Using Parallel Structures and Fixing Sentence Problems

In this chapter, you will learn to use parallel structure to add symmetry and style to your sentences. You will also learn to recognize and repair common sentence problems: fragments, run-ons, comma splices, choppy, and stringy sentences.

Parallelism

Parallelism is an important element in English writing, especially when you are listing and comparing and contrasting items or ideas. Parallelism means that each item in a list or comparison follows the same grammatical pattern. If you are writing a list and the first item in your list is a noun, write all the following items as nouns also. If the first item is an -ing word, make all the others -ing words; if it is an adverb clause, make all the others adverb clauses.
In the examples that follow, the sentences in the column on the right follow the rule of parallelism.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Not Parallel</th>
<th>Parallel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My English conversation class is made up of Chinese, Spaniards, and some are from Bosnia.</td>
<td>My English conversation class is made up of Chinese, Spaniards, and Bosnians. <em>(The items are all nouns.)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The students who do well attend class, they do their homework, and practice speaking in English.</td>
<td>The students who do well attend class, do their homework, and practice speaking in English. <em>(The items are all verbs + complements.)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher wanted to know which country we came from and our future goals.</td>
<td>The teacher wanted to know which country we came from and what our future goals were. <em>(The items are both noun clauses.)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The language skills of the students in the evening classes are the same as the day classes.</td>
<td>The language skills of the students in the evening classes are the same as the language skills of the students in the day classes. <em>(The items are both noun phrases.)</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes**

1. You may substitute a pronoun for the second “the language skills” in the last example:

   The language skills of the students in the evening classes are the same as those of the students in the day classes.

2. All the words in the first item do not always have to be repeated in the second. You may repeat all or some of the words, depending on what you wish to emphasize. The following sentences are both correct:

   **Before you write a paper** or **before you take a test**, you must organize your thoughts.
   
   Before you **write a paper** or **take a test**, you must organize your thoughts.

**Parallelism with Coordinators: And, Or, But**

Words, phrases, and clauses that are joined by *and*, *or*, and *but* are written in parallel form. Notice the parallel structures joined by coordinators in the following sentences.

- The Federal Air Pollution Control Administration regulates automobile exhausts, and the Federal Aviation Administration makes similar regulations for aircraft.
- The states regulate the noise created by motor vehicles but not by commercial aircraft.
- Pesticides cannot be sold if they have a harmful effect on humans, on animal life, or on the environment.
Parallelism with Correlative (Paired) Conjunctions

Use parallel forms with the paired conjunctions *both ... and, either ... or, neither ... nor, and not only ... but also.*

Paired conjunctions are placed directly *before* the elements they join in the sentence. Notice the parallel structures in these clauses joined by paired conjunctions:

A new law provides the means for *both* regulating pesticides and ordering their removal *if* they are dangerous.

Air pollutants may come *either* from the ocean as natural contaminants given off by sea life *or* from the internal combustion engines of automobiles.

If *neither* industry nor the public works toward reducing pollution problems, future generations will suffer.

Many people are *neither* concerned about pollutants *nor* worried about their future impact.

At the present time, air pollution is controlled through laws passed *not only* to reduce the pollutants at their sources *but also* to set up acceptable standards of air quality.

**PRACTICE 1**

**Parallelism**

A. Two or more items in each of the following sentences are written in parallel grammatical form. Underline the items or ideas that are parallel, and circle the word or words that connect the parallel structures. The first one has been done for you as an example.

1. An ideal environment for studying includes good lighting, a spacious desk, (and) a comfortable chair.
2. You know you are truly fluent in another language when you can calculate in it and when you begin to dream in it.
3. People often spend as much time worrying about the future as planning for it.
4. You can learn a second language in the classroom, at home, or in a country where the language is spoken.
5. My new personal computer is both fast and reliable.
6. My old typewriter is neither fast nor reliable.
7. Ann is growing older but unfortunately not wiser.
8. Young people buy computers not only to do schoolwork but also to play games.
9. If industrial nations continue to burn fossil fuels and if developing nations continue to burn their rain forests, the level of CO₂ in the atmosphere will continue to increase.
10. Before the judge announced the punishment, he asked the murderer if he wanted to speak either to the victim’s family or to the jury.
11. The criminal neither admitted guilt nor asked for forgiveness before he was sent to prison.
B. Rewrite the following sentences in parallel form. Underline the part of the sentence that is not parallel and correct it. Remember that you do not have to repeat all the words in the second item. The first one has been done for you as an example.

1. The disadvantages of using a credit card are overspending and you pay high interest rates.
   The disadvantages of using a credit card are overspending and paying high interest rates.

