**First year CEE**

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**Parallel Structure**

If two or more ideas are parallel, they are easier to grasp when expressed in parallel grammatical form. Single words should be balanced with single words, phrases with phrases, clauses with clauses.

This novel is not to be tossed lightly aside, but to be hurled with great force. — Dorothy Parker

In matters of principle, stand like a rock; in matters of taste, swim with the current. — Thomas Jefferson

**Balance parallel ideas in a series.**

Readers expect items in a series to appear in parallel grammatical form. When one or more of the items violate readers’ expectations, a sentence will be needlessly awkward.

▶ Children who study music also learn confidence, discipline, and they are creative.

 ***creativity***.

The revision presents all the items in the series as nouns: *confidence*, *discipline*, and *creativity*.

▶ Impressionist painters believed in focusing on ordinary subjects, capturing the effects of light on those subjects, and to use short brushstrokes.

  **using**

The revision uses -*ing* forms for all the items in the series: *focusing*,

*capturing*, and *using*.

▶ Racing to get to work on time, Sam drove down the middle of the road, ran one red light, and^ two stop signs.

 **ignored**

The revision adds a verb to make the three items parallel: *drove*, *ran*, and *ignored.*

In headings and lists, aim for as much parallelism as the content allows.

 **Balance parallel ideas presented as pairs.**

When pairing ideas, underscore their connection by expressing them in similar grammatical form. Paired ideas are usually connected in one of these ways:

• with a coordinating conjunction such as *and*, *but*, or *or*

• with a pair of correlative conjunctions such as *either* . . . *or* or *not only* . . . *but also*

• with a word introducing a comparison, usually *than* or *as*

**Parallel ideas linked with coordinating conjunctions**

Coordinating conjunctions (*and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *so*, and *yet*) link ideas of equal importance. When those ideas are closely parallel in content, they should be expressed in parallel grammatical form.

▶ Emily Dickinson’s poetry features the use of dashes and capitalizing common words.

 the ***capitalization*.**

The revision balances the nouns *use* and *capitalization*.

▶ Many states are reducing property taxes for home owners and extend tax credits to renters.

 ***extending*.**

The revision balances the verb *reducing* with the verb *extending*.

**Parallel ideas linked with correlative conjunctions**

Correlative conjunctions come in pairs: *either . . . or*, *neither . . . nor*, *not only . . . but also*, *both . . . and*, *whether . . . or.* Make sure that the grammatical structure following the second half of the pair is the same as that following the first half.

▶ Thomas Edison was not only a prolific inventor but also was a successful entrepreneur.

The words *a prolific inventor* follow *not only*, so *a successful entrepreneur* should follow *but also*. Repeating *was* creates an unbalanced effect.

▶ The clerk told me either to change my flight or take the train.

**to take**

*To change my flight*, which follows *either*, should be balanced with *to take the train*, which follows *or.*

**Comparisons linked with *than* or *as***

In comparisons linked with *than* or *as*, the elements being compared should be expressed in parallel grammatical structure.

▶ It is easier to speak in abstractions than grounding one’s thoughts in reality.

*To speak* is balanced with *to ground.*

**Repeat function words to clarify parallels**.

Function words such as prepositions (*by*, *to*) and subordinating conjunctions (*that*, *because*) signal the grammatical nature of the word groups to follow. Although you can sometimes omit them, be sure to include them whenever they signal parallel structures that readers might otherwise miss.

▶ Our study revealed that left-handed students were more likely to have trouble with classroom desks and ^rearranging desks for exam periods was useful.

 **that**

A second subordinating conjunction helps readers sort out the two parallel ideas: *that* left-handed students have trouble with classroom desks and *that* rearranging desks was useful.

**Exercise** Edit the following sentences to correct faulty parallelism.

a. Police dogs are used for finding lost children, tracking criminals, and the detection of bombs and illegal drugs.

b. Hannah told her rock-climbing partner that she bought a new harness and of her desire to climb Otter Cliffs.

c. It is more difficult to sustain an exercise program than starting one.

d. During basic training, I was not only told what to do but also what to think.

e. Jan wanted to drive to the wine country or at least Sausalito.

f. Rowena began her workday by pouring a cup of coffee and checked her e-mail.