

Parallelism

(Based on: Aaron, J. E. *The Little, Brown Handbook Brief Version*. New York: Longman, 2002.)

Parallelism must occur when we list **equivalent ideas** that have the **same function and importance** within a sentence:

Example: The air is dirtied by ***factories belching smoke*** and ***cars spewing exhaust***.

Faulty parallelism occurs when **equivalent ideas** are NOT presented in **parallel form**:

Example: The air is dirtied by ***factories belching smoke*** and ***cars that spew exhaust***.

Parallelism calls for deliberate but controlled patterns of repetition in word forms, word groups, and word sounds, creating a rhythm that strengthens and intensifies a sentence's message, adding style and grace to writing. It also can add variety to a writer's sentence structures and eliminate unnecessary wordiness. Faulty parallelism, however, is confusing and clumsy, making writing difficult to understand and unpleasant to read.

To achieve parallelism, use the same patterns to express important ideas.

Parallel words: The industrial base was **shifting** and **shrinking**.

Parallel phrases: Politicians rarely **acknowledged problems** or **proposed solutions**.

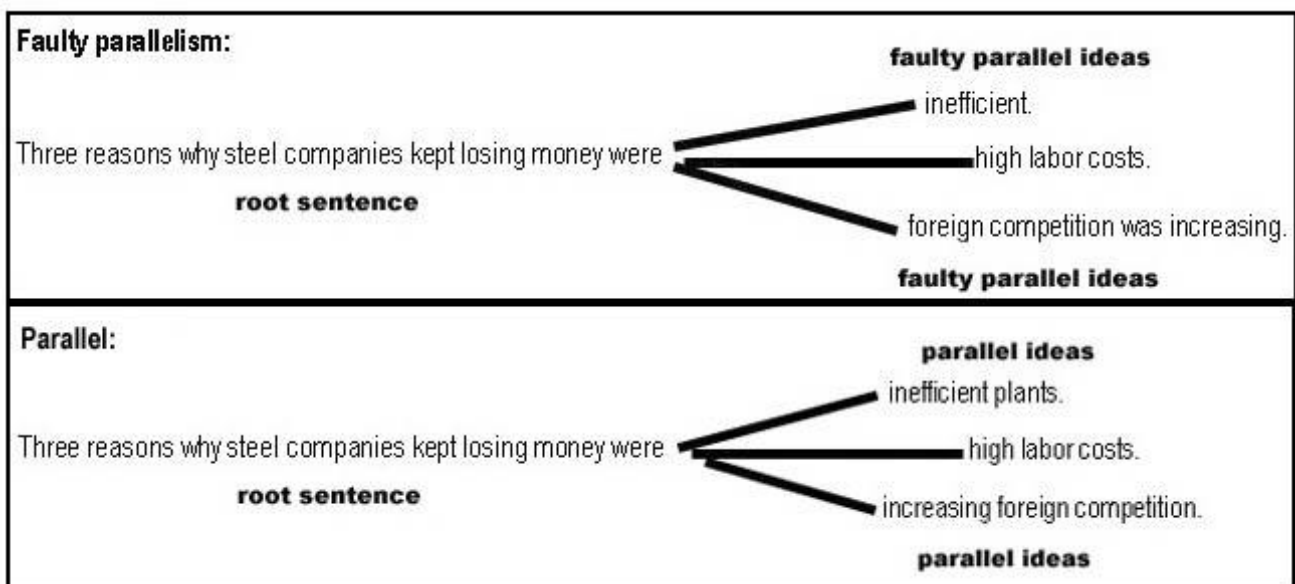
Parallel clauses: Industrial workers were understandably disturbed **that they were losing their jobs** and **that no one seemed to care**.

Parallel ideas are equivalent ideas that should be extensions of the same root sentence.

FAULTY parallelism: Three reasons why steel companies kept losing money were that their plants were **inefficient**, **high labor costs**, and **foreign competition was increasing**.

Parallel: Three reasons why steel companies kept losing money were **inefficient plants**, **high labor costs**, and **increasing foreign competition**.

When writing sentences with parallel ideas, read each idea independently with the **root sentence** as illustrated through the examples below. The faulty examples are often grammatically incorrect because we write sentences with faulty parallelism when we don't carefully consider the **root sentence** to which the parallel ideas attach. Instead, the ideas shift form as we compose our list:



Parallel ideas should be in the same grammatical pattern.

FAULTY parallelism: A good plan of study includes **reading, thinking, and to bring them together by writing**.

Parallel: A good plan of study includes **reading, thinking, and writing**.

As shown above, parallel ideas should be balanced: balance a noun with a noun, a verb with a verb, and so on.

Reading, thinking, and writing are all gerunds (verbs acting as nouns, ending in -ing) while the phrase **to bring them together by writing** is much more than another gerund. Simplify and compress **to bring them together by writing** by using the simple gerund **writing**.

FAULTY parallelism: She got a new job **with a better salary, increased benefits, and she works less hours**.

Parallel: She got a new job **with a better salary, increased benefits, and shorter hours**.

Again, in the example above, parallel ideas are balanced by consistently working of the preposition **with** in a grammatical pattern that is an adjective and noun phrase:

with	better	salary	increased	benefits	shorter	hours
	<i>adjective</i>	<i>noun</i>	<i>adjective</i>	<i>noun</i>	<i>adjective</i>	<i>noun</i>

Parallelism Practice

Revise the following sentences in the space provided to create parallelism; add or delete words and rephrase as necessary.

Example: After emptying her bag, searching the apartment, and she called the library, Jennifer realized she had lost the book.

Revised: *After emptying her bag, searching the apartment, and calling the library, Jennifer realized she had lost the book.*

1. The ancient Greeks celebrated four athletic contests: the Olympic Games at Olympia, the Isthmian Games were held near Corinth, at Delphi, the Pythian Games and the Nemean Games were sponsored by the people of Cleonae.
2. Each day the games consisted of either athletic events or holding ceremonies and sacrifices to the gods.
3. In the years between the games, competitors were taught wrestling, javelin throwing, and how to box.

4. Competitors participated in running sprints, spectacular chariot and horse races, and running long distances while wearing full armor.

5. The purpose of such events was developing physical strength, demonstrating skill and endurance, and to sharpen the skills needed for war.

6. Events were held for men, and boys got into events too.

7. At the Olympic Games, the spectators cheered their favorites to victory, attended sacrifices to the gods, and they feasted on the meat not burned in offerings.

8. The athletes competed less to achieve great wealth than for gaining honor for both themselves and their cities.

9. Of course, exceptional athletes received financial support from patrons, poems and statues by admiring artists, and they even got lavish living quarters from sponsoring cities.

10. With the medal counts and flag ceremonies, today's Olympians often seem not so much to be demonstrating individual talent as to prove their countries' superiority.