

**PARALLELISMS**

Good sentences attempt to form parallel patterns. Without this parallel structure, they can sound stilted and awkward. Any time you create a coordinating element of us a series (basically any time you make a list) you should keep parallel structure in mind.

An example of a faulty parallelism is

He liked to play checkers and riding jet skis.

Breaking the sentence down helps see the faulty parallelism

He liked (repeats)		
	to play (←infinitive)	checkers
and	riding (←gerund)	bikes.

In order to make this sentence parallel a writer would have to match infinitive to infinitive or gerund to gerund.

Gerunds: He liked playing checkers and riding jet skis.

Infinitives: He liked to play checkers and to ride jet skis.

or: He liked to play checkers and ride jetskis.

By creating a parallel structure in the sentence a writer creates cleaner, more accurate writing.

Another example of a faulty parallelism is

He spent the day visiting all the local fish markets and watched the tourists laugh at sea lions, and then he went back to his apartment to make fishwives stew.

A better way to write this sentence would be

He spent the day visiting all the local fish markets, he watched the tourists laugh at sea lions, and then he went back to his apartment to make fishwives stew.

This sentence now has a parallel structure of three main clauses in a series. Notice how each main clause starts with *He* (*verb*). That's part of what makes this a parallel sentence.

One last example of a parallelism issue is

I cut the fresh tomatoes slowly and with care.

Notice how slowly, and with care are both describing the cutting, but are using different structures to do so. A better sentence for this example would be:

I cut the fresh tomatoes slowly and carefully.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Day/Block \_\_\_\_\_

**“I Have a Dream” Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**  
**Grammar in Action Worksheet**  
**Using Parallel Structure**

Parallelism is the repetition of similar grammatical structures to emphasize and show the equality of ideas. One type of parallelism occurs when the parts of a sentence are similar in structure. Another occurs when the same structure is repeated in several sentences. Look at these passages from “I Have a Dream”:

I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia *the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners* will be able to all sit down together at the table of brotherhood. [the same subject followed by similar prepositional phrases]

I have a dream that my four little children will live in a nation where they will not be judged *by the color of their skin* but *by the content of their character*. [parallel prepositional phrases]

I have a dream that one day *every valley shall be exalted, every hill and mountain shall be made low, the rough places will be made plains, and the crooked places will be made straight, and the glory of the Lord shall be revealed*, and all flesh shall see it together. [parallel subordinate clauses, all having verbs in the passive voice]

*I have a dream today.*

*I have a dream that one day...* sisters and brothers.

*I have a dream today.*

*I have a dream that one day* every valley... shall see it together.

[repetition of sentences and dependent clauses]

Notice as well how the use of parallel structure affects the rhythm of the writing, in this case helping to create a tone of dignity and majesty.

When creating parallel structure in your own writing, be careful that the items you present as parallel are all in the same form. What is wrong with this sentence?

In every effort to help those less fortunate, our organization shows respect for the dignity of the individual, awareness of the human need for that dignity, sensitivity to those temporarily without it, and we don't make anybody fell like a beggar.

The sentence begins to create parallel structure by using a series of three direct objects each followed by two prepositional phrases. By the fourth item in the series, however, the writer appears to have lost control of the sentence, and that item is written in the form of an independent clause. Avoid this type of faulty parallel structure in your own writing.

## Parallelism

When listing items, phrases or clauses, always make sure that they are stated in parallel grammatical forms. If one is a prepositional phrase, all should be prepositional phrases. If one is an infinitive, all should be infinitives.

**Not Parallel:** I am planning to spend this summer learning to swim, to catch bass, and golf.

**Parallel:** I am planning to spend this summer learning to swim, to catch bass, and to play golf.

Rewrite each of the following sentences, making certain that all grammatical constructions are parallel.

1. We have begun to exercise more, to get regular check-ups, and dieting.
2. To go on picnics, taking part in sports, and vacationing with my family are my favorite summer activities.
3. The concert made many new friends for us, attracted a great deal of publicity, and that it earned a lot of money.
4. Our coach excels in setting possible goals for us and then to praise us for reaching them.
5. This rodeo performer has won awards in seven states for bull riding, calf roping, and he does barrel racing.
6. The walnut shelf by the window is for trophies, portraits, and where I like to display dishes.
7. The two things I liked most about the class were that it had a great teacher and discussing philosophy.
8. My Aunt Pauline has a reputation for her oyster dressing, cole slaw, and baking blueberry muffins.
9. John makes a great pot of coffee, he tells a good story, and listening to anyone's problems with a sympathetic ear.
10. Each boy had a different problem: Fred, shin splints; Ralph, torn ligaments; Jack, a shoulder separation; Tom, sneezed and coughed.
11. She was hired to type, to file, to answer the phone, and bookkeeping.
12. O. Henry wrote stories with common characters, with surprise endings, and that usually included a moral.
13. The day I met Linda in New York was warm, sunny, calm, and one that was perfect in every way.
14. Everyone should attend the pep assembly to show school spirit, to cheer the team, and because it will be fun.
15. The reasons for the early dismissal are the following: the roads are already hazardous, a forecast of more snow, and a malfunctioning furnace.
16. I enjoy fireworks, picnics, ball games, and to see a parade.
17. Our entries in the state meet this year are Clawson, long jump; McAfee, mile; Spirling, shot and discus; Phillips, running in the 300 meter low hurdles.
18. Our coach was unhappy with the officials because they let too many fouls go unnoticed, their lack of knowledge about the rules, and they became intimidated by the crowd.
19. At this afternoon's contest, Caroline hopes to perform well, to keep her composure, and that she will not break any of the rules.
20. We wrote the store a big check, purchased another piece of furniture, and agreeing to consider buying new carpeting.