Parallel Structure

Parallel structure adds both clout and clarity to your writing. When you use parallel structure, you increase the readability of your writing by creating word patterns readers can follow easily.

Understanding Parallel Structure

Parallel structure (also called parallelism) is the repetition of a chosen grammatical form within a sentence. By making each compared item or idea in your sentence follow the same grammatical pattern, you create a *parallel* construction.

Example

Not Parallel:
Ellen likes hiking, the rodeo, and to take afternoon naps.

Parallel:
Ellen likes hik*ing*, attend*ing* the rodeo, and tak*ing* afternoon naps.
OR
Ellen likes to *hike*, *attend* the rodeo, and *take* afternoon naps.

Using Parallel Structure

With Coordinating Conjunctions

When you connect two or more clauses or phrases with a coordinating conjunction (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet*, or *so*), use parallel structure.

Example

Not Parallel:
My best friend took me dancing and to a show.

Parallel:
My best friend took me to *a dance* and *a show*.

With Correlative Conjunctions

When you connect two clauses or phrases with a correlative conjunction (*not only...but also*, *either...or*, *neither...nor*, *if...then*, etc.), use parallel structure.

Example

Not Parallel:
My dog not only likes to play fetch, but also chase cars.

Parallel:
My dog not only *likes to play fetch*, but he also *likes to chase cars*.
OR
My dog likes not only *to play fetch*, but also *to chase cars*.

With Phrases or Clauses of Comparison

When you connect two clauses or phrases with a word of comparison, such as *than* or *as*, use parallel structure.

Example

Not Parallel:
I would rather pay for my education than financial aid.

Parallel:
I would rather *pay* for my education than *receive* financial aid.

With Lists

When you are comparing items in a list, use parallel structure.

Example

Not Parallel:
John Taylor Gatto criticizes public schools because they are compulsory, funded by the government, and destroy students' humanity.

Parallel:
John Taylor Gatto criticizes public schools because they are *compulsory*, *government-funded*, and *normalizing*.

OR

John Taylor Gatto criticizes public schools because they *require* students to attend, *receive* money from the government, and *destroy* students' humanity.

Exercise

Read the following example sentences and revise any that do not use parallel structure. Remember that there are many ways to revise a sentence to reflect parallel structure; if possible, rewrite each incorrect sentence in more than one way.

Some helpful hints on how to revise sentences for parallel structure:
1) Figure out what parts of the sentence are being compared.
2) Decide whether they are parallel, i.e. arranged or constructed in the same way.
3) If they are not, make them parallel by making the grammatical construction the same in each part.

Examples

I would rather eat potatoes than to eat rice.

Global warming affects humans, the environment, and is scary.

It's harder to do long division than dividing with a calculator.

Pirates ransacked the mansion, but they didn't steal all the silver.

Merchants receive either money or trade goods with their clients.

Bruce Wayne enjoys donning his Batman costume, answering the Commissioner's phone calls, and saving Gotham City from cruel villains like the Penguin.