



The Writing Center



Parallelism: One More Tip for Writing with Style

Parallelism—the intentional repetition of a word, phrase, or grammatical structure—is a simple way to make a sentence sound good. Look at these examples, and try it in your writing.

- One simple type of parallelism involves the repetition of verb tenses and verb forms:*
 - Harry stuttered, grimaced, and stared into space as he tried to spell “banns.”
 - Feeling pessimistic yet hoping for the best, April competed in the National Spelling Bee.
 - Neil was willing to work with language tutors, to do spelling drills in the computer, and to study with his father five hours a day.
- Parallelism can also involve a repetition of patterns. Note how these sentences repeat the article-adjective-noun pattern:*
 - After her long day at school, she looked forward to a quiet house, a soft couch and a long nap.
 - She was tired of living in L.A. because of the snarled traffic, the polluted air, and the high cost of living.
- Here are some complex examples of parallelism from a range of sources:*
 - “They stand smoking, swearing, playing with the girls, making a teen-age row.”
—Robert Davies’ poem, “Leather Jackets, Bikes and Birds”
 - “...We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that the government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.”
—Abraham Lincoln in his Gettysburg Address
 - “Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth...”
—The Beatitudes, Matthew 5
 - “We must combine the toughness of the serpent and the softness of the dove, a tough mind and a tender heart.”
—Martin Luther King Jr. 1963.
 - We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and pursuit of Happiness.
—The Declaration of Independence, 1772, Thomas Jefferson et al.

Try this site for [practice quizzes on parallelism](http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/parallelism.htm):

<http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/parallelism.htm>