

ARC Writing Lab Worksheets: Parallel Structure

Final draft version, compiled February 9, 2007, by J. Hines, Ed Prgms Intern

Parallel Structure Is...

Within Sentences:

- Lists need the elements to be expressed in the same way, as the same part of speech, and if those elements are verbs, in the same tense: “I enjoy scuba-diving, fencing, and bowling,” *not* “I enjoy scuba-dive, fencing, and to bowl.”
- Modifiers are either adjectives or adverbs. Do not modify the same word with both adjectives and adverbs; keep like with like, as with the adjectives in this sentence: “Her work is *intricate* and yet *accessible*.”
- Verbs put parallel with each other need to be in the same tense (conjugation)—and to be parallel with other verbs, not other parts of speech: “I want *to work* and *to be appreciated* for my work,” not “I want to work, and appreciation.”

Between Sentences

- Paragraphs should be monitored to make sure they follow a single train of thought from sentence to sentence. Related points should be addressed in similar ways.
- Whole essays should follow a single thesis, and not get sidetracked. If an essay goes off-topic, the writer (you!) should either change or delete the extra information, or else consider revising the topic.

Problems with Parallel Structure Can Be Fixed by...

- Rewrite “coordinated parts” (parts that go together) to match (look for the joining conjunctions—either coordinating conjunctions, as in the “FANBOYS,” or correlative conjunctions, as in “either... or...” or “not only... but also...”):

“The question at hand is whether to incorporate student feedback **or** complete reliance on the opinions of professionals.”

Either phrase can be changed to match the other. The first half might be rewritten as “The choice at hand is between incorporation of student feedback...” or the second half could be changed to “to rely completely on the opinions of professionals.”

- If parallel and equal things are “held together” by correlative conjunctions, as in any of the list that follows, move the conjunctions so they contain those equal things:
- If neither of these work for the effect you want, split the sentence up.

Practice Sheet

Rewrite the following sentences on a separate sheet of paper:

1. "The Budget Information System is a query system, the database is small, and we need to recognize the fact that the response time is unacceptably long."
2. "She likes reading the latest novels and to listen to music."
3. "You will either listen to your father, or negative results will occur."
4. Rewrite the following sentence: "Declining trees both have a higher probability of branch failures and of dying prematurely."
5. Rewrite the following paragraph, identifying where parallel structure rules are ignored:

"To assess your effectiveness as a writer, consider whether your writing does the following. It should convey your message with clarity, emphasis, precision, and style. It uses variety in sentence structure for good stylistic effect. It provides organized, coherent, logical, insightful development of the subject. It supports your main points with specific, detailed, compelling examples and illustrations. You commit no significant errors in grammar, usage, spelling, or punctuation."

Solutions to exercises on next page. Do not look until you have tried at least twice!

Most exercises above adapted from references on notes pages.

Solutions to “Practice Sheet”

Note that for all of these, other corrections or changes are always possible.

1. “The Budget Information System is a query system with a small database and an unacceptably long response time, which fact we need to recognize.”
2. “She likes reading the latest novels and listening to music.”
OR
”She likes to read the latest novels and listen to music.”
3. “Either you will listen to your father, or negative results will occur.”
4. “Declining trees have a higher probability both of branch failures and of dying prematurely.”
5. The last sentence should be changed to, “It commits no significant errors in grammar, usage, spelling, or punctuation.” Do not change forms of address or the way you phrase similar ideas while in the middle of a series of ideas.

Note that the above paragraph is rather repetitious. The intention is to show with a very general example what your grammar should do; stylistically, it is important to be careful of repetition unless you are very intentionally trying to make a point with such a style.