San José State University Writing Center
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Parallelism

Parallelism is an act of grammatical balancing. When two or more ideas are parallel, they are more easily understood. For instance, single words should be balanced with the single words, phrases with phrases, and clauses with clauses. Moreover, 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.

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 pursued with complete abandon.

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

Without parallelism, sentences become needlessly confusing for your reader.

Examples

After taking an accounting class, Laura learned that the most important things in finance are *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 for students from other states.

Activity

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.

Answer Key for Activity

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

References

Hacker, Diana. *A Writer's Reference*. 5th ed. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2003. Print.