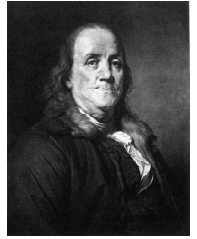


Parallelism and Comparisons

If Benjamin Franklin had written: “**Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy, and a C.E.O.,**” we wouldn’t be quoting him today. Instead, he began his list with *two adjectives*, “*healthy*” and “*wealthy*,” and completed it not with a noun, “*C.E.O.*,” but with a third adjective, “*wise*,” thereby rendering his maxim memorable. What he did was follow **parallel construction**, a technique that lends a **sentence rhythm and cadence**. It sounds good, and it creates emphasis.



Parallel construction = Consistency

The principle of parallel construction is a simple one. Plainly put, the reader expects **consistency**. Ideas that are related to each other should be expressed in parallel form. Expressions similar in content and function should be expressed similarly. Get the idea? Here’s a sentence with *non-parallel construction*:

She is capable, experienced, and often works late at night.

Doesn’t sound right, does it? In this sentence the writer breaks the contract with the reader by shifting from a series of adjectives, “capable” and “experienced,” to a verb phrase, “often works late at night”. The result is a break in rhythm, a loss of momentum. To honour the contract, the writer should have written:

She is capable, experienced, and *dedicated*” — or “*talented*” or “*brilliant*.”

Here’s another example:

The volume of business depends on an institution’s delivery method, production time, and whether or not it is open or closed.

Can you hear where the sentence violates parallel construction and loses its momentum? To eliminate the breach in contract, the series should be concluded as it was begun – with a third noun phrase, like this: “delivery method, production time and hours of operation.”

Here’s another example:

She researches cell membranes and walls.

Is she a biologist, or a biologist with an interest in interior design? This revision makes the meaning clear:

She researches cell membranes and cell walls.

Here’s another example:

Not only do I like to ski, but I also like sledding.

The verb in the first clause is an infinitive: to ski. But the verb in the second clause is a gerund: sledding. Fix it in one of two ways:

1. **Not only do I like to ski, but I also like to sled.**
2. **Not only do I like skiing, but I also like sledding.**

Here’s another example:

He liked killing, running, and to sulk.

Again, there are two ways to fix this:

1. **He liked to kill, to run and to sulk.**
2. **He liked killing, running and sulking.**

Here's another example:

1. **Painting with oils is easier than when you paint with water colours.**

To fix this, make sure your verbs are in the same form:

2. **Painting with oils is easier than painting with water colours.**

Another problem in parallelism occurs when you are using two verbs in a sentence and they are not grammatically parallel.

Incorrect: The doctors have been and will continue to **conduct** tests on the sick patient.

Correct: The doctors have been **conducting** and will **continue** to conduct tests on the sick patient.

Often parallelism problems occur when one preposition is expected to do the work of two.

Incorrect: She is a believer and supporter **of** the theory of love at first sight.

Correct: She is a believer **in** and a supporter **of** the theory of love at first sight.

Use parallel structures when organising items in a series or a list.

Nouns go with nouns, verbs with verbs and adverbial phrases with adverbial phrases.

- **Noun + noun + noun:** He likes **roses, violets** and **bicycles**.
- **Verb + verb + verb:** When she was on stage, she **danced, sang,** and **acted** like an angel.
- **Adjective + adjective + adjective:** My teacher is **fussy, picky,** and **hard-headed**.
- **Participle + participle:** They danced through life, **loving** one another and **enjoying** their adventures.
- **Infinitive + infinitive + infinitive:** I like **to sing, (to) draw,** and **(to) write poetry**.
- **Phrase + phrase:** **With his arms akimbo** and **in a state of bliss,** he leaped off the cliff.
- **Clause + clause:** **If she capitulates** and **when she apologises,** we will forgive her blunders and unforgettable actions.

Look at another sentence below:

She thwarted his moves because of her status, her young age and desiring to marry a famous person.