2. Credit cards are accepted by department stores, airlines, and they can be used in some gas stations.

3. You do not need to risk carrying cash or to risk to miss a sale.

4. With credit cards, you can either pay your bill with one check, or you can stretch out your payments.

5. You can charge both at restaurants and when you stay at hotels.

6. Many people carry not only credit cards but they also carry cash.

7. Many people want neither to pay off their balance monthly nor do they like paying interest.

8. Not making any payment or to send in only the minimum payment every month is poor money management.
C. On a separate sheet of paper, write seven original sentences in parallel form, using the following conjunctions one time each. Write sentences on the topics suggested, or choose topics of your own.

- **and** two weekend activities you enjoy
- **or** two foods you would not eat/give to a baby
- **but** one school subject that you excel at and one that you struggle with
- **both . . . and** two advantages of being bilingual
- **either . . . or** two places you might spend a month’s vacation or a honeymoon
- **neither . . . nor** two places you would never spend a month’s vacation or a honeymoon
- **not only . . . but also** two reasons to get a college degree

**Sentence Problems**

In this section, you will learn to recognize and correct some common errors in sentence structure: sentence fragments and choppy, run-on, and “stringy” sentences.

**Sentence Fragments**

Sentence fragments are incomplete sentences or parts of sentences. Remember that a complete sentence must contain at least one main or independent clause. Study the following examples of sentence fragments and the suggested methods for correcting them.

1. **Problem**
   Because some students work part-time while taking a full load of classes.

   This is a dependent clause. It begins with a subordinator (because). It does not express a complete thought because there is no independent clause.

   **To correct**
   1. Add an independent clause.

      Because some students work part-time while taking a full load of courses, 
      **they have very little free time.**

   2. Delete the subordinator (because).

      Some students work part-time while taking a full load of classes.
2. For example, the increase in the cost of renting an apartment. To live and work for at least a year in a foreign country.

**Problem**
Neither sentence has a verb.

**To Correct**
Rewrite each sentence so that it has a verb.

For example, the increase in the cost of renting an apartment is one reason for more people being homeless.

To live and work for at least a year in a foreign country has always been my dream.

3. Teachers who give too much homework.

**Problem**
This is a noun (teachers) + an adjective clause (who give too much homework). The noun is the beginning of an independent clause that was never finished.

**To Correct**
Finish the independent clause.

Teachers who give too much homework are unpopular.

Always check your own writing for sentence fragments. Pay particular attention to sentences beginning with subordinators (although, since, because, if, before, and so on). These are DANGER WORDS! Make sure that every clause beginning with these words is attached to an independent clause.

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**Practice 2**

**Rewriting**

**Sentence Fragments**

A. Read the following sentences. Mark them *Frag.* if they are sentence fragments, or *Comp.* if they are complete sentences. On a separate sheet of paper, rewrite each fragment to make a complete sentence.

1. The desire of all humankind to live in peace and freedom, for example.
2. Second, a fact that men are physically stronger than women.
3. The best movie I saw last year.
4. *Titanic* was the most financially successful movie ever made, worldwide.
5. For example, many students have part-time jobs.
6. Although people want to believe that all men are created equal.
7. Finding a suitable marriage partner is a challenging task.
8. Many of my friends who did not have the opportunity to go to college.
9. Working during the morning and attending classes during the afternoon.
10. Because I do not feel that grades in college have any value.
11. A tsunami that occurred in the Indian Ocean in December 2004, killing more than 200,000 people.
12. The total energy of the tsunami waves was about five megatons of TNT.
13. More than twice the total explosive energy used during all of World War II, including two atomic bombs, according to one expert.
14. Evidence that the wave reached a height of 80 feet (24 meters) when coming ashore along the coastline and rose to 100 feet (30 meters) in some areas when traveling inland.

15. Despite a lag of up to several hours between the earthquake and tsunami, nearly all of the victims were taken completely by surprise.

B. Read the following short essay. Put brackets [ ] around any sentence fragments you find and mark them *Frag*. Then correct the fragments on a separate sheet of paper.

**Women Drivers**

1 Sexism\(^1\) extends even into the area of automobile driving, it seems. Believing that they are far better drivers than women. Men consider women drivers incompetent, inattentive, and even dangerous behind the wheel.

2 However, statistics prove that women are, in fact, safer drivers than men. For example, insurance rates. Insurance rates for women are 20 percent lower than they are for men. Another proof is that more accidents are caused by male drivers between the ages of 18 and 25 than by any other group. Also, the greater percentage of accidents involving deaths caused by men. Although women are criticized for being too cautious. They are really just being safe drivers.

