



Parallel Structure

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When a structure consists of two or more parts, those parts should be parallel (similar in form).

Example: I like **skiing** and **skating**.

In the above example, the two objects of the verb like are skiing and skating. Notice how they are parallel (or similar) in form. It would sound very awkward to say I like **skiing** and **to skate** or I like **to ski** and **skating**. These structures sound awkward because they are not parallel.

It is common for students to make errors in parallel structure with items in a series.

Examples:

(a) Gerry and his wife have lived **in France, Italy, and in Switzerland**.

This series is not parallel. There are two ways to correct the error:

Gerry and his wife have lived **in France, Italy, and Switzerland**.

(A series of three nouns sharing the preposition in)

Gerry and his wife have lived **in France, in Italy, and in Switzerland**.

(A series of three prepositional phrases)

(b) I love **to dance, to read, and watch movies**.

Again, the series is not parallel; there are two ways to correct the error:

I love **to dance, read, and watch movies**.

(A series of three verbs sharing the word to)

I love **to dance, to read, and to watch movies**.

(A series of three infinitives)

(c) Sue has trouble **doing algebra, physics, and understanding grammar**.

Again, there are two ways to correct this non-parallel structure:

Sue has trouble **doing algebra, learning physics, and understanding grammar**.

(A series of ing word groups)

Sue has trouble with **algebra, physics, and grammar**.

(A series of nouns sharing the preposition with)

Two-part Conjunctions

It is important also to use a parallel structure with correlative conjunctions. Correlative conjunctions are two-part conjunctions:

both . . . and . . .

either . . . or . . .

neither . . . nor . . .

not only . . . but also

whether . . . or

Examples:

I like **both** skiing **and** skating.

(Two ing words)

We will travel **either** by car **or** by bus.

(Two prepositional phrases)

Many people in the world can neither read nor write.

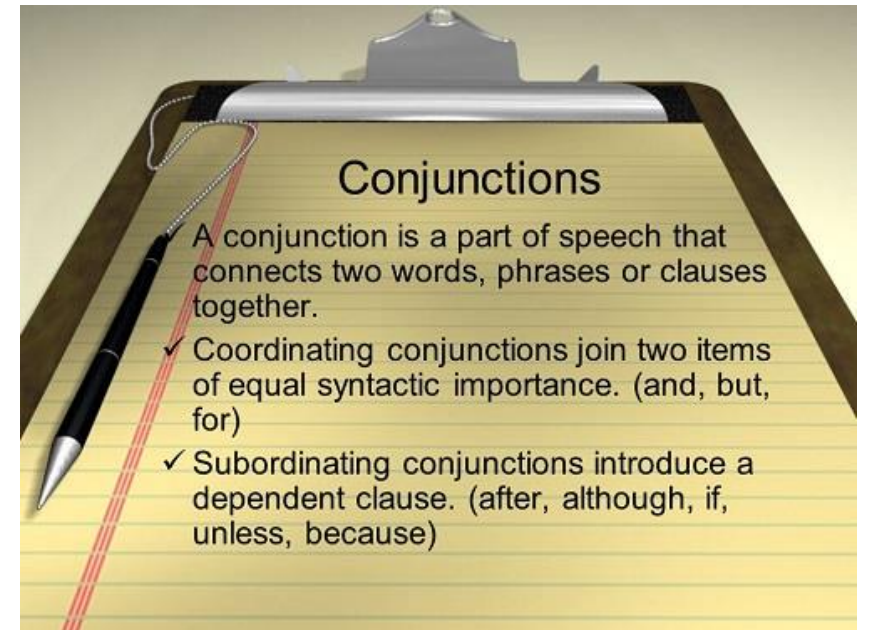
(Two main verbs sharing the helper can)

The boys have **not only** cut the grass **but also** weeded the garden.

(Two main verbs sharing the helper have)

I can't decide **whether** to read a book **or** to watch television.

(Two infinitive word groups)



Parallelism on Sentence Level

- "There will be neither **rest** nor **tranquility** in America until the Negro is granted his citizenship rights".

The coordinating conjunction, "nor," connects two nouns.

- "This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the unalienable rights of **life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness**".

Here, the coordinate elements are the three compliments of the direct object, "unalienable rights." The first two are simple nouns, while the third is a noun with a prepositional phrase as a modifier.

- "It would be fatal for the nation **to overlook the urgency of the moment** and **to underestimate the determination of the Negro**".

Here, the coordinating conjunction "and" connects the two infinitive phrases with their objects and the prepositional modifiers of the objects.

- "This **sweltering summer of the Negro's legitimate discontent** will not pass until there is an **invigorating autumn of freedom and equality**".

This is a complex sentence (It has an independent clause and a dependent clause introduced by "until."). The parallelism here balances the contrasting images of the metaphor on coordinate grammatical structures (the subject of each clause followed by its prepositional modifier). Note that the word "there" is called an "expletive" and merely introduces the clause, having no grammatical function. The real subject of the clause is invigorating autumn.

- "The marvelous new militancy which has engulfed the Negro community must not lead us to a distrust of all white people, for many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that **their destiny is tied up with our destiny** and **their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom**".

In this sentence, the parallel elements are the two noun clauses that are the objects of the infinitive "to realize."