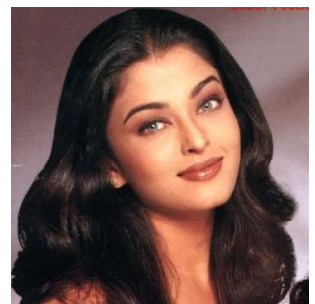
Do you think that there is a problem with the above sentence? Maybe you do not! The problem of parallelism (the problem in this sentence) is something that we normally gloss over, and do not pay much attention to. However, these problems are quite simple to identify if we are attentive. Try replacing the "and desiring to marry" with "and desire to marry".

Another example:

Aishwarya is a great dancer, but she acts ordinarily.

OR

Aishwarya is a great dancer but ordinary at acting.



Here the sentence describes two activities of Aishwarya. So, there should be parallelism between the words expressing those two acts. However, we have **dancer, a noun,** and **act, a verb.**

We can correct this sentence in a few ways, by removing the error of parallelism. For example:

1. Aishwarya is a great **dancer**, but an ordinary **actor**. (*Parallelism between nouns: dancer and actor.*)
2. Aishwarya is great at **dancing**, but ordinary at **acting**. (*Parallelism between nouns: dancing and acting.*)
3. Aishwarya **dances** greatly, but **acts** ordinarily. (*Parallelism between verbs: dances and acts.*)

Let's take another example:

I believe that if Leander has it in him to win gold, he will beat Sampras in the semis and emerge the best player India has ever produced.

The problem with this sentence is that there is no parallelism of infinitives. It should have been:

I believe that Leander has it in him to win gold, to beat Sampras in the semis and to emerge the best player India has ever produced.

Similarly,

Romance is exciting, fun and it is expensive.

This sentence should be

Romance is exciting, fun and expensive.

Now we have parallelism between adjectives.

The three reasons why Vijay has not married are his young age, his uncertain future and desiring to marry every pretty girl.

Do you notice any problem in the above sentence? Let us look at the sentence first. In this sentence, there is a main verb that controls several phrases that follow it. Each of those phrases has to be set up in the same way. In the sentence mentioned above, the three reasons cited are: **his young age, his uncertain future and desiring to marry every pretty girl**. There should have been parallelism in the construction of the three reasons as they stand for the same thing. The first two reasons have the same construction and function as nouns (young age and uncertain future). However, the third one seems to function as a verb and has a different construction. Therefore, we have to change **desiring** to a noun. The sentence now becomes:

The three reasons why Vijay has not married are his young age, his uncertain future and desire to marry every pretty girl.

The sentence is still wrong. Though we have changed the verb to a noun, we have not inserted the possessive pronoun **his** used before each of the other nouns. The correct sentence would be:

The three reasons why Vijay has not married are his young age, his uncertain future and his desire to marry every pretty girl.

It would have been correct, if the sentence had been:

The three reasons why Vijay has not married are his young age, uncertain future and desire to marry every pretty girl.

In this case, there is one possessive pronoun, which stands for each of the reasons as it is used before all the reasons. In the earlier sentence, since it was used before two of the reasons, it had to be used before the third reason as well.

We should be especially alert for problems in a sentence that is divided into two or more parts.



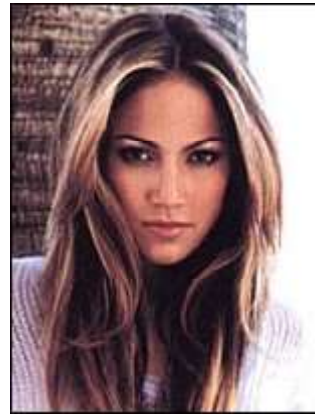
Here is an example:

To say that I do not deserve Jennifer Lopez is being unfair to me.

The problem with this sentence is that there is no parallelism between the two parts of the sentence. If the first half of the sentence is constructed in a particular way, the second half must also be constructed in the same way.

The first half of the sentence begins with **"To say that"**. Therefore, the second half must begin the same way. The correct sentence is:

To say that I do not deserve Jennifer Lopez is to be unfair to me.



