

Parallel Structure

In 1946, Winston Churchill traveled to Fulton, Missouri, *to deliver* a speech and *to be present* at the dedication of a bust in his honor. After his speech, an *attractive* and *ample* woman approached the wartime prime minister of England and said, “Mr. Churchill, *I have traveled* over a hundred miles for the unveiling of your bust.” Churchill, who was known *far* and *wide* for his quick wit, responded, “I assure you, in that regard, *I would gladly return the favor.*”

Parallel structure means putting ideas of the same rank in the same grammatical structure. In the above anecdote, the italicized words and phrases show parallel structure. Your writing and speech should have parallel words, phrases, and clauses. Parallel structure gives your writing many admirable strengths, including tempo, stress, balance, and conciseness.

1. *Parallel words* share the same part of speech (such as nouns, adjectives, or verbs) and tense (if the words are verbs).

To some people, traveling by air is *safe*, *inexpensive*, and *convenient*.

To others, it’s *dangerous*, *expensive*, and *inconvenient*.

You should eat foods that are *nourishing* as well as *tasty*.

2. *Parallel phrases* contain modifiers.

Polyester shirts wash easily, drip-dry quickly, and wear durably.

Nick took the new job to learn more about finance, make important connections, and get a health plan.

“For taking away our Charters, abolishing our laws, and altering the Forms of our Government . . .” (Declaration of Independence)

3. *Parallel clauses* can be complete sentences or dependent clauses.

I came, I saw, I conquered.

“Our chiefs are killed; Looking-Glass is dead; Ta-Hool-Shute is dead.” (Chief Joseph’s surrender speech, 1877)



Sentence *coordination* links ideas of equal importance.



Sentence *subordination* connects two unequal but related clauses with a subordinating conjunction to form a complex sentence.



Parallel structure means putting ideas of the same rank in the same grammatical structure.



QUESTIONS

True-False Questions

1. Sentence *coordination* links ideas of equal importance.
2. Each of the coordinating conjunctions has a different meaning.

3. *Subordination* involves using the right word or mark of punctuation to show different relationships between ideas.
4. Correlative conjunctions always come in pairs, such as “either . . . or” and “not only . . . but also.”
5. Link sentences with a subordinating conjunction if you want to show a balance between two independent clauses.
6. Link independent clauses with a semicolon to show that the information in the main clause is not as important as the information in the subordinate clause.
7. Each way to coordinate sentences establishes a slightly different relationship between ideas.
8. There is always a clearly “right” conjunction and punctuation to use when you coordinate ideas.
9. *Coordination* shows the relationship among equal independent clauses; *subordination*, in contrast, shows the relationship between ideas of unequal rank.
10. When you coordinate one part of a sentence to another, you make the dependent clause develop the main clause.
11. If you put the main idea in a dependent clause, your sentence will not be logical.
12. *Subordinate* when you want to link related independent clauses.
13. *Coordinate* when you want to put the most important idea in the main clause.
14. *Parallel words* share the same part of speech (such as nouns, adjectives, or verbs) and tense (if the words are verbs).
15. The following sentence has parallel adjectives:
Egypt, a long, narrow, fertile strip of land in northeastern Africa, is the only place in the world where pyramids were built.

Completion Questions

Select the word that best completes each sentence.

1. A lightning bolt lasts a fraction of a second, (so, but) it has enough power—30 million volts—to light up all of Miami.
2. (And, Because) the average thunderstorm is more powerful than an atomic bomb, injuries from these storms are not uncommon.
3. All the following are coordinating conjunctions except *for*, *but*, or (*since*, *and*).
4. All the following are subordinating conjunctions except *since*, *because*, *although* (*when*, *nor*).
5. All the following are conjunctive adverbs except *consequently*, *furthermore*, *therefore*, (*nevertheless*, *and*).
6. (*Coordination*, *Subordination*) is connecting two unequal but related clauses with a subordinating conjunction to form a complex sentence.
7. (*Subordination*, *Parallel structure*) means putting ideas of the same rank in the same grammatical structure.

8. The film industry changed from silent films to the “talkies” in the late 1920s, (when, after) the success in 1927 of *The Jazz Singer*.
9. Ari is very good about staying in shape: He likes to ride his bicycle, to jog around the track, and (swimming, to go swimming).
10. The committee considered the letter, talked about its major points, and (the unanimous decision was made to ignore it, unanimously decided to ignore it).

Multiple-Choice Questions

Choose the best answer to each question.

1. You can coordinate independent clauses by using all the following methods *except*
 - (a) Coordinating conjunctions
 - (b) Correlative conjunctions
 - (c) A semicolon and a conjunctive adverb
 - (d) Subordinating conjunctions
2. When you coordinate independent clauses, you should decide which ideas can and should be combined and then
 - (a) Select the method of coordination that shows the appropriate relationship between ideas.
 - (b) Use the subordinating conjunction that most clearly expresses your ideas.
 - (c) Add a semicolon to link ideas.
 - (d) String together as many ideas as you can.
3. When you decide how to coordinate or subordinate ideas, you should always consider your
 - (a) Audience
 - (b) Purpose
 - (c) Handwriting
 - (d) Style
4. Which revision best combines ideas?

Ancient Egypt had an abundance of rocks quarried close to the banks of the Nile. These rocks had to be brought from quarries to the building sites.

 - (a) Ancient Egypt had an abundance of rocks quarried close to the banks of the Nile, so these rocks had to be brought from quarries to the building sites.
 - (b) Ancient Egypt had an abundance of rocks quarried close to the banks of the Nile, when these rocks had to be brought from quarries to the building sites.
 - (c) Ancient Egypt had an abundance of rocks quarried close to the banks of the Nile, but these rocks had to be brought from quarries to the building sites.
 - (d) Since ancient Egypt had an abundance of rocks quarried close to the banks of the Nile; these rocks had to be brought from quarries to the building sites.

