

## Parallelism

### Definition:

Parallelism is an act of grammatical balancing. When two or more ideas are parallel, they are easier to understand when expressed in a similar manner. For instance, single words should be balanced with single words, phrases with phrases, and clauses with clauses. What's more, each sentence should also be balanced with the same types of words, phrases, or clauses. Thus, nouns should be balanced with nouns, verbs with verbs, and so on.<sup>1</sup>

### Examples:

Should the punctuation of this sentence be a comma, a question mark, or an exclamation point?

Books are not to be read aimlessly, but to be perused with complete abandon.

When faced with authority, stand in line; when faced with injustice, stand up.

### Models:

Without parallelism, sentences become needlessly awkward:

- After taking an accounting class, Laura learned that the most important thing in finance is balancing accounts, checking account balances, and ~~to keep~~ *keeping* receipts.
- Many of the state universities in New York are raising enrollment numbers and ~~increase~~ *increasing* tuition fees to students from other states.

### Exercise:

Use parallelism to balance the words, phrases, or clauses in the following examples. In each sentence, cross out and replace the word, phrase, and/or clause that does not balance the sentence grammatically.

1. Mary enjoys hiking, bicycling, and to go swimming.
2. While in English class, we learned to read poems critically, to answer questions thoughtfully, and we appreciated literature.
3. By incorporating online resources, by creating a class chat room, and asking students to create and edit informative videos, the class is technology-supported.
4. Michael excelled at clarifying complex points in his essay and used outlines to map those points.
5. The production manager was asked to write his report quickly, thoroughly, and to be accurate.
6. Ashley said she wanted to be a dancer, a singer, and to paint.
7. The teacher's lessons focused on clarifying, illuminating, and how to use parallelism.
8. Students who do not attend class risk suspension and to be expelled.
9. In my spare time, I enjoy reading classical novels and to write thoughtful poetry.
10. Bill spent hours calculating the profits of his company and to record expenses.

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<sup>1</sup> Definition paraphrased from Hacker, Diana. A Writer's Reference. 5<sup>th</sup> ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003.

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Exercise Answers:

1. swimming
2. to appreciate
3. by asking
4. using outlines
5. accurately
6. a painter
7. using
8. expulsion
9. writing
10. recording