Parallel Structure in Sentences

When you list ideas in a sequence, those ideas should be in similar grammatical form. This is called “parallel structure” or “grammatical parallelism.” Keeping your phrases in parallel form adds clarity and power to your writing. Parallelism is especially important when you list supporting points within a thesis.

EXAMPLE #1:

List that is not parallel in form:

The band started with a familiar song, then switching to tunes off their new album, and to end with their usual finale was the best part of the show.

Note the verbs in the sequence: started, switching, and to end. One verb is in the past tense form (-ed); another is in the progressive form (-ing); and the third is the infinitive form (“to”).

Corrected list in parallel form:

The band started with a familiar song, then switched to tunes off their new album, and ended with their usual finale, the best part of the show.

The list is now in parallel structure:

started + switched + ended

EXAMPLE #2:

List that is not in parallel form:

Today’s consumers may find it expensive to keep up with the latest versions of essential gadgets; portable music storage devices, small laptop computers, and phones are getting smarter all the time.

Note that the first two ideas in the sequence create a series of brief noun phrases: devices, computers. However, the third idea in the sequence is an entire independent clause (like a complete sentence): phones are getting smarter all the time.

Corrected list in parallel form:

Today’s consumers may find it expensive to keep up with the latest versions of essential gadgets: portable music storage devices, small laptop computers, and smart phones. The list is now parallel structure:

portable music storage devices + small laptop computers + smart phones
Parallel Structure in Sentences

Parallelism in Thesis Statements

EXAMPLE 1

Incorrect: The three authors show the value of reading by using metaphors, they give detailed examples, and their personal experiences also.

Correct: The three authors show the value of reading by using metaphors, examples, and personal experiences.

EXAMPLE 2

Incorrect: Success in achieving one’s life goals is determined by three factors: motivation being the most important, there is also support from others, and without hard work, success is impossible.

Correct: Success in achieving one’s life goals is determined by three factors: motivation, support from others, and hard work.

EXAMPLE 3

Incorrect: Globalization has had negative effects on local areas, including the loss of distinct regional cultures, some natural resources are no longer under local control, and global firms outcompeting local stores.

Correct: Globalization has had some negative effects on local areas, including the loss of distinct regional cultures, the lack of control over natural resources, and the inability of local stores to compete with global firms.

EXAMPLE 4

Incorrect: The poet employs personification and images of loss to show the value of the elm trees, and the various ways people use the trees is presented also.

Correct: To show the value of the elms, the poet employs personification, images of loss, and references to the various ways people use the trees.

EXERCISE: Create parallel structure in the following thesis statement.

Incorrect: Images of women in the media—women that are too thin, some are submissive to men, and materialistic values are portrayed—are having a negative psychological impact on American women today.

Correct:
EXAMPLE 5

Incorrect:

Correct