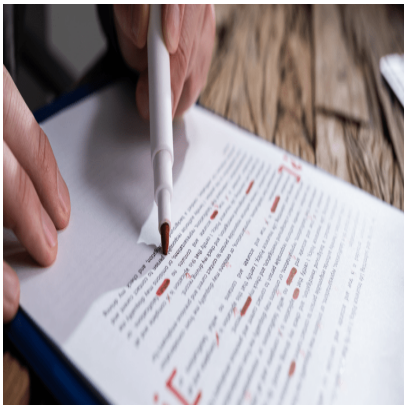


Description

When Charles Dickens wrote the opening sentence to *A Tale of Two Cities* — “It was the best of times, it was the worst of times,” he was employing a literary tool called *parallelism* that seeks to balance the sound, meaning, or meter of a sentence for deliberate effect. Using the same words (“of times”) adds balance and rhythm that can make the words more persuasive and impactful.

What Is Parallelism?

Parallelism is the use of similar words, phrases, clauses, sentence structure, or other grammatical elements to emphasize similar ideas in an impactful way in a sentence. As mentioned, it adds balance to the sentence structure and helps create coherent and consistent content.

Examples of Parallelism:

- “Alice ran into the room, into the garden, and into our hearts.”
- “Whenever you need me, wherever you need me, I will be there for you.”

While writers and poets may choose parallelism for a positive effect, academic writers should use it while ensuring that their writing doesn’t underestimate the importance of parallelism in basic sentence structure.

Function of Parallelism

Parallel structure not only adds balance and creates impactful words, but also improves coherence and consistency while writing.

Poor Sentence Structure:

To build a backyard garden, my dad purchased some seeds, lots of fertilizers, and grass mower.

Parallel Structure:

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To build a backyard garden, my dad purchased seeds, fertilizers, and grass mower.

The difference between these two sentences is the existence of adjectives in the first sentence. If a writer uses adjectives in a list, they will have to use them to describe every noun in the list. Meanwhile, in the parallel structure example, they could remove adjectives altogether.

Use of Parallelism in Grammatical Structures

In English grammar, parallelism refers to the similarity of structure between the components of a sentence. By definition, items in a series should appear in parallel grammatical form. Nouns should be listed with other nouns, verbs with an *–ing* form should be balanced with other *–ing* verbs, and adjectives should be listed with other adjectives. Failure to maintain this balance is termed faulty parallelism.

A few examples of faulty parallelism are as follows:

Faulty: *Sally likes line dancing and to write poetry.*

Correct Parallel Structure*: Sally likes line dancing and writing poetry.* (balanced verb *–ing)*

Faulty: *My first-year geography teacher was informative, funny, and a source of inspiration.* (two adjectives and a noun)

Correct Parallel Structure: *My first-year geography teacher was informative, funny, and inspiring* (balanced with all three adjectives)

Faulty: I attended a conference, weddings, and a festival last winter.

Correct Parallel Structure: I attended a conference, three weddings, and a festival last winter. (balanced with adjectives)

Usage of Correct Parallel Structure

Fixing faulty parallelism often requires deconstructing the sentence into its parts to verify the balance (or lack thereof). Consistency in the use of adjectives or noun phrases, as in the example of the geography teacher above, can be easy to spot and correct. However, compound or complex sentences that use coordinating or subordinating conjunctions could be a little tougher to correct the parallel structure.

For example:

Faulty: *My English professor told me to revise my assignment and that I should pay particular attention to faulty parallelism.*

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In the above sentence, the incorrect use of subordinating conjunction leaves the sentence out of balance. To correct it, you could use “that” on both sides of the sentence:

Parallel Structure: *My English professor told me that I should revise my assignment and that I should pay particular attention to faulty parallelism.*

Or, a more concise and elegant solution would be to balance the *infinitive* (*to* + verb) on each side as follows:

My English professor told me to revise my assignment and to pay particular attention to faulty parallelism.

In Conclusion

Maintaining parallel structure in academic writing will help researchers avoid grammatically incorrect sentences and enhance their writing style. While faulty parallelism may seem like a minor transgression when compared to other more glaring grammatical errors such as incorrect spelling, the sentences must be easier to read and add a sense of balance to writing.

Information is more readily absorbed in parallel form, and since the provision of information is typically the purpose of academic writing, doesn’t it make sense to take the extra effort to ensure that the writing is presented in a form that best achieves its objective?

Category

1. Language & Grammar
2. Reporting Research

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