Description

[Successful writing](#) is a matter of clear structure, conventional grammar, and good style. While the rules of structure and grammar are fairly straightforward, the anatomy of style incorporates concepts such as grace and readability that can seem fuzzy in comparison. Here we are going to examine the stylistic technique "parallel form" and articulate effective guidelines for using it. Sentences that correctly use parallel form are like skirmishes for the [reader's attention](#) that are won by the writer. The beginning of the form sets up the reader's expectations and the ending of the form meets them.

Reduce Verbosity

Use parallel form as an antidote for verbosity. Any time you are repeating a lot of the same verbiage, check to see if you can use parallel form. Here's an example from a paper on environmental policy initiatives:

> Alien species are sometimes deliberately introduced into an area, but frequently, alien species are introduced accidentally, mainly via trade and transportation routes.

There are three problems here: The statement begins with a passive clause and ends with an active one. The terms "alien species" and "introduced" are both repeated. Finally, the reader can't anticipate what will come next.

> Agronomists sometimes deliberately introduce alien species into an area, but trade and transportation often do so accidentally.

In the revision, both clauses are in the active voice. The use of "do so" lightens the reader's load, and the final stress on "accidentally" as the antithesis of "deliberately" – one of the paper's themes – is emphasized.

Create Resonance

Parallel form invigorates a limp or cluttered exposition, as in this statement, which ends with a series of chaotic noun phrases:

> These internal developments in Shinshû should be examined within the context of the evolving medieval society which took the course of increasing decentralization, civil war, and finally, bankruptcy.

When items in a series are not of the same type, you risk alienating your reader. Here a rewrite that uses only adjectival phrases in its series is more satisfying:

> These internal developments in Shinshû should be examined within the context of the

evolving medieval society which was increasingly decentralized, war-torn, and finally bankrupt.

Note that in parallel form, it is the second item in the series that makes or breaks the resonance of the rest.

Unify Point of View

Not all pairs are parallels. Here is a "false comparison" statement:

> For isolated muons up to 100 GeV the tracking efficiency is over 99%, compared to the efficiency for charged pi mesons which is about 80%, depending on the pseudorapidity.

The tracking efficiency for the one element does not depend upon the tracking efficiency for the other. Therefore, the sentence above is overambitious in its attempt to assess both events in a single breath. Here's the revision:

> For isolated muons up to 100 GeV, the tracking efficiency is over 99%. For charged pi-mesons, it is about 80%, depending on the pseudorapidity.

Do you see how using parallel form both breaks the false comparison and asserts a unified point of view? Don't confuse the presentation of combined ideas with the expression of a unified authorial voice.

Summarize

If your paper is making two or three major points, you can use parallelisms to summarize them forcefully in a single sentence consisting of multiple dependent clauses connected to a single independent clause. Here's an example that uses multiple "because" clauses:

> Cyanobacteria blooms are undesirable because they are expensive to mitigate, because they create unpleasant odors, and because they kill fish.

This construction can become cumbersome quickly, so use it sparingly. Here's the revision:

> Cyanobacteria blooms are undesirable because they are expensive to mitigate, create unpleasant odors, and kill fish.

Why Use Parallel Structure?

Parallel form can be used when contrasting ideas and highlighting similarities—all while maintaining a consistent point of view and cutting down on word clutter. Parallel forms lend clarity and crispness to good writing!

Category

1. Language & Grammar
2. Reporting Research

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