Some complicated parallels

1. The suicidal roach **skulked** out of the toaster, **scuttled** across the counter, and **skirted** the sink before hurling itself into the disposal.
2. Angry ants, **munching** marshmallows, **crumbling** coffeecake, and **sipping** syrup, headed off across the Great Divide.
3. The concubine's entourage included **a dimpled dwarf, a joking giant, and a humungous hamster.**
4. The duties of the Hospitality Committee are to **greet** the gynaecologists, **serve** the Sangria, **pass** the Popsicles, and **woo** the wallflowers.

Diagnose these

1. **Like birds, wings have evolved in some mammals.**

What's being compared here? Birds and wings or birds and some mammals? Right, birds and some mammals. To fix this, put the two things being compared next to each other:


Like birds, some mammals have evolved wings.

2. **Like the Byzantines, Ottoman buildings often feature huge domes.**

It's illogical to compare the Byzantines to Ottoman buildings. You're comparing people to structures. Instead, compare like with like. Here are some ways to fix this problem:

1. **Like Byzantine structures, Ottoman buildings often feature huge domes.**
2. **Like the Byzantines, the Ottomans built structures that feature huge domes.**
3. **Like Byzantine architects, Ottoman architects built structures with huge domes.**

Note: Be sure to compare only those things that are capable of being compared.

Incorrect	Correct
The damage done by the flood was worse than the fire.	The damage done by the flood was worse than that of the fire. OR The damage done by the flood was worse than the damage done by the fire.
The girl's teeth were prettier than the boy.	The girl's teeth were prettier than the boy's. OR The girl's teeth were prettier than the boy's teeth.
When hiking through the wilderness, pay attention to your feet; the pain caused by blisters is worse than a steep hill. 	When hiking through the wilderness, pay attention to your feet; the pain caused by blisters is worse than that caused by a steep hill. OR When hiking through the wilderness, pay attention to your feet; the pain caused by blisters is worse than the pain caused by a steep hill.
Education Hall is older than any building on campus.	Education Hall is older than any other building on campus.
My best buddy, Naina, is more loyal than my friends.	My best buddy, Naina, is more loyal than any other of my friends. OR My best buddy, Naina is more loyal than any of my other friends.
What takes the most time, your job or school?	What takes more time, your job or school?
Of all my four children, Himesh is the better cook by far.	Of all my four children, Himesh is the best cook by far.
Both Lalit and Varun are big eaters, but Lalit is the fattest of the two.	Both Lalit and Varun are big eaters, but Lalit is the fatter of the two.
She types faster than I, and she's the most accurate.	She types faster than I, and she's more accurate.
When I was younger, I was most frightened of dogs.	When I was younger, I was more frightened of dogs.
She likes hiking, swimming, and to ride a bicycle.	She likes hiking, swimming, and riding a bicycle.
The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and in a detailed manner.	The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, accurately, and thoroughly.
The teacher said that he was a poor student because he waited until the last minute to study for the exam, completed his lab problems in a careless manner, and his motivation was low.	The teacher said that he was a poor student because he waited until the last minute to study for the exam, completed his lab problems in a careless manner, and lacked motivation.
The coach told the players that they should get a lot of sleep, that they should not eat too much, and to do some warm-up exercises before the game.	The coach told the players that they should get a lot of sleep, that they should not eat too much, and that they should do some warm-up exercises before the game.
The coach told the players that they should get a lot of sleep, not eat too much, and do some warm-up exercises before the game.	The salesman expected that he would present his product at the meeting, that there would be time for him to show his slide presentation, and that questions would be asked by prospective buyers.
The dictionary can be used for these purposes: to find word meanings, pronunciations, correct spellings, and looking up irregular verbs.	The dictionary can be used for these purposes: to find word meanings, pronunciations, correct spellings, and irregular verbs.
He wondered whether it was better to tell his girlfriend that he forgot or if he should make up some excuse.	He wondered whether it was better to tell his girlfriend that he forgot or to make up some excuse.

Exercises

The following exercises will help you understand parallelism better.

Correct errors in parallel structure in the following sentences.

