

PARALLEL STRUCTURE TIP SHEET

Parallelism (or parallel structure) is the use of matching grammatical forms or structural patterns to express ideas of equal importance. When we have at least two, but generally three or more, ideas in a sentence, we need to make sure those ideas are parallel.

1. Words in a series should be the same parts of speech.

Not parallel: The mall was small, friendly, and the atmosphere was crowded.

Parallel: The mall was small, friendly, and crowded.

2. Phrases in a series should be the same kind of phrase.

Not parallel: Her lost assignment was in her closet, on the floor, and a pile of clothes was hiding it.

Parallel: Her lost assignment was in her closet, on the floor, and under a pile of clothes.

3. Clauses in a series should not be mixed with phrases.

Not parallel: The street was narrow, the shops were charming, and crowds in the café.

Parallel: The street was narrow, the shops were charming, and the café was crowded.

Quick Test

Rewrite the sentences to make all the parts parallel.

1. The sunshine spilled through the window, onto the armchair, and the cat on the armchair.
2. Pat grabbed his backpack, threw his lunch in the backpack, and drinking his coffee.
3. After work, Darlene drives home, picks up her children, and took them to karate class.
4. Bobby likes solving Sudoku puzzles, driving his Toyota Supra, and sang karaoke.
5. The man put the computer hardware together; his wife sets up the software.

Quick Test Answers

These are possible answers. If you have something different, ask for help.

1. The sunshine spilled through the window, onto the armchair, and on the cat on the armchair.
2. Pat grabbed his backpack, threw his lunch in the backpack, and drank his coffee.
3. After work, Darlene drives home, picks up her children, and takes them to karate class.
4. Bobby likes solving Soduko puzzles, driving his Toyota Supra, and singing karaoke.
5. The man put the computer hardware together; his wife set up the software.