 Grammar Workshop

**Parallel Structure**

Parallel structure (parallelism) refers to the fact that similar elements within a sentence need to be balanced in order for a reader to more easily understand the written information being given, A lack of balance will invariably cause the sentence to falter and the reader to not fully understand the writer's meaning. 

Writers achieve parallelism when they join words with similar words: nouns with nouns, adjectives with adjectives, adverbs with adverbs, etc. Writers also achieve parallelism by joining groups of words with other similar groups of words: prepositional phrase with prepositional phrase, clause with clause, sentence with sentence. In other words, when writers set up lists of items, the form and format of the information must be equal or balanced (parallel),

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Not parallel: | "To be or death is the other alternative—that is the question."  |
|  | Not parallel: | "To be or not being—that is the question." |
|   | Parallel: | "To be or not to be—that is the question."  |
|  | Not parallel: | Jim prefers to hike, to ski, and going sailing. |
|  | Parallel: | Jim prefers to hike, ski, and sail. |
|  | Not parallel: | Kobe Bryant's reputation is based on his ability inpassing, shooting, and he was good at rebounds. |
|  | Parallel: | Kobe Bryant's reputation is based on his ability in passing shooting, and rebounding. |

Signal words and combination words (and, whether/or, and other coordinating or comparison words) indicate that parallel structure will be needed.

 Ex: I like to eat, drink, and be merry. ("and" joins verb forms) 

Ex: Joan enjoys movies more than plays. ("more than" joins nouns)

Ex: Jim earned an A in math but failed his art class. ("but" joins compound verb elements)

Ex: Let Philip know whether you will ride with him or he will ride with you. ("whether"/"or" joins clauses)

# Exercises

Some of these groups of words form sentences with parallel structure; some do not.

First, locate and circle any joining words within each sentence. Then, if the sentences contain balanced elements, place a "C" in the space provided. If the sentences do not contain balanced elements, place "l"/ (faulty parallelism) in the space provided. Finally, correct the faulty parallelism by making the unparallel elements into parallel elements.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 1. Lynette had already decided that to walk on the beach is more fun than

answering phones or entering data into the computer.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 2. The office has run out of pens, paper, ink cartridges, and we need more toner, too.

\_\_\_\_\_\_ 3. Suzanne enjoys movies that make her laugh, that make her cry, and that make her think.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 4. Dan purchased a Dodger Dog, but Sam chose the Stadium Peanuts.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ 5. Either we will win this game, or let's go out trying!



writingcenter@wsu.edu

WSUV Writing Center: 546-9650