The Parallelism Principle

Introduction
When writing items in a series, you must be sure that all of the items are parallel; that is, the items must be written in the same grammatical form.

Incorrect example: I like camping, fishing, and to hike.

The items in the above sentence are not parallel. The first two verbs end in –ing, but the third verb (to hike) is the infinitive form of the verb. To correct the sentence, you must make sure that all the items in the list have the same grammatical form.

Correct example: I like camping, fishing, and hiking.
or
I like to camp, to fish, and to hike.

Rule: Correct faulty parallelism by giving the same grammatical form to all of the items in a series.

Why follow the Parallelism Principle?
Sentences that are not in parallel form sound awkward, and sometimes the meaning is unclear. By making sure that your sentences are in parallel form, your writing will flow better, and your ideas will be more clear.

Examples:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Parallel</th>
<th>Parallel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I support myself by tending bar, playing piano, and shoot pool.</td>
<td>I support myself by tending bar, playing piano, and shooting pool.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Her upbringing made her neat, polite, and an obnoxious person.</td>
<td>Her upbringing made her neat, polite, and obnoxious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gordon tried to do what is right, different things, and make a profit</td>
<td>Gordon tries to do what is right, what is different, and what is profitable.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Make a List
One way to determine whether all the items in a list are parallel is to picture (or actually write) the items in list form, one below the other. That way, you can make sure that all the elements are in the same grammatical form – they are all words, or phrases, or clauses.
“Sharon is kind, considerate, and likes to help.”

Write the items in list form:

Sharon is:

• Kind
• Considerate
• Likes to help

The last item is not in the same grammatical form as the first two items; therefore, the sentence is not parallel.

Hint: If you read the third item in place of the first item, it does not work – “Sharon is likes to help” is not grammatically correct.

However, you can reword the sentence:

Sharon is:

• Kind
• Considerate
• Helpful

All three items are in the same grammatical form; therefore, the sentence is parallel.

Let us try it now. Use the list to help you change the third word to be parallel.

“Books provide us with information, education, and they’re entertaining to read.”

Make a list. Books provide us with:

1. Information
2. Education
3. They’re entertaining.

When you reword the sentence, it becomes: “Books provide us with

1. Information
2. Education
3. Entertainment

The See-Saw

One way to understand parallelism is to imagine a see-saw. In a perfect world, the see-saw would be parallel to the ground with no one on it. When the first person gets on, the scale goes down. To balance it again you need someone of equal weight.
For example: the phrases ‘swiftly’ and ‘with skill’. These two phrases are not the same weight.

In the case of parallelism, weight refers to the grammatical form of the word. By using the same grammatical form you keep your sentence parallel.

For example: With the words ‘swiftly’ and ‘with skill’ we can change the words ‘with skill’ to ‘skillfully’ to make it parallel.

Let us try it now using the phrases ‘camping’ and ‘to fish’.

Why don’t you try to balance the see-saw by thinking of the word to replace ‘to fish’ that would be parallel with ‘camping’.

The word ‘fishing’ is parallel to ‘camping’.

Great job. By using the idea of a see-saw it is easy to see that parallelism is all about balance.

**Practice**

Try to complete the following exercises using what you learned in this module. There will be questions based on the techniques explained before.

1. Make the following sentence parallel using the see-saw technique. “She works speedily but with care.”
   What word would replace ‘with care’ to make our see-saw balance.
   Answer: the word ‘carefully’ would make our see-saw balance.

2. Make the following sentence parallel using the see-saw technique. “In sickness and health.”
   How would we change the word ‘health’ to make our see-saw balance.
   Answer: changing ‘health’ to ‘in health’ would make our see-saw balance.

3. In the following sentence, how could you replace the third point of the list to make the sentence parallel? ‘You need to develop skill, strategy, and be agile to be a good tennis player’.
   You need to develop:
   1. Skill
   2. Strategy
   3. Be agile

   Answer: You could change the third point to say ‘agility’.

4. In the following sentence, how could you replace the second point of the list to make the sentence parallel? ‘He advised me to take two aspirins and that I call him in the morning’.
   He advised me:
   1. To take
   2. Call
Answer: You could change the second point to say ‘to call’.

5. Rephrase the sentence to make it parallel. “I am overworked and not paid enough.”
   Answer: “I am overworked and underpaid.”

6. Rephrase the sentence to make it parallel. “The three main kinds of speech are demonstrative, informative and the kind persuading some of something.”
   Answer: “The three main kinds of speech are demonstrative, informative and **persuasive.**”

**Additional Information and More Practice**

You have completed the practice questions. If you would like to learn more about Parallelism or to continue to test your skill, please use the following links:

- [Exercise 1: Recognizing Parallel Structure](#)
- [Parallel Structure—Exercise 3](#)