

Sentence Parallelism

Definition: A sentence is parallel when each item that it lists uses the same grammatical form.

- Parallelism is important because it balances a sentence and communicates clearly and concisely by using the same grammatical form throughout the sentence.
- The way to fix a non-parallel sentence is to make sure that the adjectives, nouns, and verbs are all in the same order. Also note that parallelism can deal with sentence clauses, and not just verbs and nouns (see Example #3).

Example #1

Unparallel sentence: My dog has *warm fur*, a *nose that is wet*, and a *fluffy tail*.

To make this sentence parallel, we need to flip "nose" and "wet" so that they are in the same adjective-noun order as the rest of the items in the list: warm (adjective) fur (noun), wet (adjective) nose (noun), fluffy (adjective) tail (noun).

Parallel sentence: My dog has *warm fur*, a *wet nose*, and a *fluffy tail*.

Example #2

Unparallel sentence: Robert was a straight-A student because he liked *to study*, *to research*, and *enjoyed reading*

This sentence can be corrected by making sure that an infinitive ("to" plus a verb) is used for each item in the list: to study (verb), to research (verb), to read (verb). To make the sentence parallel, we need to change "enjoyed reading" to "to read."

Parallel sentence: Robert was a straight-A student because he liked *to study*, *to research*, and *to read*.

Example #3

Unparallel sentence: In order to prepare for the final, the professor told students *that they should* get plenty of sleep, *that they should* study the lecture notes, and *to be* confident in themselves.

This sentence can be corrected by making sure that each item in the list begins with the same clause, instead of having various grammatical forms (like the infinitive "to be"): use the clause "that they should" all three times.

Parallel sentence: In order to prepare for the final exam, the professor told students *that they should* get plenty of sleep *that they should* study the lecture notes, and *that they should* be confident in themselves.