Parallelism

Problem: Parallelism means using the same pattern of words for two or more ideas that are equally important (as in a list or statement of comparison). When a sentence lacks parallelism, it is likely to become unclear, and your audience may have to reread the sentence in order to fully grasp the relationship among your ideas.

Solutions:

1) Recognize the situations in which parallel structure is necessary.
   • For items in a list
   • For words/phrases joined by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, yet, or, nor, for, so)
   • For words/phrases combined with a correlative conjunction (e.g., both/and, not only/but also, (n)either/(n)or, whether/or, etc.)
   • For words/phrases used with a comparison word (e.g., “than” or “as”)

2) Use the same part of speech for structurally equivalent words/phrases.

   Not parallel: The job required experience, competent, and get up early.
   
   Parallel (all nouns): The job required experience, competence, and a desire to get up early.
   
   Parallel (all adjectives): They were looking for someone who was experienced, competent, and willing to get up early.
   
   Parallel (all verbs): They were looking for someone who had experience, was competent, and enjoyed getting up early.

3) Make sure that structurally equivalent verbs are in the same form.

   Not parallel: Success in school requires studying hard and sleep regularly.
   
   Parallel: Success in school requires studying hard and sleeping regularly.
   
   Parallel: I have always studied hard and slept regularly during the school year.
   
   Parallel: It is just as important to sleep regularly as it is to study hard in school.
   
   Parallel: A person should not only study hard but also sleep regularly.
   
   Parallel: My overworked roommate neither sleeps regularly nor studies effectively.

4) Be consistent with clauses and complete sentences.
Not parallel: Three reasons were given for the game’s cancellation: the quarterback was sick, a poor weather report, and the coach had recently quit.

Parallel: Three reasons were given for the game's cancellation: the quarterback was sick, the weather report was poor, and the coach had recently quit.

Parallel: Three reasons were given for the game’s cancellation: the quarterback's illness, the poor weather report, and the coach’s recent resignation.

Not parallel: The university president explained when the remodel would begin and it would be funded by a grant from the Board of Trustees.

Parallel: The university president explained when the remodel would begin and how it would be funded.

Parallel: The university president explained that the remodel would begin in May and that it would be funded by a grant from the Board of Trustees.

Finally, as you develop your overall writing style, try to use parallelism to strengthen the relationship of ideas among sentences, as well as within them. In the following example, parallel sentences help link the ideas together:

Writing is a demanding activity. It asks you to think deeply, tapping into both mental and emotional energies. It also requires you to pay special attention to details by proofreading for errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.