Parallelism

Although ineffective repetition results in poor style, repetition for the sake of parallel structure produces effective writing. Parallel structure means that a grammatical form is repeated -- that is, an adjective is balanced by another adjective, a verb phrase is balanced by another verb phrase, a subordinate clause is balanced by another subordinate clause, and so on.

Example:
For centuries people have been puzzled by the expressions on the faces of the subjects of three great works of art: the curious smile of the Mona Lisa, the severe set of the mouth of Michelangelo's Madonna and the mysterious gaze of the Great Sphinx.

Awkward:
The female sphinx in Greek Mythology was cruel as well as being deceptive.
(one segment includes a "be" verb; the other contains a participle.)

Parallel:
The female sphinx in Greek mythology was cruel as well as deceptive.
(neither segment includes a participle.)

Awkward:
She is supposed to have asked passers-by a riddle: "What walks on four legs in the morning, on two legs at noon, and used three legs for walking at night?"
(Two segments contain a prepositional phrase; one does not.)

Parallel:
She is supposed to have asked passers-by a riddle: "What walks on four legs in the morning, on two legs at noon, and on three legs at night?"
(All three segments contain prepositional phrases.)

Awkward:
We read that the Sphinx asked the riddle of every traveller and strangling was the punishment for anyone who could not answer correctly.
(One segment contains an adjective clause; one does not.)
Parallel:
We read that the Sphinx asked the riddle of every traveller and that she
strangled anyone who could not answer correctly.
(Both segments contain adjective clauses.)

To make a parallel clear, repeat - whenever necessary - a preposition, an
article, the sign of the infinitive (to), or the introductory word of a phrase or
clause.

Example:
Oedipus answered the Sphinx that it is man who crawls on all fours as a
baby, who walks upright as an adult, and who hobbles with a cane as an
old person. The Sphinx is reported to have heard Oedipus' reply and to
have plunged from a high rock in a rage. She was killed not by a sword
but by a word.
(Who crawls, who walks, and who hobbles are all relative phrases. To
have heard and to have plunged are both infinitive phrases. By a sword
and by a word are both prepositional phrases).

Exercise I.

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

Make the following sentences grammatically parallel.
1. Her stories are characterized by simple vocabulary, rapid action and she
   uses a vast amount of dialogue.
2. Knowledge gained from experience is just as important as what the books
teach.
3. Del's low grades were due to irregular attendance, to poor attention in class,
   and he didn't study sufficiently.
4. Before writing your essay a topic should be selected, collect your material,
   and prepare a rough outline.
5. The three kinds of speech are demonstrative, informative, and the kind
   persuading someone of something.
6. He advised me to take two aspirins and that I call him in the morning.
7. Playing with small construction toys is beneficial to young children because it
develops their fine motor skills, encourages concentration and patience, and
their creative imagination is stimulated.
8. You need to develop skill and strategy and be agile to be a good tennis
   player.
In parallel construction, repeat an article (a, the, an), a preposition, or pronoun whenever necessary to make the meaning clear.

**Examples:**
The owner and manager (one and the same person) agreed to buy a full-page ad.
The owner and the manager (two different people) agreed to buy a full-page ad.
George gave more time and help to his brother than Jill. (than Jill did)
George gave more time and help to his brother than to Jill. (than he did to Jill)

**Note**
Take care with correlative conjunctions, which are conjunctions used in pairs:
- both............and
- not only........but (also)
- neither........nor
- either........or
Each part of the conjunction should be placed immediately before the item it introduces.

**Incorrect**
To escape detention, she both changed her name and her address

**Correct**
To escape detention, she changed both her name and her address.

**Incorrect**
Mrs. Austen not only supported the Cancer Society but also the Heart Fund.

**Correct**
Mrs. Austen supported not only the Cancer Society but also the Heart Fund.
Exercise II.

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

Revise the following sentences.
1. The people of the Phillippines had no more desire to be ruled by the United States than the Spanish.
2. The four diplomats could neither agree on the time nor the place for their next meeting.
3. I said that, if I could have my way, I would neither see him nor his sister again.
4. The auditorium of the new school will not only be used by the school, but also the community will use it.
5. The sign in the restaurant read, "Our Establishment Serves Tea in a Bag Just Like Mother."

Using Parallel Constructions Effectively

These are parallel lines: |||. They remain the same distance apart no matter how far you extend them. And, as it takes two to tango, it also takes two grammatical constructions to be parallel, at least two.

Words can be parallel in their own way also:

hoping,
praying,
holding,
loving,

These words all end in ing.

