

# Parallelism

## Definition of Parallelism

Parallelism is the use of components in a sentence that are grammatically the same; or similar in their construction, sound, meaning, or [meter](#). Parallelism examples are found in literary works as well as in ordinary conversations.

This method adds balance and [rhythm](#) to sentences, giving ideas a smoother flow and thus persuasiveness, because of the [repetition](#) it employs. For example, “Alice ran into the room, into the garden, and into our hearts.” We see the repetition of a phrase that not only gives the sentence a balance, but rhythm and flow as well. This repetition can also occur in similarly structured clauses, such as, “Whenever you need me, wherever you need me, I will be there for you.”

## Common Examples of Parallelism

Like father, like son.

Easy come, easy go.

Whether in class, at work, or at home, Shasta was always busy.

Flying is fast, comfortable, and safe.

## Short Examples of Parallelism in Speech

They got together, conversed, and dispersed, but to no avail.

He came, he saw, and he conquered.

He wanted to have a new house to live in, and a new car to drive.

The applicant was approached through telephone, email, and snail mail.

Their new teacher was neither a Catholic, nor an Anglican.

His favorite foods are chocolate, chips, and soft drinks.

The new airline claims to be fast, efficient, and safe.

James liked fast food, while Mary liked conventional food.

The boss said, “You need to work hard and be efficient to get a promotion.”

The political leader said, “The present government has ruined the economy; it has ruined the education system; and it has ruined the health system of our country.”

Shakespeare was a prolific playwright and an excellent sonneteer.

The culprit was wanted dead or alive.

He preferred fruits to sweets.

The book was interesting as well as adventurous.

For success in life, one needs to pursue his goal with determination and perseverance.

## Examples of Parallelism in Literature

In literature, parallelism is used in different ways to impress upon the readers certain messages or [moral](#) lessons. Let us analyze a few examples of parallelism in literature:

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### Example #1: *An Essay on Criticism* (By Alexander Pope)

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[Antithesis](#) is a kind of parallelism in which two opposite ideas are put together in parallel structures. Alexander Pope, in his *An [Essay](#) on Criticism*, uses antithetic [parallel structure](#):

“To err is human; to forgive divine.”

Imperfection is a human trait, and God is most forgiving. Through these antithetical but parallel structures, the poet wants to say that God is forgiving because his creation is erring.

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### Example #2: *Community* (By John Donne)

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“Good we must love, and must hate ill,  
For ill is ill, and good good still;  
But there are things indifferent,  
Which we may neither hate, nor love,  
But one, and then another prove,  
As we shall find our fancy bent.”

Contrasting ideas of “good” and “ill,” “love” and “hate,” are placed together in parallel structures to emphasize the fact that we love good because it is always good, and we hate bad because it is always bad.

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### **Example #3: *A Tale of Two Cities* (By Charles Dickens)**

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We see the repetition of parallel structures in the following lines from *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens:

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.”

By repeating “*It was...*” in the passage, the readers are prompted to focus on the traits of the “age” they will read about in the succeeding passages.

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### **Example #4: *The Tyger* (By William Blake)**

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“What the hammer? what the chain?  
In what furnace was thy brain?  
What the anvil? what dread grasp  
Dare its deadly terrors clasp?”

Blake uses parallel structures, starting with “what” in each phrase, creating a beautiful rhythm in the above lines.

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### **Example #5: *Henry VIII*, Act 3, Scene 2 (By William Shakespeare)**

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Parallelism takes form of “Diazugma,” in which a single subject is connected with multiple verbs. Read the following lines from the speech of Norfolk in William Shakespeare’s *Henry VIII*, Act 3, Scene 2:

“My lord, we have  
Stood here observing him: Some strange commotion

Is in his brain: he bites his lip, and starts;  
Stops on a sudden, looks upon the ground,  
Then, lays his finger on his temple; straight,  
Springs out into fast gait; then, stops again,  
Strikes his breast hard; and anon, he casts  
His eye against the moon: in most strange postures  
We have seen him set himself.”

The use of multiple verbs in the above lines creates a dramatic effect in the speech of Norfolk, which makes his description vivid.

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#### **Example #6: *I have a Dream* speech (By Martin Luther King Jr.)**

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“I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident; that all men are created equal.’

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their [character](#).

“I have a dream today.”

This is a speech by Martin Luther King, Jr. in which he repeats the phrase, “I have a dream” several times. This phrase later became the title of the speech. This is a good example of parallelism.

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#### **Example #7: *How do I Love Thee* (By Elizabeth Barrett Browning)**

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“I love thee freely, as men strive for right.  
I love thee purely, as they turn from praise.”

These two verses from the poem of Elizabeth Barrett Browning have been made parallel by the repetition of “I love thee.”

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#### **Example #8: *Presidential Inauguration Speech* (By Barack Obama)**

“My fellow citizens: I stand here today **humbled by** the task before us, **grateful for** the trust you have bestowed, **mindful of** the sacrifices borne by our ancestors.”

In this speech, U.S. President Barack Obama uses structural parallelism in the bold phrases, giving his speech beauty.

### **Function of Parallelism**

The use of parallel structures in speech or writing allows speakers and writers to maintain a consistency within their work, and create a balanced flow of ideas. Moreover, it can be employed as a tool for [persuasion](#).