

Parallelism is an important element in English writing, especially when you are listing and comparing and contrasting items or ideas. Parallelism means that each item in a list or comparison follows the same grammatical pattern. If you are writing a list and the first item you list is a noun, write all of the following items as nouns also. If the first item is an infinitive verb phrase, make all of the others infinitive verb phrases: if it is a dependent clause, make all of the others dependent clauses. If you are making a comparison or contrast, make sure that the items you are comparing or contrasting are the same.

RULE OF PARALLELISM: Similar points should receive similar structure.

Notice how the first sentence in each of the following examples is not parallel, but the second sentence follows the rule of parallelism.

NOT My English conversation class is made up of Chinese,
PARALLEL Spaniards, and some are from Bosnia.

PARALLEL My English conversation class is made up of Chinese,
Spaniards, and Bosnians.

NOT The students who do well attend class, they do their
PARALLEL homework, and practice speaking in English.

PARALLEL The students who do well attend class, do their
homework, and practice speaking in English.

NOT The teacher wanted to know which country we came from
PARALLEL and our future goals.

PARALLEL The teacher wanted to know which country we came from
and what our future goals were.

NOT The language skills of students in the evening classes
PARALLEL are the same as the day classes.

PARALLEL The language skills of students in the evening classes
are the same as the language skills of the students in
the day classes.

NOT If you want to pass the course, you have to study hard,
PARALLEL taking good notes, and attendance at every class.

PARALLEL If you want to pass the course, you have to study hard,
to take good notes, and to attend every class.

NOT After the toddler threw his bowl of cereal, oatmeal
PARALLEL splattered down the walls, the floor, the table.

PARALLEL After the toddler threw his bowl of cereal, oatmeal
splattered down the walls, on the floor, and under the
table.

NOT Of all the sports I've played, I prefer tennis, handball
PARALLEL and playing golf.

PARALLEL Of all the sports I've played, I prefer tennis, handball
and golf.

NOT If you're looking for the car keys, you should look
PARALLEL under the table, the kitchen counter and behind the
refrigerator.

PARALLEL If you're looking for the car keys, you should look
under the table, on the kitchen counter and behind the

refrigerator.

NOT He is a good choice for manager because he works hard,
PARALLEL he keeps calm and well-liked.

PARALLEL He is a good choice for manager because he works hard,
 he keeps calm and he is well-liked.

Words, phrases, and clauses that are joined by *and*, *or*, and *but* should also be written in parallel form. Notice the parallel structures joined by coordinators in the following sentences. For example:

The Federal Air Pollution Control Administration regulates automobile exhausts, and the Federal Aviation Administration makes similar regulations for aircraft.

The states regulate the noise created by motor vehicles but not by commercial aircraft.

Pesticides cannot be sold if they have an adverse effect on humans, on animal life, or on the environment.

Practice using parallel form in the following exercises.

Exercise 1

Rewrite the following sentences in parallel form.

1. Credit cards are accepted by department stores, airlines, and they can be used in some gas stations.
2. You do not need to risk carrying cash or to risk to pass up a sale.
3. With credit cards, you can either pay your bill with one check, or you can stretch out your payments.
4. You can charge at restaurants and when you stay at hotels

5. Many people carry not only credit cards but they also carry cash.
6. Many people don't want to pay off their balance or they don't want to pay interest.
7. Not making any payments or to send in only minimum payments every month is poor money management.
8. If you want to be friends with him, you have to accept his shyness and make excuses for his awkwardness.

Exercise 2

Rewrite the following sentences in parallel form.

1. The Festival of Flowers begins on June 5; June 15 is when it ends.
2. Rick is considerate, sympathetic, and has tact.
3. My children have so many after-school activities that I have to take them for haircuts, buying them new shoes, and share family dinners on the weekend.
4. It's perfectly acceptable to come to the party in jeans or to wear shorts.
5. Rachel is a dancer with great style and who is talented.
6. After the conference, the director and I met to assess the program, planning next month's session, and coordinate the schedule.
7. The pager's color, its compact size, and what it costs made it attractive to Gary.
8. I would rather go to a movie than spending forty dollars a month on a concert.
9. Getting engaged is not the same as when you get married.