Phrases can be parallel:
to the store
to the bus
to the show

These all begin with to,

OR

with courage
with trust
with a generous amount of verve

which are with prepositions
Clauses can be parallel, too:
  who came from the country
  who moved to the City for ten years, and
  who eventually retired to the country again
These all begin with who, a relative pronoun.

Similar ideas expressed in similar structures are said to be parallel. The use of parallel constructions can be a source of power in speaking or writing, as in:
  "Give me liberty or give me death!" (Each phrase begins with give me).
  "... that this government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth." (Each phrase begins with a preposition: of, by, for).

Parallel constructions are common in poetry and songs:
  "All the lonely people, where do they all come from?
   All the lonely people, where do they all belong?"

Parallel constructions are simply the repetitions, not of words, but of the grammatical forms in which we put these words. Sometimes we set up a parallel construction and the promise of its rhythm and richness is established, only to be spoiled by a structure that breaks the pattern. Compare the following examples to the examples given above and notice what happens:
  "Give me liberty or without it, I'd rather die."
  "... that this government of the people, by the people, and with the people's interests at heart shall not perish from the earth."
  "All the lonely people, where do they all come from?
   All the lonely people, who do they belong to?"

Something is lost, right? Several strengths dwindle away into weakness. The expressions lose a rhythmic force, they lose a conciseness, and they sound far less important or profound because they sound less carefully structured.
Exercise A.

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

In the following sentences, parallel constructions are set up. That is, similar ideas are expressed in similar ways. Underline the parallel constructions in each sentence.

Examples:
Jill woke up hoping to see the sun shining, to smell bacon frying, and to hear sounds of life in the apartment.
(Each of the underlined phrases begins with an infinitive: to + a verb).
1. Instead, when she finally opened her eyes she could tell that the day was cloudy and dreary, that nothing was happening in the kitchen, and that no one else had yet begun to stir.
2. She sighed, swung her legs out onto the floor, and reached for her jeans.
3. What she really wanted was someone who liked getting up early and who would help her pack as much as possible into this fall day.
4. Jill dialed her usual morning call to get the exact time and to see what the day's weather would be like.
5. The forecast was for a sunny afternoon, so she began making coffee, frying bacon, and getting the day started.
6. The day had started as usual, but Jill still hoped something would happen to change it from its usual pattern and to make this day special.
7. All at once, the phone rang, the doorbell chimed, and the toast popped up, ready to be buttered.
8. Jill hesitated, wondered what to do first, and finally, reached for the phone.
9. The telephone caller wanted her to name the first five presidents and to award a free trip to look at some real estate.
10. The caller at the door knocked, waited, knocked again, and then left.

Parallel constructions are really two or three sentences combined into one.

Most television commercials are designed for an audience that will believe almost anything.
Most television commercials are designed for an audience that remembers slogans better than facts.
Most television commercials are designed for an audience that will tolerate seeing and hearing repetitious material.
Put all three into one and, behold - **A PARALLEL CONSTRUCTION:**

Most television commercials are designed for an audience that will believe almost anything, that will remember slogans better than facts, and that will tolerate seeing and hearing repetitious material.

First, you need to be able to recognize parallel constructions. Then, you need to be able to compose them. And finally, you need to be able to rewrite sentences where parallel constructions began but fizzled out along the way.

**Exercise B.**

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

Write the elements of parallel constructions found in each example on the lines following each sentence. Try to determine what grammatical form is used in each, (ie. infinitive, preposition, verb, etc.).

**Example:**
The taxicab company advertised for drivers who knew the city and who had good driving records.

**Parallel Constructions:**
who knew the city
who had good driving records

1. Jack knew that his record was good and that getting around the city would pose no great problems, so he applied for a job.

**Parallel Constructions:**

2. Little did he know that he would also be required to have his eyes checked, to have a complete physical examination, and to obtain a chauffeur's license.

**Parallel Constructions:**

3. When all that was finished, Jack stepped into his cab, turned on the ignition, and set out for his first day on the job.

**Parallel Constructions:**

Find more at http://rdc.libguides.com/writing
4. His first customer was a frantic fellow who asked Jack to get him to the airport and to hurry.

   Parallel Constructions:

5. Being eager to please and knowing what it feels like to rush for a plane, Jack wove in and out of traffic like a veteran driver.

   Parallel Constructions:

6. Within a half hour, Jack had the man at the ticket counter with the bags already checked and with ten minutes to spare.

   Parallel Constructions:

7. The drive back to the city gave Jack a chance to drive normally, to relax, and to feel pleased with himself.

   Parallel Constructions:

Exercise C.

Print out the following exercise to complete it.

In the following sentences, parallel constructions have begun to be set up, but something breaks the pattern in each case. Underline the parallel parts and rewrite each sentence so that the remainder is parallel.

