



# Writing Balanced Sentences

Parallelism is a similarity of grammatical form for similar elements of meaning within a sentence or among sentences.

If two or more ideas are parallel, they should be expressed in parallel grammatical form. Single words should be balanced with single words, phrases with phrases, clauses with clauses. Parallelism makes form follow meaning.

## Rule

Balance parallel ideas in a series

## Description

Readers expect items in a series to appear in parallel grammatical form. When one or more of the items violates readers' expectations, a sentence will be needlessly awkward.

## Examples

### Not Parallel

Abused children commonly exhibit one or more of the following symptoms: withdrawal, rebelliousness, restlessness, and **they are depressed**.

### Parallel

Abused children commonly exhibit one or more of the following symptoms: withdrawal, rebelliousness, restlessness, and **depression**.

### Not Parallel

Sam is responsible for stocking merchandise, writing orders for delivery, and **sales** of computers.

### Parallel

Sam is responsible for stocking merchandise, writing orders for delivery, and **selling** computers.

## Rule

Balance parallel ideas presented in pairs

## Description

When pairing ideas, underscore their connection by expressing them in similar grammatical form. Paired ideas are usually connected in one of three ways:

1. With a coordinating conjunction such as *and, but, or, nor, yet*
2. With a pair of correlative conjunctions such as *either . . . or . . . not only . . . but also*
3. With a word introducing a comparison, usually *than* or *as*

## Examples

### Not Parallel

At Lincoln High School, vandalism can result in suspension or **even being expelled** from school.

### Parallel

At Lincoln High School, vandalism can result in suspension or even **expulsion** from school.

### Not Parallel

Mother could not persuade me that giving is as much a joy as to **receive**.

### Parallel

Mother could not persuade me that giving is as much a joy as **receiving**.

## Rule

Use Parallelism with lists, headings, and outlines

## Description

The items in a list or outline are coordinate and should be parallel. Parallelism is essential in the headings that divide a paper into sections and in a formal topic outline.

## Example

### Not Parallel

- Changes in Renaissance England
- Extension of trade routes
- **Merchant** class became more powerful
- **The death** of feudalism
- **Up surging** of the arts
- **Religious** quarrels began

### Parallel

- Changes in Renaissance England
- Extension of trade routes
- **Increased** power of the merchant class
- **Death** of feudalism
- **Upsurge** of the arts

- **Rise** of religious quarrels

*The information on this page was adapted from A Writer's Reference by Diana Hacker and The Little, Brown Compact Handbook by Jane E. Aaron.*

*This information was compiled by Katie Bailey.*