



APSU Writing Center

Parallel Structure

Parallelism in Sentence Structure

Resource: *The Writer's Harbrace Handbook*, 3rd edition

- Two or more elements are considered parallel when they have similar grammatical forms.
- Grammatical forms include words, verb types, phrases and clauses.
- It is important to make sure all sentences follow the rules of parallelism because the lack of parallel structure in sentences can cause misunderstandings in writing style and reading.

Parallel Words

- When a list is present in a sentence, the structure of the verbs should be parallel.
 - **Incorrect:** If students want to pass a course, they must **attend** every class, be sure **to stay** awake, **taking** good notes, and **pass** all of their tests.
 - **Correct:** If students want to pass a course, they must **attend class**, **stay awake**, **take notes**, and **pass tests**.
 - **Incorrect:** The athlete **is** full of strength and **practices** endurance to run the two miles.
 - **Correct:** The athlete **is** full of strength and **endurance** to run the two miles.

Parallel Verbs

- In order for a sentence to be correct, *all* verbs and their forms must agree. The simplest way to check if verbs are parallel is to make sure they are all in the same tense. If they are all in the same tense, then make sure they all have the same ending. Incorrect Patty ate macaroons, drank soda and was dancing the tango.
 - **Incorrect:** Patty **ate** macaroons, **drank** soda and **was dancing** the tango.
 - **Correct:** Patty **ate** macaroons, drank soda and danced the tango.

The "to ___" Verbs

- The "to ___" verbs (to walk, to talk, to eat, to chat, to drink...) are called infinitives. With infinitives, a very simple rule applies: the word "to" must either go *only* before the first verb in the list, or before *every* verb in the list.
 - **Correct:** He likes **to** swim, **to** sail, and **to** dance.
 - **Correct:** He likes **to** swim, sail, and dance.
 - **Incorrect:** He likes **to** swim, sail, and **to** dance.



APSU Writing Center

Parallel Structure

Parallel Phrases

- Most phrases are formed by a preposition (*of, from, under, below, to, etc.*). A prepositional phrase provides information about place, time, cause, manner, etc.
- If there are a series of prepositional phrases in a sentence, the structure must be parallel.
 - **Incorrect:** He searched for his cell phone **in the car, the** bed, and **his** book bag.
 - **Correct:** He searched for his cell phone **in the car, under** the bed, and **through** his book bag.
 - **Incorrect:** For about fifteen minutes, I have been pacing **in my office, hands on my hips,** my face **with a scowl,** and **feeling a grudge.**
 - **Correct:** For about fifteen minutes, I have been pacing in my office, hands **on my hips,** a scowl **on my face,** and a grudge **on my mind.**