

PARALLELISM

Grammar

PARALLELISM:

Parallelism is a way of writing equal ideas by grouping them together. In parallel sentences, equal ideas are presented in equivalent grammatical forms. Such a matching of terms unifies the ideas and allows them to flow smoothly.

Not only does parallelism bring ideas closer together, but it also makes one's writing clearer and easier to understand.

The student found that the university course was interesting, beneficial, and enjoyable.

This sentence is written in parallel form; it links the qualities of the university course together in a smooth and concise manner.

NON-PARALLEL SENTENCES:

Non-parallel sentences occur when equivalent ideas are presented in different grammatical forms. These errors disrupt the connection between the elements and make the writing confusing and awkward.

The vehicle is recognized for its efficiency, its durability, and *because it is affordable*.

This sentence is not written in parallel form; the vehicle's qualities are not presented in equivalent grammatical terms and therefore, the sentence does not flow nicely.



CORRECTING NON-PARALLEL SENTENCES:

Maintaining parallelism requires writers to ensure that the ideas that they link are written in equal grammatical forms. The following examples demonstrate how to correct common errors in parallelism:

Non-Parallel Noun Phrases:

Non-parallel: The vehicle is recognized for its efficiency, its durability, and *because it is affordable*.
(This sentence mixes noun phrases with a dependent clause.)

Parallel: The vehicle is recognized for its efficiency, its durability, and *its affordability*.
(This sentence contains only noun phrases and is therefore, correct.)

Non-Parallel Prepositional Phrases:

Non-parallel: The hypothalamus regulates the endocrine system by monitoring hormone levels and *it stimulates* hormone production.
(This sentence includes a prepositional phrase and a verb.)

Parallel: The hypothalamus regulates the endocrine system by monitoring hormone levels and *by stimulating* hormone production.
(This sentence contains only prepositional phrases.)



Note: Repeated words can be omitted while still maintaining parallel structure. Both ways of writing each sentence below are correct.

The vehicle is recognized for *its* efficiency, *its* durability, and *its* affordability. → The vehicle is recognized for *its* efficiency, durability, and affordability.

The hypothalamus regulates the endocrine system *by* monitoring hormone levels and *by* stimulating hormone production. → The hypothalamus regulates the endocrine system *by* monitoring hormone levels and stimulating hormone production.



Non-Parallel Infinitives:

Non-parallel: It is a manager's duty to hire employees, to keep their staff on task, and *ensuring* that a positive work environment is maintained.

(This sentence mixes infinitives with a gerund.)

Parallel: It is a manager's duty to hire employees, to keep their staff on task, and *to ensure* that a positive work environment is maintained.

(This sentence contains only infinitives.)

Non-Parallel Gerunds:

Non-parallel: Her favourite pastimes include reading, drawing, and *she loves to paint*.

(This sentence combines gerunds with an independent clause.)

Parallel: Her favourite pastimes include reading, drawing, and *painting*.

(This sentence contains only gerunds.)

Non-Parallel Verbs:

Non-parallel: Visitors to Newfoundland can take hikes on the East Coast Trail, *observing* icebergs at Signal Hill, and hear live music on George Street.

(This sentence mixes verbs with a gerund.)

Parallel: Visitors to Newfoundland can take hikes on the East Coast Trail, *observe* icebergs at Signal Hill, and hear live music on George Street.

(This sentence contains only verbs.)

Non-Parallel Adjectives:

Non-parallel: The critic said that the film was witty and *it had good acting*.

(This sentence includes an adjective and a verb.)

Parallel: The critic said that the film was witty and *well acted*.

(This sentence contains only adjectives. *Well acted* is a compound adjective—two words that function as a single adjective.)

Dissimilar elements following correlating conjunctions:

Another common error in parallelism involves mismatched elements in sentences that use pairs of correlating conjunctions. The terms following the correlating conjunctions must be alike.

Correlating conjunctions: either/or, neither/nor, both/and, not only/but also

Non-parallel: A bat either *is* a piece of sporting equipment, or a winged mammal.

Parallel: A bat *is* either a piece of sporting equipment, or a winged mammal.

Here, the correlating conjunction *either* has simply been repositioned to maintain parallelism.

Non-parallel: The assignment was not only difficult, but also *it took a long a time*.

