

Parallel Structure

Sentences that have a series of words or phrases should be structured in parallel form. Parallel structure simply means that words or phrases follow the same balanced format.

Nonparallel

Eleanor spends her time reading, listening to music, and she works at the mall.

Parallel

Eleanor spends her time reading, listening to music, and working at the mall.

The series must be balanced: reading, listening, working. You can determine whether a series is parallel by breaking up the sentence.

Eleanor spends her time reading
Eleanor spends her time listening to music.
Eleanor spends her time she works at the mall.

Eleanor spends her time reading.
Eleanor spends her time listening to music.
Eleanor spends her time working at the mall.

Nonparallel

I was exhausted, irritable, and wanted to eat.

I was exhausted.
I was irritable.
I was wanted to eat.

Parallel

I was exhausted, irritable, and hungry.

I was exhausted.
I was irritable.
I was hungry.

Nonparallel

When she was transferred to Miami, she had to buy a new car, find a nice apartment, and opening a checking account.

She had to buy a new car.
She had to find a nice apartment.
She had to opening a checking account.

Parallel

When she was transferred to Miami, she had to buy a new car, find a nice apartment, and open a checking account.

She had to buy a new car.
She had to find a nice apartment.
She had to open a checking account.

Nonparallel

Jan appeared on a talk show, visited with Vanna White, and a meeting with Tom Cruise was arranged.

Jan appeared on a talk show.
Jan visited with Vanna White.
Jan a meeting with Tom Cruise was arranged.

Parallel

Jan appeared on a talk show, visited with Vanna White, and met Tom Cruise.

Jan appeared on a talk show.
Jan visited with Vanna White
Jan met Tom Cruise.

Practice

Read the following sentences. Rewrite the part that is not balanced.

1. The old outboard motor sputtered, was coughing, and finally died.
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2. When Mary won the gold medal, her excited family jumped up from their seats, cheered, and hugs were exchanged.
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3. After eating two hamburgers, a milkshake, and paying his bill, John left.
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4. The professor told Marsha that she had two options, to make up the work she missed or dropping the course.
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5. Do you like to go for walks or jogging in the park?
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6. Every morning on the camping trip, Jane started a fire, fried bacon, and a large pot of coffee was made.
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7. Jack asked his sister to feed the dog, the doors had to be locked, and to water the plants.
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8. That seafood place serves old shrimp, brown lettuce, and the rolls are stale.
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9. Waitresses can sometimes be cranky, make a lot of snide comments, and rude.
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10. Before John goes to bed, he turns off the lights, locks the doors, and the alarm is set for 5 a.m.
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