

Grammatical Parallelism

‘Grammatical parallelism’ or ‘parallel structure’ refers to using the same **grammatical form** for expressions that have the same **grammatical connections** in a sentence. Correct grammatical parallelism is very important and faulty parallelism should definitely be avoided in writing (especially academic writing); however, in speech even skilled native speakers make occasional parallelism errors when talking quickly or casually.

Certain grammatical FORMS deserve particular attention in terms of parallelism. For instance:

a) It is usually problematic to mix different kinds of verbals (infinitives, gerunds).

- ☹ Pete loves nature. He enjoys **swimming, hiking, and to look at the sky at night.**
- ☺ Pete loves nature. He enjoys **swimming, hiking, and looking at the sky at night.**

b) It is usually problematic to mix infinitives and nouns.

- ☹ When Pete is at home, he likes **to grow** plants, **to watch** the birds in his garden, and **nature books.**
- ☺ When Pete is at home, he likes **to grow** plants, **to watch** the birds in his garden, and **to read** nature books.
- ☺ **OR** When Pete is at home, he likes **to grow** plants, **watch** the birds in his garden, and **read** nature books.

c) However, it is usually at least acceptable to mix gerunds and nouns.

- ☺ Pete’s sister prefers **swimming, walking, and golf.**
- ☺ **HOWEVER**, it is more precise to write, Pete’s wife prefers **swimming, walking, and playing** golf.

Also, certain grammatical CONNECTIONS can create special difficulties (even for native speakers). For instance:

a) In a list, use prepositions either just once (at the beginning), or every time.

- ☹ Amy volunteered **at** school, ~~church~~ and **with** the Girl Guides.
- ☺ Amy volunteered **at** school, **at** church and **with** the Girl Guides.
- ☹ She also took part **in** the school play, ~~the fund-raising drive~~, and **in** the school council.
- ☺ She also took part **in** the school play, **in** the fund-raising drive, and **in** the school council.

☹ She also took part **in** the school play, the fund-raising drive, and the school council.

b) In a list after a colon, each item must have the same (grammatically parallel) form.

☹ We expect that the new football rules will have three effects: safer **playing conditions**, an increased **number of goals**, and **making** the game more enjoyable for the spectators.

☺ We expect that the new house-league football rules will have three effects: safer **playing conditions**, an increased **number of goals**, and more **enjoyment** for the spectators.

c) With pairs of correlative expressions, both must be followed by the same (grammatically parallel) form.

☹ I searched for the lost cat **in both** the garden **and in** the park.

☺ I searched for the lost cat **in both** the garden **and** the park.

☺ **OR** I searched for the lost cat **both in** the garden **and in** the park.

☹ The old car ~~was~~ **not only** rusty **but also** ~~it ran~~ poorly.

☺ The old car **not only was** rusty **but also ran** poorly.

☹ That hotel ~~has~~ **neither** a swimming pool **nor allows** pets.

☺ That hotel **neither has** a swimming pool **nor allows** pets.

d) When a reporting verb is followed by more than one complement, each must have the same (grammatically parallel) form.

☹ The teacher informed us **that we should do** our homework regularly, **that we should not arrive** late for class, and **to remember** our textbooks every day.

☺ The teacher informed us **that we should do** our homework regularly, **that we should not arrive** late for class, and **that we should remember** our textbooks every day.

☺ **OR** The teacher informed us that we should **do our homework** regularly, **not arrive late** for class, and **remember** our textbooks every day.