clear~~, strong supporting paragraphs, and *an* *interesting* conclusion ~~that should be interesting~~ are all elements of a well-written essay.

1. **If**[**adjectives**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#a)**in a series are not parallel, change the sentence as needed so that all the**[**modifiers**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#m)**are the same type.**

The concertgoers were rowdy and ~~making a great deal of noise~~ *noisy*.

1. **If**[**verbs**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#v)**in a series are not parallel, make sure that all of them are in the same tense**

The sports fans jumped and ~~were applauding~~ applauded the team.

1. **If**[**phrases**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#p)**and**[**clauses**](http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/exercisecentral/Glossary#c)**within a sentence are not parallel, rewrite the sentence using grammatically balanced phrases or clauses.**

The parents who supervised the new playground were pleased ~~about~~ that  the preschoolers played ~~playing~~ together, and that everyone enjoyed the sandbox.

1. **If items being compared are not parallel, rewrite the sentence to make them parallel.**

It is usually better to study for an exam over a period of time than ~~cramming~~ to cram the night before.

Parallel structure means using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. This can happen at the word, phrase, or clause level. The usual way to join parallel structures is with the use of coordinating [conjunctions](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/598/01/) such as "and" or "or” (FANBOYS).

#### Words and Phrases

**With the**[**-ing form (gerund)**](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/627/01/)**of words:**

**Parallel:**

Mary likes hik**ing**, swimm**ing**, and bicycl**ing**.

**With infinitive phrases:**

**Parallel:**

Mary likes **to hike**, **to swim**, and **to ride** a bicycle.  
OR  
Mary likes to **hike**, **swim**, and **ride** a bicycle.

(Note: You can use "to" before all the verbs in a sentence or only before the first one.)

#### Do not mix forms.

**Example 1**

**Not Parallel:**   
Mary likes hik**ing**, swimm**ing**, and **to ride** a bicycle.

**Parallel:**   
Mary likes hik**ing**, swimm**ing**, and rid**ing** a bicycle.

**Example 2**

**Not Parallel:**   
The production manager was asked to write his report quick**ly**, accurate**ly**, and **in a detailed manner**.

**Parallel:**   
The production manager was asked to write his report quick**ly**, accurate**ly**, and thorough**ly**.

**Example 3**

**Not Parallel:**   
The teacher said that he was a poor student because he wait**ed** until the last minute to study for the exam, complet**ed** his lab problems in a careless manner, and **his motivation was** low.

**Parallel:**   
The teacher said that he was a poor student because he wait**ed** until the last minute to study for the exam, complet**ed** his lab problems in a careless manner, and lack**ed** motivation.

#### Clauses

A parallel structure that begins with clauses must keep on with clauses. Changing to another pattern or changing the voice of the verb (from active to passive or vice versa) will break the parallelism.

**Example 1**

**Not Parallel:**   
The coach told the players **that they should get** a lot of sleep, **that they should not eat** too much, and **to do** some warm-up exercises before the game.

**Parallel:**   
The coach told the players **that they should get** a lot of sleep, **that they should not eat** too much, and **that they should do** some warm-up exercises before the game.

— or —

**Parallel:**   
The coach told the players that they should **get** a lot of sleep, not **eat**too much, and **do** some warm-up exercises before the game.

**Example 2**

**Not Parallel:**   
The salesman expected **that he would present** his product at the meeting, **that there would be** time for him to show his slide presentation, and **that questions would be asked** by prospective buyers. **(passive)**

**Parallel:**   
The salesman expected **that he would present** his product at the meeting, **that there would be** time for him to show his slide presentation, and **that prospective buyers would ask** him questions.

#### Lists After a Colon

**Be sure to keep all the elements in a list in the same form.**

**Example 1**

**Not Parallel:**   
The dictionary can be used to find these: **word meanings**, **pronunciations**, **correct spellings**, and **looking up irregular verbs**.

**Parallel:**   
The dictionary can be used to find these: **word meanings**, **pronunciations**, **correct spellings**, and **irregular verbs**.

#### Proofreading Strategies to Try:

* Skim your paper, pausing at the words "and" and "or." Check on each side of these words to see whether the items joined are parallel. If not, make them parallel.
* If you have several items in a list, put them in a column to see if they are parallel.
* Listen to the sound of the items in a list or the items being compared. Do you hear the same kinds of sounds? For example, is there a series of "-ing" words beginning each item? Or do your hear a rhythm being repeated? If something is breaking that rhythm or repetition of sound, check to see if it needs to be made parallel.