

Parallelism is the technique of matching structural patterns to improve the memorability, readability, and clarity of a piece of writing. While this handout provides general information about parallelism, remember to write with your audience and assignment in mind.

Parallelism in Sentence Structure

Within writing, **parallelism is commonly used in lists, series, stages of a process, correlations** (e.g., either, or), or **comparisons**. In a list of **words**, parallelism is achieved by matching words in both form (e.g., noun, verb, adjective) and function as shown in the following examples:

Incorrect: The cat ran quickly, quietly, and was calm.

Correct: The cat ran quickly, quietly, and calmly.

In the correct example, all three adjectives in the **list** match by ending in *-ly* and describe the verb *ran*.

Incorrect: They will either go swimming or to hike.

Correct: They will either go swimming or hiking.

Correct: They will either swim or hike.

In the correct examples, parallelism is achieved by having the **correlated** and listed words match structurally. In the first correct example, the verb is followed by gerunds that both end in *-ing*. In the second correct example two verbs are listed in matching form, tense, and function.

To achieve parallelism with **phrases** or groups of words functioning together in a **list**, each item should match every other item grammatically:

Incorrect: I'll have a small soup, medium salad, and drink a soda that is large.

Correct: I'll have a small soup, medium salad, and large soda.

Each phrase in the correct example maintains parallelism by following the same grammatical pattern (adjective + singular noun) to match in form and function.

Parallel structure can also apply to **clauses** (subject + verb). When using clauses, parallelism is achieved by ensuring that each clause matches in the verb tense, voice, type of object, and type of subject:

Incorrect: She enjoys reading books, but watching movies was preferred by him.

Correct: She enjoys reading books, but he prefers watching movies.

The two clauses "She enjoys reading books" and "he prefers watching movies" maintain parallelism throughout the **comparison** by matching verb form and tense ("enjoys" and "prefers") and having a similar form for the subject and object.

Parallelism in Document Structure

Parallelism in formatting involves using consistent organization in a document. For example, if a heading is used to introduce a concept, use the same style of heading to introduce the next concept.

Example:

Stage 1: Egg

Typically, butterfly eggs are laid on plants so that the emerging larva has something to eat.

Stage 2: Larva

The butterfly larva (caterpillar) must eat as much as it can to prepare for the cocoon stage.