

# Parallel Structure

Recognize *parallel structure* when you see one.

Whenever you include a list of actions or items, you must use equal grammatical units. If the first item is a noun, then the following items must also be nouns; if the first action is a simple past tense verb, then make the other items simple past tense verbs as well.

*Nonparallel structure* looks like this:

Students  ,  , and  .

Students *capped* their pens, *were closing* their notebooks, and *zipped* their book bags as they tried to alert Professor Jones, rambling at the lectern, that the end of class had arrived.

*Capped* and *zipped* are both simple past tense verbs, but *were closing* is past progressive, wrecking the parallelism.

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

Students  ,  , and  .

Students  ,  , and  .

To establish parallelism, you can use all simple past tense verbs:

Students *capped* their pens, *closed* their notebooks, and *zipped* their book bags as they tried to alert Professor Jones, rambling at the lectern, that the end of class had arrived.

Or you can revise the sentence so that all of the items in the list are nouns:

Students gathered their *pens*, *notebooks*, and *book bags* as they tried to alert Professor Jones, rambling at the lectern, that the end of class had arrived.

**Be especially careful with *correlative conjunctions*.**

*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 Professor Jones give the class a withering look, *but* he *also* assigned 20 extra pages of homework as punishment for their impatience to leave.

Or you can use two verbs:

Professor Jones *not only gave* the class a withering look *but also assigned* them 20 extra pages of homework as punishment for their impatience to leave.

Or you can have two nouns as this version does:

Professor Jones gave the class *not only a withering look but also 20 extra pages* of homework as punishment for their impatience to leave.



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## Parallel Structure

**Directions:** Choose the sentence that has no errors in structure.

1.
  - A. Barking dogs, kittens that were meowing, and squawking parakeets greet the pet shop visitors.
  - B. Barking dogs, meowing kittens, and squawking parakeets greet the pet shop visitors.
  - C. Dogs that bark, kittens that meow, and parakeets squawking greet the pet shop visitors.
  
2.
  - A. During class, Samuel spent his time flirting with Brittney, eating candy, and doodling on the assignment sheet.
  - B. During class, Samuel spent his time flirting with Brittney, he ate candy, and doodling on the assignment sheet.
  - C. During class, Samuel spent his time to flirt with Brittney, to eat candy, and doodling on the assignment sheet.
  
3.
  - A. Alex looked everywhere for his math book—under the bed, on his desk, and he searched inside the refrigerator.
  - B. Alex looked everywhere for his math book—viewing under the bed, searching on his desk, and inside the refrigerator.
  - C. Alex looked everywhere for his math book—under the bed, on his desk, and inside the refrigerator.
  
4.
  - A. The manager wanted staff who arrived on time, smiled at the customers, and didn't snack on the chicken nuggets.
  - B. The manager wanted staff who arrived on time, would be smiling at the customers, and would not be snacking on the chicken nuggets.
  - C. The manager wanted staff who arrived on time, smiled at the customers, and no snacking on the chicken nuggets
  
5.
  - A. After giving Jeremy her phone number, Felicia had to tolerate his late night calls, stupid conversations, and requests for her math homework.
  - B. After giving Jeremy her phone number, Felicia had to tolerate his late night calls, the fact that he carried on stupid conversations, and requests for her math homework.
  - C. After giving Jeremy her phone number, Felicia had to tolerate being woken up late at night, having stupid conversations, and he constantly requested her math homework.

