

Bracken Business Communications Clinic

PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Whenever you make a list, the members of that list should all be the same kind of grammatical entity, be it a part of speech, a verb tense, a clause structure, or a date format. This is called parallel structure. It is easier to understand a list that is structured in a parallel way. Such a list also has a consistent rhythm to it. When writing, keep an eye and an ear out for parallel structures.

Parallel structure applies to lists of single words, such as verbs, adjectives, nouns, etc.

e.g., Ethnic restaurants in Bozeman include Chinese, Brazilian, and Italian.

>Correct: Here, “Chinese, Brazilian, and Italian” are all adjectives (all the same type of words), and this is good parallel structure.

e.g., Ethnic restaurants in Bozeman include Chinese, food from Brazil, and Italian.

>Incorrect: Here the list is not made up of the same entities; “food from Brazil” is a noun phrase, not an adjective. Therefore, this is not parallel structure

Parallel structure also applies to lists of phrases or clauses.

e.g., The BBCC offers such services as correcting and improving papers, fine-tuning résumés and cover letters, and listening to and providing feedback on oral presentations.

>Correct: Here, each phrase after “as” is a gerund phrase which includes the action (e.g., “correcting”) and the object of the action (e.g., “papers”).

e.g., The BBCC offers such services as correcting and improving papers, fine-tuning résumés and cover letters, and the coaches provide feedback on oral presentations.

>Incorrect: Here, the last phrase is different in structure from the previous two. It is a full clause (with subject “coaches” and main verb “provide”). This clause can be made into a separate sentence, but it cannot be part of the preceding list of gerunds.

Long lists, e.g. in résumés, are most concise in bulleted form, but parallel structure is still necessary.

>Correct: Parallel structure:

- Directed evaluation
- Applied new regulations
- Increased sales

>Incorrect: Lacking parallel structure:

- I directed evaluation
- When regulations changed...
- Sales increased

For More Information

Visit the OWL Purdue Online Writing Lab, Parallel Structure Guide:

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/623/01/>