

Parallel Structure

What is parallel structure?

It is a similarity of grammatical form between two or more coordinated elements. Parallel structure reinforces and highlights a close relation or a contrast between compound sentence elements, whether they are words, phrases, or entire clauses.

The principle underlying parallel structure is that form should reflect meaning: since the parts of compound constructions have the same function and importance, they should have the same grammatical form. In simple terms, parallel structure means that items are the same part of speech.

The proofreading symbol or correction symbol for parallel structure looks like this:
// two parallel lines.

To achieve parallel structure, there are a few steps you can use to check and to verify if you have correct parallel structure or faulty parallelism.

How to create parallelism with elements linked by coordinating conjunctions

Example: Many speakers are using presentation software because it makes their presentations more professional looking, enables them to import spreadsheets and graphics from other programs, and allows them to print out their slides in several formats.

- (1) Identify the items in the series. If the items are not already in a list, look for conjunctions within sentences, since these often join items that need parallel structure. Using a list at this stage makes it easier to compare the items.
- (2) Check to see if the items are the same part of speech and if they use the same form.
In this example, we have three verb phrases joined by “and” (coordinating word). All three verbs—“makes,” “enables,” “allows”—are in the present tense.
- (3) If the items are not the same part of speech and the same form, change the items so they are the same.