




# RULES FOR FINDING AND FIXING ERRORS IN PARALLEL STRUCTURE

## Understand the problem.

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For a list of actions or items, you must maintain **parallel structure**. To do this, use equal 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** looks like this:

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*.

**Parallel structure**, the correct way to write, looks like this:

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.

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

Look at this example:

We spent the hour in the waiting room *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, the sentence looks like this:

We spent the hour in the waiting room *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 and have 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.

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*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*.

