Parallel Structure

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Similar Ideas and Parallel Structure

- Parallel structure is used by writers and speakers in order to place similar (or coordinate) ideas together into a logical pattern.

- When similar ideas are placed into a logical pattern, people will more easily and quickly understand the similarities.

logical:

confusing:

Parallel Ideas

Like parallel roads, parallel ideas are easier to understand and result in fewer problems.

Unparallel structure

Critical thinking skills are used **to write paragraphs, essays,** and **doing research.**

Unparallel Ideas:

**to write paragraphs
essays
doing research**

Parallel Structure

Critical thinking skills are used **to write paragraphs, to create essays,** and **to do research.**
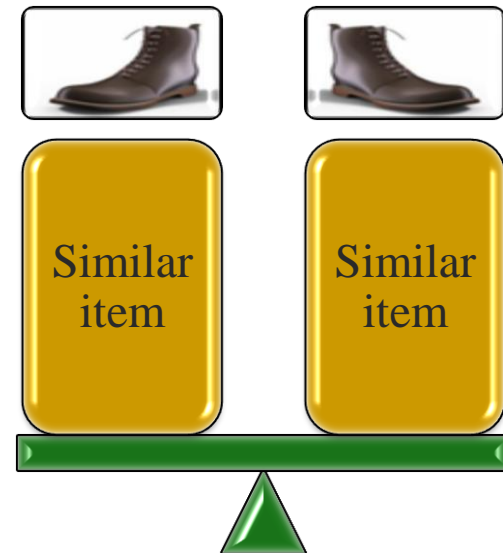
Parallel Ideas:

**to write paragraphs
to create essays
to do research**

When to Use Parallel Structure

Parallel structure should be used when joining similar items with:

- coordinating conjunctions
- correlative conjunctive pairs
- comparisons beginning with the words "than" and "as"
- other structures

Similar item

Similar item

Coordinating Conjunctions

- Parallel structure is needed when joining **two or more similar ideas** with coordinating conjunctions **(fanboys).**

- If two words or phrases are joined, no comma is needed.

- If three or more words or phrases are joined, commas are needed.

f	a	n	b	o	y	s
o	n	o	u	r	e	o
r	d	r	t		t	

similar idea **for** similar idea

similar idea **and** similar idea

similar idea **nor** similar idea

similar idea **but** similar idea

similar idea **or** similar idea

similar idea **yet** similar idea

similar idea **so** similar idea

similar idea, similar idea, **and** similar idea

Coordinating Conjunction Example

Nonparallel

The classroom had **thirty desks, new computers, and the cabinets were painted green.**

Parallel

The classroom had **thirty desks, new computers, and green cabinets.**

If the similar ideas being joined by a coordinating conjunction are two clauses, rather than words or phrases, a comma is needed: **The classroom had thirty desks, and the new computers were green.**

similar idea **for** similar idea

similar idea **and** similar idea

similar idea **nor** similar idea

similar idea **but** similar idea

similar idea **or** similar idea

similar idea **yet** similar idea

similar idea **so** similar idea

similar idea, similar idea, **and** similar idea

Correlative Conjunctive Pairs

- Parallel structure is needed when joining **two similar ideas** with **correlative conjunctive pairs.**

- **A similar idea** is placed after each one of the **paired conjunctions.**

either <u>similar idea</u> or <u>similar idea</u>

neither <u>similar idea</u> nor <u>similar idea</u>

whether <u>similar idea</u> or <u>similar idea</u>

both <u>similar idea</u> and <u>similar idea</u>

not only <u>similar idea</u> but also <u>similar idea</u>

Correlative Conjunctive Pair Example

Nonparallel	Parallel
Not only will teachers have skills but also police officers should be able to write well.	**Not only teachers but also police officers** should be able to write well.

