

Parallel Structure

What is Parallel Structure?

To maintain clarity, items or phrases in a list should be in similar (or parallel) form. If you are listing nouns, list all nouns; if you are listing verbs, list all verbs, etc. Don't mix apples with oranges. Imagine a non-parallel sentence looking like this:

I am going to /, /, and ~.

A parallel sentence would look like this:

I am going to /, /, and /.

Another factor that creates non-parallel lists is when the base of the sentence (the noun and verb) is awkwardly restated or changed in the list. Consider this non-parallel sentence as a whole, then broken up:

Not parallel: **I need to** go to the store, drop off the mail, and **the car needs to be** washed.

I need to go to the store.

I need to drop off the mail.

I need to *the car needs to be* washed.

(Notice how the base of the sentence "I need to" is changed later in the list: "the car needs to be") An effective way to avoid this change of subject and verb is to imagine listing each item separately before combining the list:

I need to go to the store.

I need to drop off the mail.

I need to wash the car.

Parallel: I need to go to the store, drop off the mail, and wash the car.

When fixing this mistake, it usually doesn't matter which form you choose, as long as it is consistent.

Not parallel: In my free time, I like singing and to play the piano.

Parallel: In my free time, I like singing and playing the piano.

Also parallel: In my free time, I like to sing and play the piano.

Résumés

Items in separate lists should also be parallel. This separate list, non-parallel mistake often occurs in résumés, and reflects poorly on the applicant.

Not parallel:

Leadership Experience

- **Volunteered** as a reading tutor at Sunnyside Elementary

- **Served** as student body president

- **I have worked** as a mentor at a school for troubled youth

Parallel:

Leadership Experience

- **Volunteered** as a reading tutor at Sunnyside Elementary

- **Served** as student body vice president

- **Worked** as a mentor at a school for troubled youth