3 The reasons for women drivers' safer driving habits can perhaps be found in the differing attitudes of the sexes toward automobiles. On the one hand, women drivers who regard the automobile as a convenience. Like a washing machine. On the other hand, men regard the automobile as an extension of their egos. Using it as a weapon when they feel particularly aggressive. Or using it as a status symbol.

4 All in all, women are safer drivers. Because of their attitude. Men can learn to become safe drivers. If they adopt the attitude that an automobile is merely a convenience.

**Choppy Sentences**

Choppy sentences are sentences that are too short. Short sentences can be effective in certain situations. For instance, when you want to make an impact, use a short sentence.

Despite countless doctors' warnings, news stories, and magazine articles about the importance of eating a nutritious, balanced diet, many people resist developing healthy eating habits. Some people just like junk food.

*(A sentence of 25 words is followed by one of 6 words. The second sentence has greater impact because it is so short.)*

\(^1\)Sexism: men's belief in male superiority
However, overuse of short sentences is considered poor style in academic writing. Choppy sentences are easy to correct. Just combine two or three short sentences to make one compound or complex sentence. Your decision to make a compound or a complex sentence should be based on whether the ideas in the short sentences are equal or whether one idea is dependent on the other.

1. If the sentences express equal ideas, use coordination to combine them.

**CHOPPY SENTENCES**

Wind is an enduring source of power. Water is also an unlimited energy source. Dams produce hydraulic power. They have existed for a long time. Windmills are relatively new.

**CORRECTED**

Both wind and water are enduring sources of power. Dams have produced hydraulic power for a long time, but windmills are relatively new.

2. If the sentences express unequal ideas, that is, if one sentence expresses a less important idea than the other, use subordination to combine them.

**CHOPPY SENTENCES**

We must find new sources of energy. Natural sources of energy are decreasing. Solar energy is a promising new source of energy. Solar energy is energy from the sun.

**CORRECTED**

We must find new sources of energy because natural sources of energy are dwindling. Solar energy, which is energy from the sun, is a promising new source.

**PRACTICE 3**

*Rewriting Choppy Sentences*

Improve the following choppy sentences by combining them.

**Step 1** Decide what the relationship between the sentences is.

- Do they express equal ideas? If yes, write a compound sentence.
  
  Both sentences present the main idea.

  - Similar or equal idea
  - Negative equal idea
  - Opposite idea
  - Alternative possibility
  - Surprising continuation
  - Expected result
  - Reason
  
  And, nor, but, or, yet, so, for

- Is one idea more important than another idea? If yes, go on to Steps 2 and 3 and write a complex sentence.

**Step 2** Decide which sentence expresses the most important idea. This will be the independent clause.

**Step 3** Then decide what the relationship of other sentences to the main idea is and choose a subordinator that expresses that relationship.

- Time
- Reason
- Contrast
- Descriptive information

*when, after, as soon as, and so on
because, since, or as
although, whereas, and so on
who, which, that, and so on*
The first one has been done for you as an example. As you can see from the example, there may be more than one way to combine the sentences.

1. (a) Gasoline became expensive. (b) Automobile manufacturers began to produce smaller cars. (c) Smaller cars use less gasoline.

   Equal / Not equal?
   Main idea?
   Relationships: Sentence (a) could be time (when) or reason (because). Sentence (c) could be reason (because) or descriptive information (which).
   Combined sentence: When gasoline became more expensive, automobile manufacturers began to produce smaller cars because they use less gasoline.

   OR
   Because gasoline became more expensive, automobile manufacturers began to produce smaller cars, which use less gasoline.

2. (a) Electric cars are powered solely by batteries. (b) The new hybrid vehicles switch between oil and gasoline.

   Equal / Not equal?
   Main idea?
   Relationship:
   Combined sentence:

3. (a) Government and private agencies have spent billions of dollars advertising the dangers of smoking. (b) The number of smokers is still increasing.

   Equal / Not equal?
   Main idea?
   Relationship:
   Combined sentence:

4. (a) Some students go to a vocational school to learn a trade. (b) Some students go to college to earn a degree.

   Equal / Not equal?
   Main idea?
   Relationship:
   Combined sentence:
5. (a) The grading system at our college should be abolished. (b) The students do not like getting grades. (c) The instructors do not enjoy giving grades.
   Equal / Not equal?
   Main idea?
   Relationship:
   Combined sentence:

6. (a) Education in a free society teaches children how to think. (b) Education in a dictatorship teaches children what to think.
   Equal / Not equal?
   Main idea?
   Relationship:
   Combined sentence:

Run-On Sentences and Comma Splices

A run-on sentence is a sentence in which two or more independent clauses are written one after another with no punctuation. A similar error happens when two independent clauses are incorrectly joined by a comma without a coordinating conjunction. This kind of error is called a comma splice.