Parallel: The assignment was not only difficult, but also *time consuming*.

Here, the words following the conjunction *but also* had to be rewritten to maintain parallelism.

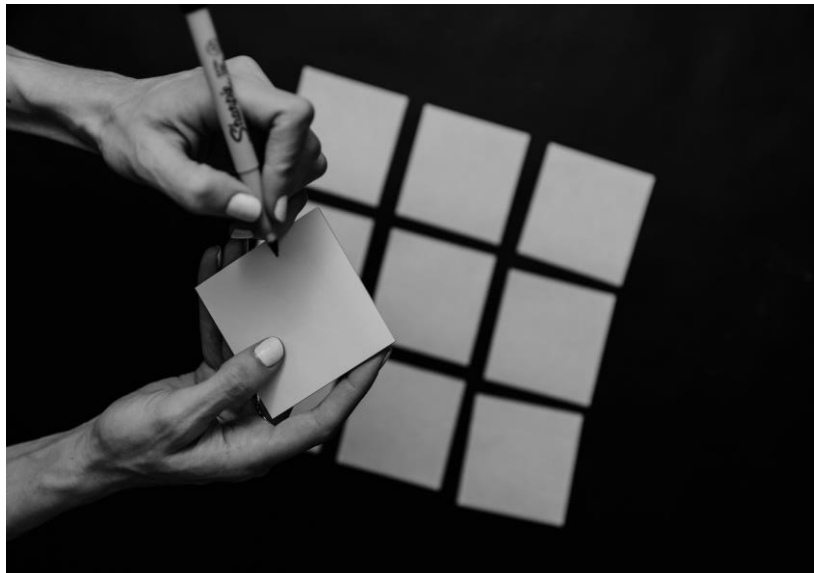
Non-parallel: Students should be familiar both *with* MLA, and APA format.

Parallel: Students should be familiar *with* both MLA, and APA format.

OR

Parallel: Students should be familiar both *with* MLA, and *with* APA format.

Here, the word *with* can either be repositioned or written twice to maintain parallelism.



BALANCE:

Balance is a type of parallelism that presents two equal ideas on opposite sides of a coordinating word or punctuation mark. It is especially useful for contrasting two equal ideas since it highlights the differences between two ideas concisely and effectively.

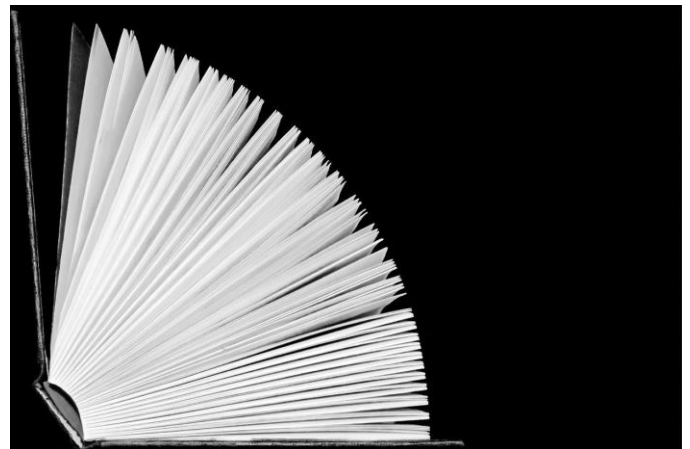
You win some and you lose some.
If you never try, you will never succeed.
A penny saved is a penny earned.

PARALLELISM OVER MULTIPLE SENTENCES:

Parallelism and balance can extend beyond a single sentence. Series of sentences can be written in parallel form to link the consecutive ideas together.

This strategy can be used for emphasis as the repetitive structure reinforces the writer's point. It can also improve the paragraph's rhythm and flow.

She tried her best to attend every class. She tried her best to stay focused. She tried her best to follow every direction the teacher instructed.



Sources:

(MLA 8th Edition)

Hogue, Ann. *Essentials of English: A Writer's Handbook*. Pearson Education, 2003

Reinking, James. A, et al. *Strategies for Successful Writing: A Rhetoric, Research Guide, Reader, and Handbook, Sixth Canadian Edition*. Pearson Canada Inc, 2017

Contact us

Writing Centre SN-2053
writing@mun.ca
709-864-3168