

PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Recognize parallel structure when you find it.

Whenever you include a list of actions or items, you must use equal grammatical units. If the first item is a **noun**, then the following items must also be nouns; if the first action is a simple past tense **verb**, then make the other items simple past tense verbs too.

Nonparallel structure is lopsided like this:

Students , , and .

Students **capped** their pens, **were closing** their notebooks, and **zipped** their book bags as they tried to alert Professor Jones, rambling at the lectern, that the end of class had arrived.

Capped and **zipped** are both simple past tense verbs, but **were closing** is past progressive, wrecking the parallelism.

Parallel structure, the correct way to write, has this format:

Students , , and .

Students , , and .

To establish parallelism, you can use all simple past tense verbs:

Students **capped** their pens, **closed** their notebooks, and **zipped** their book bags as they tried to alert Professor Jones, rambling at the lectern, that the end of class had arrived.

Or you can revise the sentence so that all the items in the list are nouns:

Students gathered their **pens**, **notebooks**, and **book bags** as they tried to alert Professor Jones, rambling at the lectern, that the end of class had arrived.

Be especially careful with correlative conjunctions.

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.

For instance, you can have two **main clauses** like this:

Not only did Professor Jones give the students a withering look, **but** he **also** assigned 20 extra pages of homework as punishment for their impatience to leave.

Or you can use two **verbs**:

Professor Jones **not only** gave the students a withering look **but also** assigned 20 extra pages of homework as punishment for their impatience to leave.

Or you can have two **nouns**:

Professor Jones gave the students **not only** a withering look **but also** 20 extra pages of homework as punishment for their impatience to leave.

Whatever choice you make, just confirm that you have two equal grammatical units after both parts of the correlative conjunction.

