# Parallelism

*by Sophia*

This tutorial will cover parallelism in sentences, which refers to structuring the words and phrases in a sentence so that they are parallel, and why it's important. It will also cover how to spot parallelism and correct errors. The specific areas of focus include:

# 1. Parallelism in Sentences

When talking about writing, it's useful to imagine sentences as being constructed or made up of building blocks. These blocks can be put together strongly or weakly, and that construction will influence how clear a sentence is.

Think about parallel construction in a sentence. All the words and phrases inside the sentence need to be structured so that they are parallel, and this is a strong way of building a sentence.

**Parallelism** is the use of repeating grammatical structures to emphasize similarities between ideas.

⤷ EXAMPLE  I like to sing, to dance, and to swim.

Notice how in that list, each of the verbs is in its infinitive form, meaning each begins with the word "to." What if the form of one of those verbs changed?

⤷ EXAMPLE  I like singing, to dance, and to swim.

Here, "singing" has been conjugated to the present tense, but "to dance" and "to swim" haven't been. Though the meaning hasn't necessarily changed fundamentally, the sentence is much harder to understand, and the construction is weak overall.

Thus, lack of parallelism is not just grammatically incorrect, it's also confusing for the reader. Especially with lists of verbs, you need to be careful to match tense and number.

**TERM TO KNOW**

**Parallelism**
The use of repeating grammatical structures to emphasize similarities between ideas.

# 2. Correcting Parallelism Errors

It's important to identify and correct errors related to parallelism. The verbs "reads" and "plays" are parallel in this example. Notice that they both match tense, so this list of two makes perfect sense.

→ EXAMPLE Everybody in my family reads and plays cards.

Here, you have parallel adjectives, not verbs. In this list of three qualities about the kitchen, each description matches the others. Again, this is a clear sentence.

→ EXAMPLE The kitchen was warm, sunny, and comfortable.

## 2a. Identifying and Correcting Errors #1

Take a look at the two sentences below describing Phil's family. Everyone hates to read, and hates playing cards. Each separately is correct. It would make sense as written if each was on its own instead of in this list.

However, the first sentence isn't correct because the two items aren't parallel. "To read" is in the infinitive tense, but "playing cards" is in the present tense. You can see the corrected version in the second sentence:

<u>Everybody in Phil's family hates</u> to read and <u>playing cards</u>
Everybody in Phil's family hates <u>reading</u> and <u>playing cards</u>

## 2b. Identifying and Correcting Errors #2

Here is another sentence with a list of three adjectives. The first sentence's list starts off well—cold and damp are parallel. Their structures match.

But then the way the list is put together changes, and the third item is "it was uncomfortable." This is where the sentence stops being parallel. But this is easily fixed, too. See the corrected version in the second sentence:

The dungeon was <u>cold</u>, <u>damp</u>, and it was <u>uncomfortable</u>.
The dungeon was <u>cold</u>, <u>damp</u>, and <u>uncomfortable</u>.

[✎ TRY IT]

Now it's your turn. See if you can spot which words and phrases are not parallel in the following two groups of sentences. You will see the corrected versions underlined:

**Group A:**
I wanted to travel in Spain, Italy, and in Portugal.
I wanted to travel in Spain, <u>in</u> Italy, and in Portugal.

All you have to do is pop in another "in" to make the second item match the rest.

**Group B:**
I wanted to travel to Los Angeles and to San Francisco in California, as well as Memphis and Nashville in Tennessee.
I wanted to travel <u>to Los Angeles and to San Francisco</u> in California, as well as <u>to Memphis and to Nashville</u> in Tennessee.

This one is a little harder because each pair matches on its own, but the two sets don't match each other. Thus, the sentence was not parallel. Adding the word "to" helps create parallelism.

## SUMMARY

In this tutorial, you learned about **parallel structure in sentences**, and how non-parallel sentences are both grammatically incorrect and confusing.

You then practiced identifying and **correcting errors of parallelism** in a variety of sentences.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Martina Shabram.

## TERMS TO KNOW

**Parallelism**
The use of repeating grammatical structures to emphasize similarities between ideas.