



Grammar: Parallelism

Parallelism is a rule stating that two or more phrases or clauses in a sentence (or on a list) should have the same grammatical structure and/or form.

Sentences

In sentences that contain more than one noun or verb phrase, the tense and/or form should stay the same for every part of the list. Look out for “and” and “or” to find places where you should pay attention to parallelism.

NOT Parallel	Parallel
The princess was <u>singing, dancing,</u> and ran through the forest.	The princess was <u>singing, dancing,</u> and <u>running</u> through the forest.
I'm not good at <u>cooking</u> or being a baker.	I'm not good at <u>cooking</u> or <u>baking</u> .
I wake up every day and <u>walked</u> my dog.	I wake up every day and <u>walk</u> my dog.
I like naps and eating pizza.	I like <u>taking naps</u> and <u>eating</u> pizza. OR I like naps and pizza.

Speaking and Writing Center [1]: In this example, notice how the first two verbs, “singing” and “dancing,” have the same verb ending. Therefore, the last verb in the sequence should have the same ending, too.

Speaking and Writing Center [2]: Note the differences between the right and left versions of this sentence. In good parallel structure, verbs will end in the same tense. In this case, the first underlined word is an -ing verb used as a noun, which is known as a gerund. Following this logic, the second underlined word should be a gerund, too.

Speaking and Writing Center [3]: In the non-parallel version, one verb is present tense and one is past tense. Both should be one or the other. This is because wake and walk form a compound verb (two verbs performed by the same subject). It isn't always incorrect to change verb tenses in a sentence, but it is in this instance because of the compound verb.

Speaking and Writing Center [4]: There are often multiple ways to make a sentence parallel. In this example, you can either remove the verb “eating” or add the verb “taking,” since the original sentence pairs a plural noun (naps) with a gerund (eating).



Either/Or and Neither/Nor

The verbs, nouns, or phrases in “either, or” and “neither, nor” sentences require parallel verbiage. Any helping verbs (should, can, is, will, does, might, etc) should only be stated once and not again after the “or” or “nor” half of the sentence. In other words, the kinds of phrases after “either” and after “or” should match, as should the verbs after “neither” and after “nor.”

NOT Parallel	Parallel
You can either do homework or you can watch football.	You can either do homework or watch football.
Most people are either good at math or language arts.	Most people are either good at math or good at language arts. OR Most people are good at either math or language arts.
Neither taking a long bath nor a movie could shake me out of my slump.	Neither a long bath nor a movie could shake me out of my slump. OR Neither taking a long bath nor watching a movie could shake me out of my slump.

Speaking and Writing Center [5]: In this example, the original sentence is incorrect because the noun and verb of the sentence exist outside of the “either-or” pair. A great way to check if you’ve written this correctly is to switch the part between “either” and “or,” with the part after “or.” In the first example, “You can either you can watch football or do homework” does not make sense, but “You can either watch football or do homework” does!

Speaking and Writing Center [6]: Similar to the last example, the original sentence here was not grammatically correct because the “either” and “or” segments did not align. You would not be able to flip them around in the original sentence, as “Most people are either language arts or good at math,” but the new example would work both ways.

Speaking and Writing Center [7]: This sentence shows the other correct way to correct the sentence on the left. By moving “good at” out of the “either, or” phrase, you no longer need it directly before math and language arts.

Speaking and Writing Center [8]: In this case, both adding the verb “watching” or removing the verb “taking” will give the sentence parallel structure.

Speaking and Writing Center [9]: In these examples, the list gains parallel structure by making all verb endings similar (in this case, -ing), and adding -ing verbs where there are none. There are many right ways to fix this list! It would also be parallel if all of the verbs were removed, so it would be just nouns (baked goods, school, The SWC, cars, quirky personality). The only exception in that case would be to add a noun after our adjective, “quirky,” so that it fits in with the other nouns.

Speaking and Writing Center [10]: These two examples do not follow the pattern set by “baking cookies” because they are nouns, not actions.

Speaking and Writing Center [11]: This example does not follow the pattern because the infinitive verb, “to drive,” is a different verb form than “baking.”

Speaking and Writing Center [12]: This example does not follow the pattern because it is an adjectival phrase.

Lists

All lists - bulleted, numbered, etc - need to follow the same pattern.

NOT Parallel	Parallel
Things I enjoy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baking cookies • School • SWC • To drive fast cars • Funny movies 	Things I enjoy: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Baking • Going to school • Working at the SWC • Driving fast cars • Watching funny movies

Speaking and Writing Center [12]: This example does not follow the pattern because it is an adjectival phrase.