

Parallelism

Parallelism is the use of the same grammatical structure for items in a sentence that deserve equal emphasis.

Parallelism is an attractive and effective stylistic device.

Lack of parallelism is considered bad writing style.

Parallelism is especially effective in the following situations:

1. Items in a series

Not parallel: The poems may be e-mailed, sent by postal mail, or the poet can drop them off at the editor's office.

Parallel: The poems may be e-mailed, sent by postal mail, or dropped off at the editor's office.

Not parallel: Ingmar Bergman's films remain famous for their stark cinematography, epistemological angst, and the acting is intense.

Parallel: Ingmar Bergman's films remain famous for their stark cinematography, epistemological angst, and intense acting.

2. Items connected by *and* or *or*

Not parallel: A docent tells visitors about the paintings and who painted them.

Parallel: A docent tells visitors about the paintings *and* the painters.

Parallel: A docent tells visitors about the paintings *and* the people who painted them.

Not parallel: Working eighty hours a week can result in early retirement in Florida or you might be interred early in the grave.

Parallel: Working eighty hours a week can result in early retirement in Florida *or* early interment in the grave.

3. Items compared by using *than*, *more than*, or *rather . . . than*

Not parallel: Many Americans fear speaking in public more than the loss of a limb.

Parallel: Many Americans fear speaking in public *more than* losing a limb.

4. Items inserted into parallel structures such as *either . . . or* or *not only . . . but also*

Not parallel: Thomas Hardy mastered the writing of not only novels but he also wrote poems.

Parallel: Thomas Hardy mastered the writing of *not only* novels *but also* poems.