

Coherence and Parallelism

In writing, the term *coherence* is often used to indicate how well your sentences and ideas “flow,” or connect.

Consider the following sentence:

After work, I ran to the store, went to the library, and I needed to go to the dry cleaner’s.

Sounds awkward, doesn’t it? As many students would say, it just doesn’t “flow.”

Now look at the new and improved version:

After work, I ran to the store, went to the library, and dropped off some clothes at the dry cleaner’s.

Why is the second sentence so much better?

Look at the first sentence again. This sentence contains what’s known as *faulty parallelism*. If we analyze the sentence we have two verb phrase that start with past tense verbs (*ran* and *went*). However, the third item in this series is a clause (I needed to go to the dry cleaner’s). This jumble of phrases and clauses is awkward.

Now look at the new and improved version again:

After work, I ran to the store, went to the library, and dropped off some clothes at the dry cleaner's.

This sentence contains **correct parallel structure** because each item in the series begins with a past tense verb (*ran, went, dropped*).



YEAAAAAAAAA!!!!

Now let's try it again:

My dog loves to get in the garbage, to dig in the yard and bark at the neighbors.

This sentence also contains **faulty parallelism**. *To get and to dig* are both infinitives, but *bark* is a present tense verb.

My dog loves to get in the garbage, to dig in the yard and bark at the neighbors.

This sentence has correct parallel structure because each item in the series begins with an infinitive (*to get, to dig, and to bark*).

So Why Is This So Important?



Using parallel structure helps to emphasize the similarity of items and ideas. Always proofread your writing to revise any occurrences of faulty parallelism.