either *similar idea* or *similar idea*
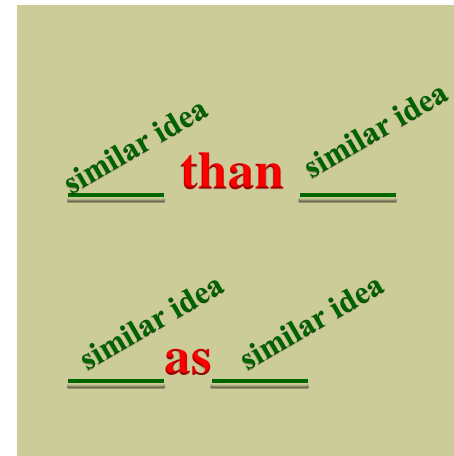
neither *similar idea* nor *similar idea*

whether *similar idea* or *similar idea*

both *similar idea* and *similar idea*

not only *similar idea* but also *similar idea*

Items Being Compared and/or Contrasted

Parallel structure is needed when joining **two similar ideas** with **"than"** or **"as."**

Items Being Compared and/or Contrasted Example

Nonparallel

Marginal notes more easily can be added to a page **by using a pencil** **than** **if we write with a highlighter.**

Parallel

Marginal notes more easily can be added to a page **by using a pencil** **than** **by using a highlighter.**

similar idea **than** _similar idea_

similar idea **as** _similar idea_

Other Structures

Parallel structure is needed when joining **two or more similar ideas** in many different structures, including lists, headings, and clauses with semi-colons.

in lists
in headings
in clauses joined with semi-colons

CRI

Other Structures Example

in lists   in headings   in clauses joined with semi-colons
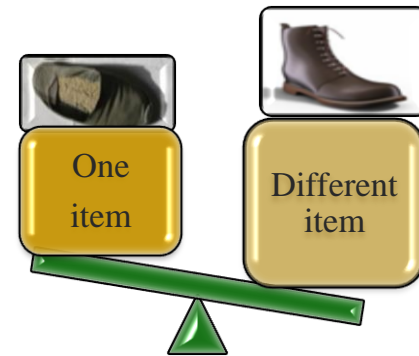
Nonparallel

In the kitchen, the light fixtures were brand new, and they all had energy-efficient fluorescent bulbs; the lamps in the living room were antiques, but they still all had new light bulbs that saved energy.

Parallel

In the kitchen, the light fixtures were brand new, and they all had energy-efficient fluorescent bulbs; in the living room, the lamps were antiques, but they still had new energy-saving light bulbs.

Three Methods of Finding Parallel Structure Errors

1. Compare the joined items.

2. Analyze each item.

3. Check the function words.

Nonparallel Structure:
People can learn **by writing ideas down, to listen to lectures, and we all love to practice tasks.**

One item

Different item

Compare the Joined Items

1. Compare each of the joined (coordinated) items to the other coordinate items in the sentence, list, or series of headings.

2. Pay particular attention to the **beginnings** and **endings** of each coordinate item.

People can learn

- **by writing ideas down**
- **to listen to lectures**
- **we all love to practice tasks**

People can learn

- **by writing down ideas**
- **by listening to lectures**
- **by practicing tasks**

Analyze Each Item

Analyze each coordinate item separately to see if it fits correctly with the rest of the sentence.

Nonparallel Structure:

Emphasis can be added **either with a pretty highlighter or bright pen.**

Analysis of one coordinate item:

Emphasis can be added **with a pretty highlighter.**   *logical*

Analysis of another coordinate item:

Emphasis can be added **bright pen.**   *confusing*

Revision with Parallel Structure:

Emphasis can be added **either with a pretty highlighter or with a bright pen.**

Check the Function Words

- A **function word** indicates an upcoming grammatical structure. For example, a preposition indicates an upcoming prepositional phrase.

- Check all of the **function words** to ensure that repetition of grammatical structures is happening.

Nonparallel	Parallel
The book was placed **on** the table, **near** the pencil **and** lamp.	The book was placed **on** the table, **near** the pencil, **and beside** the lamp.

missing function word

More Information

The Writing Center at the Community College of Rhode Island has more online resources.

Contact Information

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