5. Which revision best combines ideas?

Darrow invented a board game he called “Monopoly.” Monopoly made him a millionaire. This did not happen at first.

- (a) This did not happen at first, but Darrow invented a board game he called “Monopoly.” When Monopoly made him a millionaire.
 - (b) Darrow invented a board game he called “Monopoly,” which made him a millionaire, although not at first.
 - (c) Because Darrow invented a board game he called “Monopoly,” Monopoly made him a millionaire. This did not happen at first.
 - (d) Although Monopoly made him a millionaire, Darrow invented a board game he called “Monopoly,” but this did not happen at first.
6. Which revision best combines ideas?

Parker Brothers turned the game down. They felt it was too complicated to play.

- (a) Parker Brothers turned the game down and they felt it was too complicated to play.
 - (b) Since Parker Brothers turned the game down, they felt it was too complicated to play.
 - (c) When Parker Brothers turned the game down, they felt it was too complicated to play.
 - (d) Parker Brothers turned the game down because they felt it was too complicated to play.
7. Which revision best combines ideas?

Large numbers of people began flooding into southern Florida more than a century ago. The amount of water that once flowed south through the Everglades has been drastically reduced.

- (a) Ever since large numbers of people began flooding into southern Florida more than a century ago, the amount of water that once flowed south through the Everglades has been drastically reduced.
 - (b) Large numbers of people began flooding into southern Florida more than a century ago, but the amount of water that once flowed south through the Everglades has been drastically reduced.
 - (c) Large numbers of people began flooding into southern Florida more than a century ago, yet the amount of water that once flowed south through the Everglades has been drastically reduced.
 - (d) When the amount of water that once flowed south through the Everglades has been drastically reduced, large numbers of people began flooding into southern Florida more than a century ago.
8. Which choice best connects the following sentence?

It took almost a year for three men to sign confessions admitting the series had been fixed. The men were Lefty Williams, Eddie Cicotte, and J. Jackson. The men admitted they were in on the scam.

- (a) It took almost a year for three men—Lefty Williams, Eddie Cicotte, and J. Jackson—to sign confessions admitting the series had been fixed and they were in on it.

- (b) Lefty Williams, Eddie Cicotte, and J. Jackson admitted they were in on the scam when it took almost a year for them to sign confessions admitting the series had been fixed.
 - (c) Since it took almost a year for Lefty Williams, Eddie Cicotte, and J. Jackson to sign confessions admitting the series had been fixed, they admitted they were in on the scam.
 - (d) It took almost a year for Lefty Williams, Eddie Cicotte, and J. Jackson to sign confessions admitting the series had been fixed; however, the men admitted they were in on the scam.
9. Which revision best combines ideas?
The water declined. The freshwater bird population has declined more than 90 percent since the early 1900s.
- (a) The freshwater bird population has declined more than 90 percent since the early 1900s and the water declined.
 - (b) The water declined because the freshwater bird population has declined more than 90 percent since the early 1900s.
 - (c) The water declined, but the freshwater bird population has declined more than 90 percent since the early 1900s.
 - (d) As a result of the declining water, the freshwater bird population has declined more than 90 percent since the early 1900s.
10. Which revision best combines ideas?
There are still ample physical reminders of the history of the Native Americans in Florida. Impressive burial mounds, dating back hundreds of years, can be found along many of the rivers, for instance.
- (a) Impressive burial mounds, dating back hundreds of years, can be found along many of the rivers, for instance; there are still ample physical reminders of the history of the Native Americans in Florida.
 - (b) Since there are still ample physical reminders of the history of the Native Americans in Florida, impressive burial mounds, dating back hundreds of years, can be found along many of the rivers, for instance.
 - (c) Although impressive burial mounds, dating back hundreds of years, can be found along many of the rivers, for instance, there are still ample physical reminders of the history of the Native Americans in Florida.
 - (d) There are still ample physical reminders of the history of the Native Americans in Florida; impressive burial mounds, dating back hundreds of years, can be found along many of the rivers, for instance.

Further Exercises

Recombine the sentences in the following paragraphs to create a more logical and graceful style.

1. Lightning often strike twice in the same place. It is more likely to do so. Why is this so? Lightning is an electric current. As with all electric currents or discharges, lightning will follow the path of least resistance. It will take the route that is easiest for it to travel on.

Air is a very poor conductor of electricity. Almost anything else that helps to bridge the gap between the ground and a cloud will offer a more convenient path and thus “attract” the lightning. This includes a high tree, a building (especially one with a metal framework), a tall hill.

2. In 1866, John Styth Pemberton came up with a headache medicine he called “Coca-Cola.” He had taken the wine out of the French Wine Coca. He added some caffeine. The medicine tasted so terrible that at the last minute he added some extract of kola nut. He added a few other oils. He sold it to soda fountains in used bottles. A few weeks later, a man with a terrible headache hauled himself into a drugstore. The man asked for a spoonful of Coca-Cola. The druggist was too lazy to stir the headache remedy into a glass of water. He mixed the syrup in some seltzer water. The seltzer water was closer to where he was standing. The customer liked the carbonated version better than the uncarbonated one. Other customers agreed. From then on, Coca-Cola was served as a carbonated drink.
3. Some time near the beginning of the seventh century, a monk formed some leftover dough into a looped twist. Some sources claim that the twists were meant to represent the folded arms of children at prayer, but even by a considerable stretch of the imagination it is hard to match a pretzel’s shape with the usual position of arms at prayer. The pretzels soon became popular and were often given to children who were faithful in their religious observations. As a result, the baked and salted dough came to be called *pretiola*, the Latin for “little reward.” From *pretiola* to *pretzel* is only a small step.