**CCSU Writing Center**

**Grammar Guides: *Parallelism***

[**http://web.ccsu.edu/english/writingcenter/default.asp?redirected**](http://web.ccsu.edu/english/writingcenter/default.asp?redirected)

**What is *Parallelism*?**

Parallelism, or parallel structure, means using similar patterns of words in order to express similar or related ideas, or to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance.

**Why is it useful?**

* Allows the writer to establish rhythm and balance.
* Enables writers to present their thoughts clearly and concisely. Writing that lacks parallelism is oftentimes confusing or awkward to read.
* Help emphasize or draw attention to important ideas or phrases.

**Examples of Parallelism:**

***Correlative Expressions (Either, or; Not only, but also; Both, and; etc.)***

Correlative expressions, pairs of conjunctions that combine with other words, should be followed by the appropriate grammatical configuration. Sometimes simply rearranging the sentence can correct this mistake. The following example involves both:

Non-Parallel Structure (Incorrect)

**Either you** write my essay for me **and** I’m leaving.

Parallel Structure (Correct)

You **either** write my essay for me **or** I’m leaving.

***Infinitives (To + Verb)***

“To” can be used before every verb in a sentence or only before the first one:

Non-Parallel Structure (Incorrect)

I like **to write** essays, **study,** and **to read** good books.

Parallel Structure (Correct)

I like **to write** essays, **to study**, and **to read** good books.

**Or**

I like **to write** essays, **study**, and **read** good books.

***-ing (gerund)***

Make sure you don’t mix forms; If you’re using –ing, make sure your verbs and tenses are structured accordingly:

Non-parallel Structure (Incorrect)

My favorite activities include procrastinat**ing** and **to goof** off.

Parallel Structure (Correct)

My favorite activities include procrastinat**ing** and goof**ing** off.

***Clauses***

A parallel structure that begins with a clause must continue with the same clause. Changing to another pattern mid-sentence disrupts the parallelism and interrupts the flow. The following is also an example of a list:

Non-parallel Structure (Incorrect)

The professor told her students **that they should** study for their exam, **that they should get** plenty of sleep, **and to try to relax**.

Parallel Structure (Correct)

The professor told her students **that they should** study for their exam, **that they should** get plenty of sleep, and **that they should** relax.

***Lists***

Make sure to keep all the items in a list in the same form:

Non-Parallel Structure (Incorrect)

If you have trouble with commas, semi-colons, paragraph breaks, **or how to do** citations, then try the Writing Center.

Parallel Structure (Correct)

If you have trouble with commas, semi-colons, paragraph breaks, **or citations**, then try the Writing Center.

**If you’re struggling with parallelism try the following:**

* When reading your paper aloud, pause at words like “and” and “or.” Are the words on either side of these words parallel?
* Compare the items in a list. Do you hear any similar sounds or sound patterns? If you hear a disruption in the rhythm of a sentence, check to see if anything should be parallel.

**Resources:**

[**http://web.ccsu.edu/english/writingcenter/resources.asp**](http://web.ccsu.edu/english/writingcenter/resources.asp)

[**https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/623/01/**](https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/623/01/)

[**http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/parallelism.htm**](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/parallelism.htm)

[**https://www.grammarly.com/handbook/**](https://www.grammarly.com/handbook/)

[**http://www.englishgrammar.org/**](http://www.englishgrammar.org/)