




# RULES FOR FINDING AND FIXING ERRORS IN PARALLEL STRUCTURE

## Understand the problem.

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For a list of actions or items, you must maintain *parallel structure*. To do this, use equal grammatical units. If the first item is a *noun*, then the following items must also be nouns; if the first item is a *verb*, then make the other items verbs as well.

*Nonparallel structure* looks like this:

At the garden store, Larissa bought  ,  , and  .

At the garden store, Larissa bought *pink plastic flamingos*, *ceramic gnomes*, and *then she impulsively added a concrete mermaid to her cart*.

*Parallel structure*, the correct way to write, looks like this:

At the garden store, Larissa bought  ,  , and  .

At the garden store, Larissa  ,  , and  .

At the garden store, Larissa bought *pink plastic flamingos*, *ceramic gnomes*, and a *concrete mermaid*.

At the garden store, Larissa *bought* pink plastic flamingos, *rescued* ceramic gnomes from the sale bin, and impulsively *added* a concrete mermaid to her cart.

## Know the solution.

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Once you discover a nonparallel item, you have two options. First, you can make it conform to the other grammatical items in the sentence.

Look at this example:

We spent the hour in the waiting room *reading* old magazines, *eating* stale cookies from the vending machine, and *we wiggled* on the hard plastic chairs.

*Reading old magazines* and *eating stale cookies* are *participle phrases*; *we wiggled on hard plastic chairs*, however, is a *main clause*.

If we fix the nonparallel item, the sentence looks like this:

We spent the hour in the waiting room *reading* old magazines, *eating* stale cookies from the vending machine, and *wiggling* on the hard plastic chairs.

Or we can alter the first two items and have this version instead:

In the waiting room, we *read* old magazines, *ate* stale cookies from the vending machine, and *wiggled* on the hard plastic chairs.

## Recognize these special cases.

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*Not only ... but also*, *either ... or*, and *neither ... nor* all require special attention when you are proofreading for parallelism. These *correlative conjunctions* require equal grammatical units after both parts of the conjunction.

You can have two *main clauses* like this:

Not only *did Jerome buy flowers for his mother*, but he also *purchased a bouquet for Yolanda, his wife*.

For a shorter sentence, use two *prepositional phrases*:

Jerome bought flowers not only for his mother but also for *Yolanda, his wife*.

Or you can have two *nouns* as this version does:

Jerome bought flowers for not only his mother but also *Yolanda, his wife*.



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