


FINDING AND FIXING ERRORS IN PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Understand the problem.




A list of items must maintain **parallel structure**. To do this, use consistent grammatical units. If the first item is a **noun**, then the following items must also be nouns; if the first item is a **verb**, then make the other items verbs as well.

Nonparallel structure has inconsistent format:

At the garden store, Larissa bought  ,  , and  .

At the garden store, Larissa bought pink plastic **flamingos**, ceramic **gnomes**, and then **she impulsively added a concrete mermaid to her cart**.

In parallel structure, the correct way to write, all items match:

At the garden store, Larissa bought  ,  , and  .

At the garden store, Larissa  ,  , and  .

At the garden store, Larissa bought pink plastic **flamingos**, ceramic **gnomes**, and a concrete **mermaid**.

At the garden store, Larissa **bought** pink plastic flamingos, **rescued** ceramic gnomes from the sale bin, and impulsively **added** a concrete mermaid to her cart.

Know the solution.

Once you discover a nonparallel item, you have two options. First, you can make it conform to the other grammatical items in the list.

Read this example:

In the waiting room, we spent an hour **reading** old magazines, **eating** stale cookies from the vending machine, and **we wiggled on the hard plastic chairs**.

Reading old magazines and *eating stale cookies* are **participle phrases**; *we wiggled on hard plastic chairs*, however, is a **main clause**.

If we fix the nonparallel item, we have consistency:

In the waiting room, we spent an hour **reading** old magazines, **eating** stale cookies from the vending machine, and **wiggling** on the hard plastic chairs.

Or we can alter the first two items to create this version instead:

In the waiting room, we **read** old magazines, **ate** stale cookies from the vending machine, and **wiggled** on the hard plastic chairs.

Recognize these special cases.

Not only ... but also, *either ... or*, and *neither ... nor* all require special attention when you are proofreading for parallelism. These **correlative conjunctions** require equal grammatical units after both parts of the conjunction.

You can have two **main clauses** like this:

Not only did Jerome buy flowers for his mother, **but he also** purchased a bouquet for Yolanda, his wife.

For a shorter sentence, use two **prepositional phrases**:

Jerome bought flowers **not only** for his mother **but also** for Yolanda, his wife.

Or you can have two **nouns** as this version does:

Jerome bought flowers for **not only** his mother **but also** Yolanda, his wife.

