

# RULES

## For Fixing Errors in Parallel Structure

### Understand the problem.




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 *plastic pink 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 *plastic pink flamingos*, *ceramic gnomes*, and *a concrete mermaid*.

At the garden store, Larissa *bought* plastic pink 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 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 ...*, 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.

***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.***



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