

INSTRUCTOR: "Parallelism."

When we talk about parallelism, we are talking about similar things lining up. These three pencils are parallel because they all face the same direction. If one of the pencils faces a different way, it is no longer parallel with the other two.

In grammar, parallelism refers to elements in a sentence that should be parallel, or lined up, with one another. Parallelism is important in your writing because it makes your meaning clear. It is especially important to watch for parallelism when you have items in a series and items in comparisons.

A series refers to a list, such as cooking, reading, and dancing. The words in this list take the same form. They all end in -ing, so they are parallel. In a sentence, a parallel series looks like this-- Lena likes cooking, reading, and dancing.

A sentence that isn't parallel looks like this-- Lena likes cooking, to read, and dancing. Cooking and dancing are parallel because they both end in -ing, but to read is different. It's made up of the word to plus a verb, so it isn't parallel with the others.

We can correct the sentence by changing to read to an -ing verb form. The sentence can also be corrected by revising the -ing verb forms so that they match to read. Lena likes cooking, to read, and dancing. Lena likes to cook, to read, and to dance.

Problems with parallelism can also come up in your writing when you're comparing items. In a comparison, two items are being compared rather than simply listed. And they are usually linked with terms such as like, as, than, or instead of.

As with items in a series, the items being compared must be parallel. He felt happy instead of sad after they talked. The two elements being compared-- happy and sad-- are parallel because they are both adjectives.

A sentence that isn't parallel looks like this-- he felt happy instead of being sad after they talked. Happy is an adjective, but being sad is different. It's a combination of a verb and an adjective, so it isn't parallel with happy. We can correct the sentence by deleting the word being.

Remember, items in a series and items in comparisons need to be parallel for your writing to be clear and correct.