Parallelism is the expression of two or more equivalent sentence elements in the same grammatical form: nouns paired with nouns, verbs with verbs, and so forth. This may sound complicated; however, parallelism is a part of our active grammar. In fact, parallelism helps create memorable phrases and in some cases novelty bumper stickers.

Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind. – John F. Kennedy

Save the trees – ax the loggers.

Why exactly is parallelism important? It provides order and symmetry to lists of ideas, provides rhetorical emphasis and effect, and stylistically improves clarity in writing.

**Creating Successful Parallelism:**

1. Use a coordinating conjunction such as **and, but, or, nor, for, so** and **yet** to connect words or ideas in parallel structure.

   The evil witch looked into the black crystal, seeing the future of her rebellious underlings, and planning her revenge.

   This novel is not to be tossed aside lightly, but to be hurled with great force. – Dorothy Parker

2. Use a pair of correlative conjunctions: **either...or, neither...nor, not only...but also, both... and, whether...or.**

   Either you are late, or I am early.

   Art is either plagiarism or revolution. – Paul Gauguin

3. Use the words **than or as** to introduce a comparison.

   It is better for civilization to be going down the drain than to be coming up it. – Henry Allen

**Avoiding Faulty Parallelism:**

Following are three examples of faulty parallelism.* Each example is followed by a corrected sentence and an explanation of the problem in the example.

* At F&M, professors often mark faulty parallelism with the symbol “//ism”
1. **Something Relatively Simple:** This example involves a series of three ideas in which the third idea doesn’t fit grammatically.

   Non Parallel: The Navajos operate a coal mine, maintain a high-grade ram herd, run a low-cost housing project, and a flourishing arts and crafts guild is managed by them.

   The series of ideas in this sentence begins with three parallel active verbs (operate, maintain, and run), but finishes with a passive voice clause. To correct the faulty parallelism and eliminate the passive voice, change the passive verb managed to the active verb manage, and place it into the series.

   Parallel: The Navajos operate a coal mine, maintain a high-grade ram herd, run a low-cost housing project, and manage a flourishing arts and crafts guild.

2. **This One’s a Bit Tougher:** The previous sentence required only a minor correction. Some sentences may require more than just a couple of word changes.

   Non Parallel: Every four years, the Olympic Games are the headlines in every newspaper, every major television news program, and even a special cable channel solely for televised events.

   In this sentence, the writer fails to supply on before every major television news program (headlines do not appear in television news programs). Also, the third element does not easily fit with the first two. A good solution is to coordinate the first two elements and place the third in a separate sentence.

   Parallel: Every four years, the Olympic Games are the headlines in every newspaper and on every major television news program. There is even a special cable channel solely for televised events.

3. **A Description of Classical Times:** This sentence appears to have been thrown together with little attention to grammatically parallel structure.

   Non Parallel: Jugurtha saw that men wanted their own prestige, morals were not regarded by them, and they could be bought or a good price.

   The sentence begins with men wanted, but continues with not regarded by them, and closes with they could be bought. Remove the pronouns and make the verbs active with the subject men.

   Parallel: Jugurtha saw that men wanted their own prestige, had no regard for morals, and could be bought for a good price.

Attached are some sentences with which you can practice correcting faulty parallelism.

*Compiled by Rusty Kahl ’97 and Revised by Hilton Robinson ’99*
Some Practice Correcting Faulty Parallelism

Revise the following sentences to correct faulty parallelism:

1. Competition makes the body run at full speed, feel invigorating, full of life, and fully aware.

2. At the end of the first week, my new boss told me that she was both impressed with my eagerness and clumsiness.

3. Taking a quiet stroll around the campus exercises one’s muscles as well as providing an opportunity to meet other students.

4. He continued his work, with hope, without pleasure, and having no assurance that people would understand the significance of what he was trying to do.

5. My two ambitions are to have my own business, thus being my own boss, and having enough money to provide my children with a good home and a good education.

6. You will appreciate the student body size, campus location and feel more comfortable in the housing facilities here than you would at a bigger university.

7. Suicide with assistance has been a topic in numerous countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Dutch.

8. Families may be involved in situations where allowing a patient to die may be the best thing rather than going on living.