Run-on
My family went to Australia then they emigrated to Canada.

Comma splice
My family went to Australia, then they emigrated to Canada.

The ways to correct these two sentence errors are the same.

1. Add a period:
   My family went to Australia. Then they emigrated to Canada.

2. Add a semicolon:
   My family went to Australia; then they emigrated to Canada.

3. Add a coordinator:
   My family went to Australia, and then they emigrated to Canada.

4. Add a subordinator:
   My family went to Australia before they emigrated to Canada.
   After my family went to Australia, they emigrated to Canada.
A. Correct the following run-on/comma splice sentences using the method indicated.

1. A newly arrived international student faces several challenges, for example, he or she has to cope with a new culture.
   a. Add a period: ____________________________________________
   b. Add a semicolon: ____________________________________________

2. New York City is very cosmopolitan, people from many cultures and ethnic groups live there.
   a. Add a period: ____________________________________________
   b. Add a semicolon: ____________________________________________
   c. Add a subordinator: ____________________________________________
   d. Add a coordinator: ____________________________________________

3. Learning a new language is like learning to swim it takes a lot of practice.
   Add a coordinator: ____________________________________________

4. Ask for assistance at the reference desk in the library, a librarian is always on duty.
   Add a semicolon: ____________________________________________

5. Skiing is a dangerous sport you can easily break your leg or your neck.
   Add a subordinator: ____________________________________________

B. Some of the following sentences are run-ons or comma splices, and some are correct. Check each sentence. If it is incorrect, write RO or CS in the space at the left. If it is correct, leave the space blank. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, correct the incorrect sentences.

   RO   1. Two letters arrived on Monday a third one came on Wednesday.
       Two letters arrived on Monday; a third one came on Wednesday.

   ______ 2. An encyclopedia is a valuable source of information it contains summaries of every area of knowledge.

   ______ 3. Because of the rapid expansion of human knowledge, it is difficult to keep encyclopedias current.

   ______ 4. A printed encyclopedia becomes out of date almost as soon as it is published also it is quite expensive to purchase.

   ______ 5. Online encyclopedias are available to everyone with access to the Internet.
6. Articles in encyclopedias are written by experts in each subject, who are often university professors.

7. An editor of an encyclopedia does not write articles he only collects and edits articles written by subject experts.

8. To find a book on a certain subject, you used to look in a card catalog, to find a magazine article on a subject, you used to look in a periodical index.

9. Now, most libraries have thrown away their card catalogs, they have computerized catalogs that are much more efficient to use and update.

10. Many periodical indexes, which list only titles of magazine articles and indicate where to find them, have been replaced by computer indexes, some of which display abstracts\(^1\) and even entire articles instantly.

11. If you cannot find any information on a subject, you can always ask a librarian to help you, they are paid to assist students.

C. Locate the run-on/comma splice sentences in the following paragraphs. Mark them by writing RO or CS above them. Then, on a separate sheet of paper, rewrite both paragraphs, correcting the mistakes that you found. There are four errors.

1Teachers at Stone Mountain State College give higher grades than teachers at 12 of the 19 other colleges in the state college system, according to a recent report from the State Institutional Research Committee.\(^2\) This report showed that more than one-third of the undergraduate grades awarded in the spring semester 2005 were A's only 1.1 percent were F's.\(^3\) The percentage of A's awarded to graduate students was even higher, almost two-thirds were A's.

4While students may be happy to receive high grades, evidence suggests that this trend is having negative consequences.\(^4\) Investigation of the admissions criteria\(^5\) of some graduate and professional schools indicates that the admissions offices of these schools are discounting high grades on the transcripts of SMSC students, this means that an A from SMSC is not equal to an A from other universities.\(^6\) Grade inflation may, therefore, hurt a student from Stone Mountain State College who intends to apply to a graduate or professional school he or she may not be accepted despite a high grade point average.

Stringy Sentences

A stringy sentence is a sentence with too many clauses, usually connected with and, but, so, and sometimes because. It often results from writing the way you speak, going on and on like a string without an end.

To correct a stringy sentence, divide it and/or recombine the clauses, remembering to subordinate when appropriate.

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\(^1\)abstracts: summaries

\(^2\)criteria: standards by which a judgment is made
Many students attend classes all morning, and then they work all afternoon, and they also have to study at night, so they are usually exhausted by the weekend.

