

## Faulty Parallelism

Whenever you list a series of *actions*, *events*, or *things* in the context of academic writing, you will want to ensure that every item in the series follows the same, or parallel, form. This rule is especially important when the series includes a mix of *actions*, *events*, and *things*. Notice the awkward phrasing that results when multiple forms are combined in one sentence:



**Ex. The protestors wanted the government *to repeal* the new law, *concessions* that recognized their interests, and *releasing* political prisoners.**






In the above example, the 'protestors' wanted three things/nouns, but the form that these nouns take in the sentence is different in each case. To ensure that the structure of the sentence is parallel, the writer would first want to determine *who* is doing *what*. In this case, the 'protestors' (subject) wanted three things from the 'government' (object): *repeals*, *concessions*, and *releases*. However, the protestors also expect the government to take action on these three things, so the most appropriate form to use is the infinitive form:



**Ex. The protestors wanted the government *to repeal* the new law, *to grant* concessions that recognized their interests, and *to release* political prisoners.**



This rule is important when listing responsibilities on a C.V. or résumé, where all verb forms should be parallel in each list, as in, for example:

Faulty Parallelism 	Past Responsibilities 	Current Responsibilities 
• Analyze tissues in a lab	• Analyzed tissues in a lab	• Analyzes tissues in a lab
• Documented client forms	• Documented client forms	• Documents client forms
• Managing club finances	• Managed club finances	• Manages club finances
• Goes to workshops	• Attended workshops	• Attends workshops
• Boss likes my work ethic	• Praised for work ethic	• Praised for work ethic*

\*This example is a past participle rather than a verb

## Compare and Contrast

When making comparisons using the words *than* or *as*, ensure that the nouns being compared follow a parallel grammatical structure.

**Ex. The football team at Western is better than Queen's.**



This example conveys the idea that the Western football team is better than the entire institution of Queen's University. To compare only the football teams, you must use parallel structure:

**Ex. The football team at Western is better than the football team at Queen's.**



In the case of correlative conjunctions (*not only...but also*; *both...and*; *neither...nor*; *either...or*), the grammatical form of the first construction should be parallel in the second construction, and so the conjunctions should not be part of either construction.

Conjunction

**Ex. They are *either* exaggerating *or* they are telling the truth.**



In this example, the conjunction '*either*' has been placed in the middle of the first construction, and so the second construction cannot use a parallel form. The revised, parallel sentence would read:

**Ex. They are *either* exaggerating *or* telling the truth.**

***Either* they are exaggerating *or* they are telling the truth.**



### Practice Exercises

Correct the faulty parallelism in the following:

- 1) This tour bus may seat eight people comfortably or it fits twenty people uncomfortably.
- 2) Angrily, bitterly, and with tears in his eyes, Jean Chretien finally retired.
- 3) If Janice were given the choice of doing the laundry or a movie, Janice would choose a movie.
- 4) Football is less popular in Europe than North America.
- 5) Kathy is not only highly annoying, but also the proud mother of two awful children.

### Answers

- 1) This tour bus may seat eight people comfortably or twenty people uncomfortably.
- 2) Angrily, bitterly, and tearfully, Jean Chretien finally retired.
- 3) If Janice were given the choice of doing the laundry or watching a movie, Janice would choose the movie.
- 4) Football is less popular in Europe than in North America.
- 5) Kathy is not only highly annoying, but also is the proud mother of two awful children.