

# FAULTY PARALLELISM

**Parallel** is a word from mathematics. Teachers of writing have adopted the word *parallelism* to mean “close resemblance or similarity;” that is, when two or more ideas in a sentence are related and serve a similar purpose, they are phrased in the same parts, similarly put together. Parallelism aids the flow of a sentence and emphasizes the relationship of the ideas in the parallel elements. Parallel sentence elements regularly appear in lists or series, in compound structures, in comparisons using **than** or **as**, and in contrasted elements.

**Faulty:** *The weather is wet, cold, and it is raining.*

**Parallel:** *The weather is wet, cold, and rainy.*

**Faulty Parallelism** is an error in which two or more parts of a sentence are parallel in meaning but not parallel in form.

**Faulty:** *I want to learn how to write with simplicity, clarity, and accurately.*

**Parallel:** *I want to learn how to write with simplicity, clarity, and accuracy.*

Whenever you list a series of things, actions, or ideas, they should be similarly expressed to avoid faulty parallelism.

**Faulty:** *We called the meeting to elect new members, for raising money, and that we could plan for the dance.*

**Parallel:** *We called the meeting to elect new members, to raise money, and to plan for the dance.*

Be careful to avoid faulty coordination because when words, phrases, or clauses are linked by *and* are not similar, they sound confusing and illogical.

*He plays football and skillfully.*

*He does his homework and without mistakes.*

**NOTE:** When two words or groups are linked by *and*, they must have the same grammatical function. Notice the similarity of words, phrases, and clauses linked by *and* in the following sentences.

*He enjoys reading plays and poetry. (two nouns)*

*He blocks and tackles skillfully. (two verbs)*

*He looked in the drawers and under the beds. (two prepositional phrases)*

*He is a man who has worked hard and whom we all respect. (two dependent clauses)*

*I shall return to Purdue, and she will return to Smith. (two independent clauses)*

The most common kind of faulty coordination is the **and who** or **and which** sentence. This type of sentence makes an illogical link between a dependent and an independent clause.

**Faulty:** *My father is a lawyer and who has been a judge.*

**Parallel:** *My father is a lawyer who has been a judge. OR  
My father, who is a lawyer and who has been a judge, is retired.*

One other kind of faulty coordination is the misuse of correlative conjunctions. These are conjunctions used in pairs (Examples: not only ... but also; both ... and; neither ... nor; either ... or). The construction that follows the first half of the pair should be exactly balanced by the construction that follows the second half of the pair.

**Faulty:** *Not only practicing at 6am during the week, but the team also scrimmages on Sunday afternoons.*

**Parallel:** *Not only does the team practice at 6am during the week, but it also scrimmages on Sunday afternoons.*

**Faulty:** *He is either a madman or he is a fool.*

**Parallel:** *He is either a madman or a fool. OR  
Either he is a madman, or he is a fool.*

When making a comparison using the word **than** or **as**, be certain that the things you compare are similar logically as well as grammatically.

**Faulty:** *The girls in Texas are more beautiful than California.* (This sentence compares the girls to states.)

**Parallel:** *The girls in Texas are more beautiful than the girls in California.*

The following sentence is written in both a parallel and a non-parallel. Notice the differences:

**Faulty:** *The boy, in great fear and shaken by the ordeal, collapsed after the rescue.*

**Parallel:** *The boy, frightened beyond measure and shaken by the ordeal, collapsed after the rescue.*

**Practice Exercise 1**

In each list, circle the element that **does not belong** in the series.

- 1. in the country                      fishing                      at the river
- 2. going to work                      coming home                      to eat dinner
- 3. ate lunch                      hungry                      ate dinner                      ate breakfast

**Practice Exercise 2**

1. Schultz used to like girls, football, and to play chess.

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2. In the woods, under a tree, a stream alongside, I left the insect repellent.

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3. He chose neither to referee nor playing.

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