



Worksheet: Parallel Structure (also known as “Parallelism”)

When you write a list – including bulleted items in a presentation – you should try to keep your structures parallel. “Parallel” here means two things:

1. **All the items in the list should make sense after the last word before the list.** If you say, “I ate eggs, toast, and coffee for breakfast,” the last item does not work with the verb “ate.” You didn’t eat coffee, you drank it!

To fix this sentence, either change the verb to something that matches all items in the list: “I had eggs, toast, and coffee for breakfast;” or change the last item in the list to include a verb that matches it. You will need to add another “and” before this second verb: “I had eggs and toast for breakfast, and drank coffee.”

2. **All the items in the list should be grammatically similar.**

There are two versions of this:

- a. **Lists that have items that do not make grammatical sense together *should be revised*.** If you say, “I like coffee, donuts, and play video games,” you have a list with two nouns and a verb phrase. These don’t make sense together; every item in the list should have the same part of speech. Change the list to three nouns (“I like coffee, donuts, and video games.”) or two verb phrases (“I like to have coffee and donuts, and play video games.”)

Similarly, if you are describing three events that happened at the same time, they should also be the same verb tense: “Last night, I cooked dinner, did the dishes, and watch a movie” doesn’t work; you should put, “watched a movie.”

- b. **Lists that have dissimilar features, even if they are the same on some level, *may be revised*.** For example, if I say, “The job must be done quickly, efficiently, and in a professional manner,” while all items in the list are adverbials, two are actual –ly adverbs and one is a prepositional phrase (a kind of adverbial, but not like the others). You could change the last adverbial to “professionally,” though this may change the meaning a little (implying we should pay someone else to do the job).

Another example: “I am good at hockey, tennis, and dancing,” is, strictly speaking, not parallel. However, changing it is optional and depends on your teacher, textbook, or personal stylistic preference, though many writing guides would recommend it. All the items in the list are nouns; all of them work with “at;” but the last item in the list is a gerund, whereas the other two items are not. You could change it to, “I am good at hockey, tennis, and dance” (where “dance” is a noun) or “I am good at playing hockey and tennis, and I’m also good at dancing.”



Exercises: fix the bulleted list and sentences. There is more than one way to do this.

Benefits of Using the Learning Center:

- Tutors are friendly and helpful
- Use computers for free
- Helpful study tips
- Speaking practice
- We will help you with resumes, cover letters, and job interview skills
- Quieter than the cafeteria
- Hang out with your friends!

1. When John found that neither hitting the television nor adjust the cables worked to fix the picture, he decided to bring it in to the repair shop.
2. People like to shop online because prices are cheaper, to select items you want is easy, and companies sending items right to your door.
3. I have excellent customer service skills, based on over 20 years' experience working in high end retail at a downtown fashion boutique, manage the cellphone department at a London Drugs, and supervisor of sales staff as an assistant manager at The Bay.
4. The damaged golf cart flipped over, rolls down the hill, and crashing into a tree near a stream.
5. With a terrible sigh, a moaning yawn, and blink her eyes, the elderly woman fell soundly asleep.
6. I'm not good at soccer, nor am I good at play tennis, but I am good at play hockey.

Answers:

Benefits of Using the Learning Center *OPTION 1: make everything into sentences*

- Tutors are friendly and helpful
- Computers are free to use (or: "You can use computers for free")
- You can get helpful study tips
- Tutors offer speaking practice
- You can also get help with resumes, cover letters, and job interview skills (or "We will help you with...")
- It is quieter than the cafeteria
- You can hang out with your friends!

Benefits of Using the Learning Center *OPTION 2: make (almost) everything into noun phrases*

- Friendly, helpful tutors
- Free-to-use computers
- Helpful study tips
- Speaking practice (*not strictly parallel, but a gerund IS a kind of noun phrase*)
- Help with resumes, cover letters, and job interview skills
- A quieter space than the cafeteria
- You can hang out with your friends! (*no natural noun phrase works, so I've opted for a sentence*).

1 "adjusting the cables" to match "hitting the television" 2. "it is easy to select items you want;" "companies send items right to your door." 3 "managing the cell phone department at a London Drugs, and supervising sales staff..." 4. "rolled down the hill and crashed..." 5. "a blink of her eyes" (*a noun phrase to match the previous noun phrases*). 6. I'm not good at soccer, nor am I good at tennis but I am good at hockey. OR I'm not good at playing soccer, nor am I good at playing tennis, but I am good at playing hockey.





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