Many students attend classes all morning and work all afternoon. Since they also have to study at night, they are usually exhausted by the weekend.

OR

Because many students attend classes all morning, work all afternoon, and study at night, they are usually exhausted by the weekend.

Improve these stringy sentences.

1. He enrolled in an intermediate calculus class, but he found it too easy, so he dropped it, and he signed up for the advanced class.

2. First-born children in a family often have more responsibility than their younger siblings, and they feel pressure to set a good example, so they often become superachievers.

3. Last-born children, on the other hand, often have little responsibility, and they may be pampered as the "baby" of the family, but they are the smallest, and they have to get people to like them, so they often develop superior social skills.

4. The students in my engineering class could not do the homework, so we got together and worked for several hours, and we finally solved all the problems.

5. The lack of rainfall has caused a severe water shortage, so people have to conserve water every day, and they also have to think of new ways to reuse water, but the situation is improving.

Review

These are the important points covered in this chapter.

1. Parallelism
Two or more items joined by coordinating conjunctions and paired conjunctions must be parallel in structure. The same is true of contrasts and comparisons of items. If the first item is a noun, make all others nouns; if it is a phrase, make all the others phrases; if it is a clause, make all the others clauses.
Not Parallel
Taking a class on a pass/fail basis is sometimes better than to get a grade of C.
My grandmother not only speaks four languages but also she understands six others.

Parallel
Taking a class on a pass/fail basis is sometimes better than getting a grade of C.
My grandmother not only speaks four languages but also understands six others.

2. Sentence Problems
The main kinds of problem sentences that students may write are fragments, run-ons, comma splices, choppy, and stringy sentences.

Fragments are incomplete sentences.

Fragment
The subject I enjoyed the most in high school.

Corrected
The subject I enjoyed the most in high school was physics.

Run-ons and comma splices are incorrectly joined independent clauses.

Run-On
Getting married is easy staying married is another matter.

Corrected
Getting married is easy, but staying married is another matter.

or

Comma Splice
Getting married is easy, staying married is another matter.

Corrected
Although getting married is easy, staying married is another matter.

Choppy sentences are sentences that are too short.

Choppy
My family left our homeland. Then we lived in a refugee camp. We lived there for several months. Then we got our documents. We traveled to Canada. We live there now.

Corrected
After my family left our homeland, we lived in a refugee camp for several months. As soon as we got our documents, we traveled to Canada, where we live now.

Stringy sentences are sentences with too many independent clauses.

Stringy
My family left our homeland, and we lived in a refugee camp for several months, but finally we got our documents, so we traveled to Canada, and we live there now.

Corrected
After my family left our homeland, we lived in a refugee camp for several months. As soon as we got our documents, we traveled to Canada, where we live now.
Editing Practice

Edit the following paragraphs for errors in parallel structure and other sentence problems. Identify the problem sentences and correct them. Rewrite the paragraphs on a separate sheet of paper. (*Note: Not every sentence has a problem.*)

**The United States: Melting Pot or Salad Bowl?**

1The United States counts its population every 10 years, and each census reveals that the racial and ethnic mix is changing dramatically, so by the year 2050, the "average" person in the United States will not be descended from Europeans, but the majority of U.S. residents will trace their ancestry to Africa, Asia, the Hispanic world, the Pacific Islands, or the Middle East. 2Once the United States was a microcosm of European nationalities, today the United States is a microcosm of the world. 3The United States is no longer considered a "melting pot" society by many of its residents. 4Instead, many people prefer the term "salad bowl." 5They use this term to describe U.S. society. 6U.S. society will soon be predominantly nonwhite. 7"Melting pot" implies that the different ethnic groups blend together into one homogeneous mixture, "salad bowl" implies that nationalities, like the ingredients in a mixed green salad, retain their cultural identities.

8Earlier generations of immigrants believed that they had to learn English quickly not only to survive but also for success. 9Now, many immigrant groups do not feel the same need. 10Because there are many places in the United States where you can work, shop, get medical care, marry, divorce, and die without knowing English. 11For example, Chinatown in San Francisco and New York. 12Also, Los Angeles has many Vietnamese immigrants and immigrants from Mexico. 13In addition, many immigrant groups want their children to know their own culture. 14Many Hispanics, for instance, want their children to learn both English and study the Spanish language in school. 15They are fighting for the right to bilingual education in many communities. 16In many communities they are in the majority.

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1*census*: population count  
2*be descended from*: be the children, grandchildren, etc., of  
3*ancestry*: a person's origins  
4*microcosm*: small community representing a large one