

PARALLEL SENTENCES

Items in a list or a comparison have to be expressed in the same grammatical structure. By doing this, writers emphasize the relationship between these ideas. Failure to render parallel items with the same grammatical patterns is called faulty parallelism.

A kiss can be a comma, a question mark, or an exclamation point. (Mistinguett)

This novel is not to be tossed lightly aside, but to be hurled with great force. (Dorothy Parker)

It matters of principle, stand like a rock; in matters of taste, swim with the current. (Thomas Jefferson)

- **Items in a series or list must take the same grammatical form.** In the examples below, observe the faulty parallelism and see examples of how the problem can be revised. Other revisions would have been possible. Ultimately, it does not matter what grammatical forms you use to express parallel items as long as the forms are the same for all items in the list.

Ⓢ *Felicité did all the cooking, cleaning, and sewed the clothes. .*

Ⓢ *Felicité id all the cooking, cleaning, and sewing.*

Ⓢ *Felicité went to the garden because she liked to watch the bees, for solitude, and to escape from her employees.*

Ⓢ *Felicité went to the garden to watch the bees, to enjoy the solitude, and to escape from her employees.*

Ⓢ *Felicité remembered the essentials when shopping: smelling every fruit, to squeeze the vegetables, and don't buy from unknown vendors.*

Ⓢ *Felicité remembered the essentials when shopping: smelling every fruit, squeezing every vegetable, and never buying from unknown vendors.*

- **If you use coordinating conjunctions—*and, but, or, nor, yet*—the items connected by these conjunctions must have the same grammatical structure.**

Ⓢ *Felicité learned watching after cows **and** how to feed chickens.*

Ⓢ *Felicité learned how to watch after cows **and** how to feed chickens*

- **If you use correlative conjunctions—*both...and, either...or, whether...or, neither...nor, not...but, not only...but also*—the words or phrases following both parts of the conjunction must have the same grammatical structure.**

*It was clear that Felicité was religious, **both** by the way she genuflected **and** by her attempts to say the mass in Latin.*

*It was clear that Felicité was religious, **both** by the way she genuflected **and** by the way she tried to say the mass in Latin.*

- **In comparisons using *than* or *as*, the two items compared (words or phrases) must have the same grammatical structure.**

*To light the fire was even harder **than** keeping it going.*

*Lighting the fire was even harder **than** keeping it going.*

► Did you like the sample sentences? Get the whole story in Gustave Flaubert's *A Simple Heart*.