

# Parallelism

The rhythm in a poem can both make the poem sound more beautiful and make its message more meaningful, and it can do the same for your essay. Parallelism is one way to control sentence rhythm and regularity to make for clearer, more fluid writing.

## What is parallelism?

Parallelism is a term that refers to two or more phrases in one sentence that have the same grammatical structure. It can also be referred to as parallel structure or parallel construction.

## Why is it important?

Parallelism helps to improve clarity and readability in a sentence. It can also help your writing to feel and sound less awkward. This is largely because using parallelism helps to reinforce the expectation readers have for what is coming next. Using parallelism will make your writing sound more professional to people reading it.

A lack of parallelism can make writing choppy and difficult to read. By using parallelism throughout your work, your readers will be able to spend less time trying to understand the sentence and more time focusing on the content. While parallelism can take many forms in a sentence, two of the most common mistakes involve verb agreement and parts of speech.

## Examples

### Verb Agreement

To keep the flow of the sentence smooth and the expression of your ideas clear and concise, it's important that the verbs be conjugated in the same form.

Incorrect Example:

"I like **reading**, **going** for walks in the park, and **to play** tennis."

In this example, *reading* and *going* are gerunds, while *to play* is an infinitive. To properly use parallel structure, all three verbs would need to be formatted the same way.

Correct Examples:

"I like **reading**, **going** for walks, and **playing** tennis." OR "I like to **read**, **go** for walks, and **play** tennis."

### Parts of Speech

Modifiers can easily cause lapses in parallelism, so make sure that you're using the same parts of speech when you're describing something.

Incorrect:

“The man **speedily** and **with joy** ate the ice cream he had been offered.”

The lack of parallelism in this sentence is caused by quickly (adverb) and with joy (prepositional phrase) being different parts of speech. To restore parallelism, one or the other needs to change.

Correct:

“The man **speedily** and **joyfully** ate the ice cream he had been offered.” *OR* “The man ate the ice cream he had been offered **with joy and speed.**”

## Tips for Using Parallelism

There are a few quick ways to determine if you are using parallelism in your writing.

- Look for conjunctions such as “and” and “or.” Check on either side to see if the words use a parallel structure. If not, revise them so they are parallel.
- Make sure all items in a list use the same structure. If you are unsure, separate them out into a column and check that they are parallel.
- Read through your writing and listen to how it sounds. If anything sounds like it is breaking a pattern, look closely to see if it is parallel.

## Conclusion

Our brains tend to pick up on and prefer patterns. Just as we enjoy a song we’ve listened to many times because our anticipation is met with familiar music, parallel structures in sentences create a similar meeting of expectations that condenses, clarifies, and enhances meaning. Make sure you’re using this human tendency of pattern recognition to your benefit!