Parallelism is the repetition of grammatical patterns in a sentence. It is a stylistic technique that can create a pleasing effect for the reader. This handout will help you achieve more effective parallelism in your sentences.

**General Rules**

Use parallelism to show your reader that information equal in form is equal in importance.

**Find the Trunk**

Parallel elements are like branches shooting off from a tree trunk. In order to craft effective parallelism, you need to identify where the branches start. Often, the trunk is a noun, verb, or preposition.

**Example**: I want an employee who is punctual, professional, and polite.

*Note*: “Punctual,” “professional,” and “polite” are adjectives branching off from the verb “is.”

**Match Parts of Speech**

Once you have identified the trunk, the easiest way to achieve parallelism is by matching parts of speech (nouns with nouns, verbs with verbs, etc.) in the branches.

**Faulty Parallelism**: I don’t like going to the beach because it is too hot, sandy, and there are a lot of people.

*Note*: “Too hot,” “sandy,” and “there are a lot of people” are all branches of the verb “is.” However, the first two branches contain adjectives while the third contains an entire independent clause. If you were to read the trunk and the third branch alone, the resulting sentence would not make sense: “...because it is there are a lot of people.” It is also unclear whether the adverb “too” is supposed to apply to both the first and second branches or just the first one.

**Improved Parallelism**: I don’t like going to the beach because it is too hot, too sandy, and too crowded.

*Note*: Now each of the branches contains an adjective and the adverb “too.”

In addition to matching parts of speech, you will want to make sure that these parts of speech are in a similar form. For example, when matching verbs, make sure that they are in the same tense or form.

**Faulty Parallelism**: At my previous job, I was in charge of receiving applications, interviewing candidates.
and trained new hires.

Note: “Receiving applications,” “interviewing candidates,” and “trained new hires” are all branches of the preposition “of.” However, the first two branches begin with verbs in the gerund form (i.e., an –ing verb) while the third begins with a verb in the past tense. As with the previous example, if you were to read the trunk with the third branch, the result would make no sense: “I was in charge of trained new hires.”

Improved Parallelism: At my previous job, I was in charge of receiving applications, interviewing candidates, and training new hires.

Note: Now, each of the branches begins with a verb in the gerund form and makes sense when read alone with the trunk.

Match Phrase Parts

When using parallelism with phrases, be sure to include all of the words that you need to make it parallel.

Faulty Parallelism: After lunch, I have to go to the grocery store, to the library, and the mall.

Note: “To the grocery store” and “to the library” are prepositional phrases while “the mall” is a noun phrase. Reading the third branch and trunk together yields nonsense: “I have to go the mall.” Make them all either prepositional phrases or noun phrases.

Improved Parallelism: After lunch, I have to go to the grocery store, to the library, and to the mall.

Note: With the preposition “to” added to the third branch, all three elements become parallel prepositional phrases.

Parallelism within Parallelism

Sometimes your parallel elements will contain parallel elements—branches that branch. When this happens, simply repeat the process described above: find the trunk for each level of parallelism and then make sure that its branches match.

Example: I like reading and books magazines and watching movies and TV shows.

Note: “Reading” and “watching” are gerunds (i.e. –ing verbs) branching off of the verb “like.” “Books” and “magazines” are nouns branching off from “reading,” and “movies” and “TV shows” are nouns branching off from “watching.”
Specific Uses

**With Coordinating Conjunctions**

If you are joining elements with a coordinating conjunction (i.e., the “FANBOYS”—for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so), make sure to keep those elements parallel.

**Example:** He *folded the towels* but *packed the linens.*

**Example:** We recommend *that the workers be trained* and *that the equipment be replaced.*

**With Correlative Conjunctions**

Elements linked by correlative conjunctions (e.g., either...or, neither...nor, not only...but also, etc.) should also be parallel in form.

**Example:** You can either *check yourself* or *wreck yourself.*

**Example:** Neither *a borrower* nor *a lender* be.

**In Comparisons**

Parallelism makes comparisons more memorable and effective.

**Example:** *Writing a novel* is like *waging a war.*

**Example:** Our expenses are not *too large*—our budget is *too small!*

**References**
