



Help With: Parallel Structure

The OWL at Purdue defines parallel structure as “using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance.” This simply means that when you write a sentence with multiple parts, you try to be consistent in how you phrase them.

- Being Consistent with Verb Tense

The following is not ungrammatical but it confuses the reader:

☒ *Before the barbecue, you must ignite some charcoal, you needed some fresh steaks, and you should be preparing some marinade after you wrapped the potatoes in foil.*

This is hard to read because every part of the sentence is in a different verb tense. Let's put all of the parts in the same tense:

☒ *Before the barbecue, you should ignite some charcoal, buy some fresh steaks, prepare some marinade, and wrap the potatoes in foil.*

- Being Consistent with Phrasing

When you have a series of words or phrases, list each object in the same way so that the reader can identify the linking relationship clearly.

☒ *Bad: In Florida, where the threat of hurricanes is an annual event, we learned that it is important (1) to become aware of the warning signs, (2) There are precautions to take, and (3) deciding when to take shelter is important.*

☑ *Better: In Florida, where the threat of hurricanes is an annual event, we learned that it is important to (1) become aware of the warning signs, (2) know what precautions to take, and (3) decide when to seek shelter.*

- Being Parallel with Word Class

When writing a thesis sentence, try to use all verbs, or all adjectives, or all nouns in your topics:

☑ *Jogging is a good idea because it's fun, healthy, and free.* (All adjectives)

☑ *Prosecuting file piracy will waste money, achieve little, and reduce respect for law.* (All verbs)

☑ *The all-hours nightclub will result in noise, parking problems, and vandalism.* (All nouns)

Remember that being consistent in how you phrase a sentences does not mean that you have to keep using the same type of sentence over and over forever:

☒ *Bad: I got up. Then I had a bath. Then I put on clothes. Then I ate breakfast. Then I read the newspaper. Then I walked the dog. Then I bought some groceries. Then I visited a friend.*

Good writers strike a balance between using similar phrasing in related statements and incorporating variety into their writing to avoid repetitiveness.