

Parallel Structure

The Big Rule: Words, phrases, or clauses in a series should be in the same grammatical structure.

Using parallel structure demonstrates that the elements in the series fulfill the same function or carry equal weight.

Gerunds (“-ing” verbs)

Not parallel: Mary likes **hiking**, **swimming**, and **to ride** a bicycle.

Parallel: Mary likes **hiking**, **swimming**, and **bicycling**.

OR Mary likes **hiking**, **swimming**, and **riding** her bicycle.

If one element (e.g. “riding her bicycle”) is significantly longer, put it at the end of the series.

Infinitives (“to” verbs)

Not parallel: Mary likes **to hike**, **swim**, and **to ride** a bicycle.

Parallel: Mary likes **to hike**, **swim**, and **ride** a bicycle.

OR Mary likes **to hike**, **to swim**, and **to ride** a bicycle.

Prepositions

Different words require different prepositions. Be careful that you don’t leave any out.

Not parallel: He expressed disagreement and scorn **for** my opinion.

He did not “disagree **for**” the opinion—he disagreed **with** it.

Parallel: He expressed disagreement **with** and scorn **for** my opinion.

Clauses

A clause expresses a complete thought and has both a subject and a verb.

Not parallel: The coach told the players that they should get a lot of sleep, that they should not eat too much, and to do some warm-up exercises before the game.

This sentence is not parallel because the third element (“to do some warm-up exercises...”) does not have a subject (and is therefore not a clause).

Parallel: The coach told the players that they should get a lot of sleep, that they should not eat too much, and that they should do some warm-up exercises before the game.

OR (better) The coach told the players that they should get a lot of sleep, not eat too much, and do some warm-up exercises before the game.

In this sentence, the first “they” is the implicit subject of all three verbs.

A Proofreading Strategy: When you have several items in a list, put them in a column.

The salesman expected that he would present his product at the meeting, that he would show his slide presentation, and that questions would be asked by prospective buyers.

The salesman expected (1) that he would present his product at the meeting

(2) that he would show his slide presentation

(3) and that questions would be asked by prospective buyers.

Elements 1 and 2 are in active voice, but element 3 is in passive voice (the subject does not do the action of the verb), so the sentence is not parallel. To fix the sentence, make element 3 active:

(3) and that prospective buyers would ask questions.

This handout is adapted from the Purdue Online Writing Lab and Strunk and White’s *Elements of Style*.