**Directions:** Choose the correct word or phrase within the context suggested by the sentence.

6. Pasta boiling in water, \_\_\_\_\_, and garlic bread baking in the oven welcomed Francisco as he opened the door.
- A. simmered tomato sauce in the pan
  - B. tomato sauce simmering in the pan
  - C. tomato sauce that simmered in the pan
  - D. saucy tomatoes that were simmering in the pan
7. During our vacation in the Bahamas, we hope \_\_\_\_\_, to enjoy beautiful sunsets, and to dance ourselves dizzy at reggae clubs.
- A. that we eat delicious seafood
  - B. that eating delicious seafood occurs
  - C. to eat delicious seafood
  - D. eating delicious seafood
8. Karen wished Ray chewed with his mouth closed, for otherwise he was everything she wanted in a date; he was tall, intelligent, and \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. he looked good
  - B. being good looking
  - C. one handsome man to look at
  - D. handsome
9. To win Laurie's love, Albert visited the florist for roses, the drugstore for a box of chocolates, and \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. bought an expensive gold necklace at the jewelry store
  - B. the jeweler for an expensive gold necklace
  - C. the jeweler where he bought an expensive gold necklace
  - D. to buy an expensive gold necklace
10. Kimberly won't date Terry because he is too short, too noisy, and \_\_\_\_\_.
- A. because he picks his teeth with his fingers
  - B. too impolite
  - C. is the most impolite man she has ever met
  - D. Picking his teeth with his fingers



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## Parallel Structure – Exercise 1

This handout accompanies Exercise 1 of *Grammar Bytes!* Get the answers by doing the interactive version of the exercise at this address: <http://chompchomp.com/exercises.htm>

**Directions:** Determine whether the sentences below contain errors in parallel structure. *Fix any problems that you find.*

1. Monica brewed espresso, steamed milk, and told jokes as she prepared Mike's latte.
2. Natasha tried holding her breath, chewing a piece of gum, and poking her belly, but she could not quiet her empty stomach, which rumbled during the chemistry exam.
3. In the restroom, Tishena was brushing her hair, freshened her lip-gloss, and took deep breaths, trying to work up the courage to walk to her first speech class.
4. Celine looked behind the toilet, in the laundry basket, and checked under the bed, but she could not find Squeeze, her nine-foot albino python.
5. Not only did Dennis apply an extra layer of deodorant to his armpits, but he also polished each tooth with special care. He did not want to offend Malinda with any unpleasant odors.
6. For his first date with Malinda, Dennis bought not only a dozen roses but he also purchased a box of chocolates.
7. Not only did Malinda squeal at the sight of the beautiful bouquet, but she also was tearing open the box and eating chocolates all the way to the restaurant.
8. Dennis tried to be thoughtful and generous, yet Malinda refused to give him not only a kiss good night but also a single chocolate from the nut and caramel sampler.
9. Chelsea had to paddle past a school of jellyfish, kick a small sand shark in the nose, and untangle seaweed from her surfboard before she reached her favorite point break.
10. Spiders that bite, hissing snakes, and squealing rodents fill the aquariums in Desmond's basement.
11. Class with Dr. Rogers was a nightmare: the clock seemed stuck in place, the air conditioner blew inadequate cool, and a fluorescent bulb buzzed overhead.

12. Ernie is too noisy as a seatmate. Crunching on apple slices, slurping hot coffee, and the rings of his notebook snapped open and shut all contribute to the cacophony.
13. Neither the scowls from her neighbors nor the disapproval of her husband will deter Larissa from painting her house hot pink with orange and white trim.
14. Larissa will either add a flock of plastic pink flamingos, or she will purchase a family of ceramic gnomes for the front lawn.
15. Until the Weavers arrived home at 5 p.m., the clock ticked, the refrigerator hummed, and the dog snoring in the otherwise quiet house.
16. Jessica has found that neither background music nor potato chips make writing her research essay any easier.
17. Mark looked under the bed, in the hamper, and he even searched his brother's closet, but he could not find his favorite University of Florida T-shirt.
18. After you eat tuna salad from the campus cafeteria, not only will your stomach rumble, but you will also sneeze for hours from the generous addition of MSG.
19. Natalia blinked her eyes, she wiped her glasses, and then squinted at the screen, but she could not decipher the small text crammed onto the presentation slide.
20. Neither the unhappy man with the cold soup nor the irate woman with an empty glass of iced tea could get Gloria's attention, for this waitress was too busy flirting with Jose.



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