1. He has neither done the dishes nor has he made his bed.
2. She hopes to finish college, get a job and to find her own apartment.
3. To learn proper grammar and writing effectively are my goals.
4. I plan to travel this summer either in Europe or Central America.
5. The suspect has sold his house, packed his belongings and has left town.
6. He can't decide whether to enrol in Social Services or to choose General Arts.
7. He is both tired from jet lag, and he is irritated by the long line-ups.
8. He will write the report, proofread it and mail it before tomorrow.
9. That student is studying English, psychology, and is taking two computer courses as well.
10. Not only are we paying for our daughter's wedding but also for the honeymoon.
11. Reading trashy novels, the soaps and eating junk food are his only vices.
12. He is either studying in the library, or he is working in the computer lab.
13. I know how to brainstorm, write a good thesis statement and I can organise my ideas well, too.
14. She has trouble with study skills, memory techniques and managing her time.
15. This weekend, he will both research his essay topic on the Internet, and he will also write the first draft of his essay.
16. The disk in the sky revolved rapidly, emitted a humming sound and then it began to descend slowly towards the surface of the earth.
17. Hoping to thumb a ride and crossing the border, the escaped prisoner cautiously approached the highway.
18. Although we enjoyed the article on *Seven Years in Tibet*, neither we have seen the movie nor did we read the book.
19. The members of the tour group boarded the bus wearily, enduring a two-hour drive to the resort and then they discovered that they had no reservations.
20. The rebels not only attacked the village, but they also took several hostages.

Solutions

1. He has **neither done** the dishes **nor made** his bed. (Two main verbs **done** and **made** after the two parts of the correlative conjunction.)
2. She hopes to **finish** college, **get** a job, and **find** her own apartment. (Three verbs sharing the word **to** - of course, you could also repeat **to** each time, but that would sound unnecessarily repetitious.)
3. To **learn** proper grammar and **write** effectively / **To learn** proper grammar and **to write** effectively / **Learning** proper grammar and **writing** effectively are my goals. (Two verbs sharing **to**, two infinitives, or two **-ing** words)
4. I plan to travel this summer **either in Europe or in Central America**. (Two complete prepositional phrases after the two parts of the correlative conjunction.)
5. The suspect has **sold** his house, **packed** his belongings, and **left** town. (Three main verbs sharing the helper **has**.)
6. He can't decide **whether to enrol** in Social Services **or to choose** General Arts. (Two infinitives after the two parts of the correlative conjunction.)
7. He is **both tired** from jet lag **and irritated** by the long line-ups. (Two adjectives after the two parts of the correlative conjunction.)
8. He will **write** the report, **proofread** it, and **mail** it before tomorrow. (Three main verbs sharing the helper **will**)
9. That student is taking **English, psychology**, and two computer **courses**. (Three nouns acting as objects for the verb **is taking**)
10. We are paying **not only** for our daughter's wedding **but also** for the honeymoon. / **Not only** are we paying for our daughter's wedding, **but we are also** paying for the honeymoon. (Either two prepositional phrases or two independent clauses after the two parts of the correlative conjunction – but not one clause and one phrase.)
11. **Reading** trashy novels, **watching** the soaps and **eating** junk food are his only vices.
12. He is **either studying** in the library **or working** in the computer lab.
13. I know **how to brainstorm**, **how to write** a good thesis statement and **how to organise** my ideas well. / I know how to **brainstorm**, **write** a good thesis statement and **organise** my ideas well.
14. She has trouble with study **skills**, memory **techniques**, and time **management**.
15. This weekend, he will **both research** his essay topic on the Internet **and write** the first draft of his essay.
16. The disk in the sky **revolved** rapidly, **emitted** a humming sound and then **began** to descend slowly towards the surface of the earth.
17. Hoping to **thumb** a ride and **cross** the border, the escaped prisoner cautiously approached the highway.
18. Although we enjoyed the article on *Seven Years in Tibet*, we have **neither seen** the movie **nor read** the book.
19. The members of the tour group **boarded** the bus wearily, **endured** a two-hour drive to the resort and then **discovered** that they had no reservations.
20. The rebels **not only attacked** the village **but also took** several hostages.