

# Parallelism

Or,  
Achieving Parallel Structure  
And  
Why you should care

First of all, you are probably asking yourself: What the heck is parallelism?

Parallelism means using similar grammatical patterns when you are listing a series of items. These items can be words, phrases, or clauses.



**Lo and behold:**

We need to go to the store, pick up the car and run by the bank before we can leave for our trip.

In the above sentence, the writer is “listing” three things that s/he needs to do before leaving for a trip:

- **Go to the store**
- **Pick up the car**
- **Run by the bank**

Notice that each of these “items” is constructed using a consistent grammatical pattern: a **verb** followed by a **prepositional phrase**.

**This is what we call parallelism, or parallel structure!**

Now in a casual conversation, say, over the phone, the following sentence would probably not be an issue:



We need to go to the store, you can pick up the car on the way home, then running by the bank before we can leave for our trip.

However, when writing, this kind of sentence obviously has some problems.

- For one thing, it doesn't sound very good.
- For another thing, it takes a split second longer to understand.
- Finally, it doesn't make it clear whether the "we" in the sentence are responsible for running by the bank, or the "you."

These problems are caused by using different grammatical constructs for each "item" in the sentence:

- go to the store
- you can pick up the car
- then running by the bank

**Unlike the 1<sup>st</sup> sentence, there is no consistent grammatical pattern here. Each "item" is different grammatically.**

So ...

To achieve parallelism, make sure you do the following things:

When listing a series of things, or “items,” make sure you use

- all single words  
OR
- all phrases  
OR
- all clauses.

**THEN**



- Make sure each of the **words** is similar (for example, if one is an “ing” verb, then they all need to be an “ing” verb).

For example:

I need to worry about **sizing, copying, and framing** this picture.

- Make sure each of the **phrases** is similar (for example, if one starts with an “ing” verb, then they all need to start with an “ing” verb).

For example:

I need to worry about **having this picture sized, taking it to be copied, and then having it framed.**

- Make sure each of the **clauses** is similar.

For example:

With this picture, I'll need to check about sizing, I'll have to pay for copying, and I'll want to see about framing.

So that's all you need to know about that.

Well, most of what you need to know about that.