



Faulty Parallelism

Parallelism aids the flow of a sentence and emphasizes the relationship of the ideas in the parallel elements. Parallel sentence elements regularly appear in a list or series, in compound structures, in comparisons using *that* or *as*, and in contrasted elements.

Faulty parallelism is an error in which two or more parts of a sentence are parallel in meaning, but not parallel in form. Below are some guidelines to help you avoid faulty parallelism.

- ▶ When listing a series of things, actions, or ideas, the items in the list should be expressed in a similar manner. Words such as *by*, *to*, *that*, and *because* should be repeated in order to signal parallelism.

Faulty: The werewolf went to the hairdresser's, visited the butcher shop, and stopped off at the movie theatre.

Parallel: The werewolf went to the hairdresser's, to the butcher shop, and to the movie theatre.

- ▶ When linking two words or two word groups by *and*, each word or word group must have the same grammatical function.

He enjoys reading plays and poetry.
(two nouns)

He blocks and tackles skilfully.
(two verbs)

He looked in the drawers and under the bed.
(two prepositional phrases.)

He is a man who has worked hard, and whom we all respect.
(two dependent clauses)

He will return to Western, and she will return to York.
(two dependent clauses.)

- When making comparisons using the words *than* or *as*, be sure that the things you compare are similar logically as well as grammatically.

Faulty: The girls in Ontario are prettier than California.

Parallel: The girls in Ontario are prettier than the girls in California.

- When using correlative conjunctions (not only ... but also; both ... and; neither ... nor; either ... or), the construction that follows the first half of the pair should be exactly balanced by the construction that follows the second half of the pair.

Faulty: He is either a mad man or he is a fool.

Parallel: He is either a madman or a fool.
Either he is a madman, or he is a fool.

- Be sure not to omit words that are necessary to balance your sentence.

Faulty: Homer always has and always will eat dinner in front of the TV.

Parallel: Homer always has eaten and always will eat dinner in front of the TV.

Practice Exercise

Correct the faulty parallelism in the following sentences.¹

1. This tour bus may seat eight people comfortably or it fits twenty people uncomfortably.
2. Angrily, bitterly, and with tears in his eyes, Jean Cretien finally retired.
3. This summer, Ed visited Italy, France, and he also went to his mother's house in Spain.
4. If Janick were given the choice of doing the laundry or a movie, he would choose the movie.
5. Bruce not only enjoys singing, he enjoys playing the guitar as well.
6. Vampires are advised to avoid garlic, drink blood regularly, and stay out of the sun.

¹ Adapted from Put it in Writing, p. 152.

7. Football is more popular in Europe than North America
8. Rod either works at his home office, or an office at Sanctuary Towers each day.
9. Warren believes and is an advocate of werewolves' rights.
10. Kathie Lee is not only are highly annoying, but also she is the proud mother of two perfectly awful children.

Answers

1. This tour bus may seat eight people comfortably, or twenty people uncomfortably.
2. Angrily, bitterly, and tearfully, Jean Cretien finally retired.
3. This summer, Ed visited Italy, France, and his mother's house in Spain.
4. If Janick were given the choice of doing the laundry or seeing a movie, he would choose the movie.
5. Bruce not only enjoys singing, but also enjoys playing the guitar.
6. Vampires are advised to avoid garlic, to drink blood regularly, and to stay out of the sun.
7. Football is more popular in Europe than in North America.
8. Rod works either at his home office, or at his office in Sanctuary Towers each day.
9. Warren believes in and is an advocate of werewolves' rights.
10. Kathie Lee is not only highly annoying, but also is the proud mother of two perfectly awful children.

