

Within Sentences

At the sentence level, parallel structure refers to using the same format (i.e. the same part of speech) to present items in a list of two or more. Consider the following sentence.

Sylvia enjoys playing volleyball, riding her bike, and she likes to walk.

This sentence presents a list of three things Sylvia likes to do. Notice how the three things are presented.

- **Playing** volleyball
- **Riding** her bike
- **She** likes to walk

The first two items start with "ing" words. The third, starts with the pronoun, "she." To make this list parallel, all items must be stated in the same way. A logical solution would be to start the third item with an "ing" word.

- **Playing** volleyball
- **Riding** her bike
- **Walking**

The resulting sentence is as follows:

Sylvia enjoys playing volleyball, riding her bike, and walking.

Now, the sentence has a parallel structure. You don't have to use "ing" words to have parallel structure, but you do have to present all items in a list in the same way (i.e. Start each item in the list with the same part of speech.)

In Lists

The same concept applies to lists. Consider the following example:

Starting a car involves the following tasks:

- *Inserting the key*
- *Turning the key clockwise*
- *Waiting for the engine to turn over*
- *Release the key*

Notice the "ing" words that start the first three items in the list. To make the above list parallel, you can change the last item:

Starting a car involves the following tasks:

- *Inserting the key*
- *Turning the key clockwise*
- *Waiting for the engine to turn over*
- *Releasing the key*

You can also change the first three items:

Starting a car involves the following tasks:

- *Insert the key*
- *Turn the key clockwise*
- *Wait for the engine to turn over*
- *Release the key*

In the above example, each item now starts with a verb. It really doesn't matter if your items start with verbs, "ing" words, or something else; the important thing is that they all start with the same type of word.

Among Sentences

Parallel structure can also refer to a repetition of a phrase to highlight the relationship among a series of statements. Consider the following example:

Success is not about making the most money. Success is not about having the most power. Success is not about winning the most awards. Success is about sharing, caring, and believing.

Notice the repetition of the phrase "Success is not about" in the preceding passage. That repetition, along with the slightly altered "Success is about" in the last sentence, shows the use of parallel structure among sentences. (Also, note the use of parallel structure—in green—in the list in the last of the three sentences.)

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Updated: 5-9-13