Example:
It was a great day for fishing, swimming, and to bask in the sun.
It was a great day for fishing, swimming, and basking in the sun.

1. We had an old rowboat that leaked a little and needing a coat of paint.
2. Knowing we had only a few hours and because we wanted to make the most of them, we ruled out basking in the sun.
3. Although the boat would take no prizes for speed, comfort, or how safe it was, we made it through the afternoon without trouble.
**Exercise D.**

Print out the following exercise to complete it.
In each of the following sentences, one element is not parallel with the others. On the lines provided, rewrite only the misfit to make it parallel with the other elements.

**Example:**
I have to junk my good old car because of water in the oil, oil in the water, and the gas tank leaks.

a leak in the gas tank

1. She has been a good car running smoothly, good mileage, and getting me where I needed to go.

2. I took her to the shop for a tune up, for a regular mileage check, and seeing if she might be safe.

3. But the mechanic took one look at her, shook his head, and advises me to sell it as junk.

4. Who wants to buy a car that still runs, that puffs and strains uphill, to get you to work, but might not make it back?
Answer Key

Exercise I.

1. Her stories are characterized by simple vocabulary, by rapid action, and by a vast amount of dialogue. (prep. phrases)
2. Knowledge gained from experience is just as important as knowledge gained from books. (noun clause)
3. Del's low grades were due to irregular attendance, to poor attention in class, and to insufficient study. (prep. phrases)
4. Before writing your essay, select a topic, collect your material, and prepare a rough outline. (S + V + complement)
5. The three main kinds of speech are demonstrative, informative, and persuasive. (adjectives)
6. He advised me to take two aspirins, and to call him in the morning. (infinitive phrase)
7. Playing with small construction toys is beneficial to young children because it develops their fine motor skills, encourages their concentration and patience, and stimulates their creative imagination. (V + adj. + complement)
8. You need to develop skill, strategy, and agility to be a good tennis player. (nouns)

Exercise II.

1. The people of the Phillipines had no more desire to be ruled by the United States than by the Spanish.
2. The four diplomats could agree on neither the time nor the place of their next meeting.
3. I said that, if I could have my way, I would see neither him nor his sister again.
4. The auditorium of the new school will be used not only by the school, but also by the community.
5. The sign in the restaurant said "Just Like Mother, Our Establishment Serves Tea in a Bag."
Exercise A.

1. Instead, when she finally opened her eyes she could tell that the day was cloudy and dreary, that nothing was happening in the kitchen, and that no one else had yet begun to stir. (relative clauses)
2. She sighed, swung her legs out onto the floor, and reached for her jeans. (past verbs)
3. What she really wanted was someone who liked getting up early and who would help her pack as much as possible into this fall day. (relative clauses)
4. Jill dialed her usual morning call to get the exact time and to see what the day's weather would be like. (infinitives)
5. The forecast was for a sunny afternoon, so she began making coffee, frying bacon, and getting the day started. (making, frying and getting are gerunds - verbals that function as nouns)
6. The day had started as usual, but Jill still hoped something would happen to change it from its usual pattern and to make this day special. (infinitives)
7. All at once, the phone rang, the doorbell chimed, and the toast popped up, ready to be buttered. (adjective clauses)
8. Jill hesitated, wondered what to do first, and finally, reached for the phone. (past tense)
9. The telephone caller wanted her to name the first five presidents and to award a free trip to look at some real estate. (infinitives)
10. The caller at the door knocked, waited, knocked again, and then left. (past tense)

Exercise B.

1. that his record was good, that getting around the city (relative clauses)
2. to have, to have, to obtain - (infinitives)
3. stepped, turned, set out - (verbs - past tense)
4. to get, to hurry - (infinitives)
5. being eager, knowing - (gerunds)
6. with the bags, with ten minutes - (prepositional phrases)
7. to drive, to relax, to feel - (infinitives)
Exercise C.

1. We had an old rowboat that leaked and that needed a coat of paint. (relative phrases)
2. Knowing we had only a few hours and wanting to make the most of them, we ruled outbasking in the sun. (gerunds)
3. Although the boat would take no prizes for speed, comfort, or safety, we made it through the afternoon without trouble. (adjectives)

Exercise D.

1. She has been a good car running smoothly, good mileage, and getting me where I needed to go. giving good mileage
2. I took her to the shop for a tune up, for a regular mileage check, and seeing if she might be safe. for a safety check
3. But the mechanic took one look at her, shook his head, and advises me to sell it as junk. advised me to sell it
4. Who wants to buy a car that still runs, that puffs and strains uphill, to get you to work, but might not make it back? that might not make it back

MAGGIE ARMSTRONG, JANUARY - 1993