

Lesson 10.8

Using Parallelism, Coordination, and Subordination

When you write, one of your main goals should be to clearly show connections between ideas. Some ideas are equally important to your meaning while others are less important. The way that you structure a sentence can help establish those relationships and make your writing flow more smoothly.

Read the following examples. Which paragraph is easier to read and understand?

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, because we want to establish justice, insuring domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, to promote the general welfare, and we secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

We the people of the United States, in order to form a more perfect union, establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings of liberty to ourselves and our posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.

- ▶ As you can see, the structure of these paragraphs greatly affects their meaning and flow. The first example is difficult to read, and the relationship between the ideas is unclear. In the second example, it's much easier to identify the ideas and see that they are all of equal importance.

In this lesson, you will learn three ways to add structure to your writing:

- Coordination
- Subordination
- Parallelism

Coordination

Coordination is used to link two related ideas. Look at the following sentences:

- Billy, my little cousin, swam in the pool for the first time.
- He was scared.

Because these sentences are so closely related, they can be combined to form one sentence:

- Billy, my little cousin, swam in the pool for the first time, but he was scared.

Helpful Hint

To remember the seven coordinating conjunctions, memorize the acronym FANBOYS:

For
And
Nor
But
Or
Yet
So

To learn more about conjunctions, see Lesson 9.1.

Sometimes, the relationship between two ideas is so clear, you don't need to use a conjunction. Think about the following examples:

- ▶ Don't worry about what other people think of you, but worry about what *you* think of you.
- ▶ Don't worry about what other people think of you; worry about what *you* think of you.
- ▶ If you read these sentences aloud, you may notice that the second sentence sounds better. Because the relationship between both sentences is so obvious, you can simply join them with a **semicolon**. Using a comma and a coordinating conjunction in this case is both unnecessary and awkward.

Helpful Hint

Whenever you combine two independent clauses, you must join them with either a semicolon or a comma with a coordinating conjunction. If you use just a comma or just a conjunction, your sentence is grammatically incorrect.

To learn more about properly combining sentences, see Lesson 10.1.

Subordination

While coordination is used to connect related ideas of *equal* importance, **subordination** is used to connect related ideas of *unequal* importance. Here's an example:

Dr. Peppercorn cannot work with any patients until he has his first cup of coffee.

In this sentence, the subordinating conjunction *until* is being used to combine two independent clauses.

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Dr. Peppercorn cannot work with any patients.

He has his first cup of coffee.

- ▶ Using coordination to combine these sentences doesn't work because the ideas are unequal. In this case, you need to subordinate one of the sentences by adding a subordinating conjunction.

Dr. Peppercorn cannot work with any patients **until** he has his first cup of coffee.

Until he has his first cup of coffee, Dr. Peppercorn cannot work with any patients.

568 Chapter 10 | Grammatical Sentences

Here is a list of the most common subordinating conjunctions:

after	even though	until
although	if	when
as	once	while
because	since	

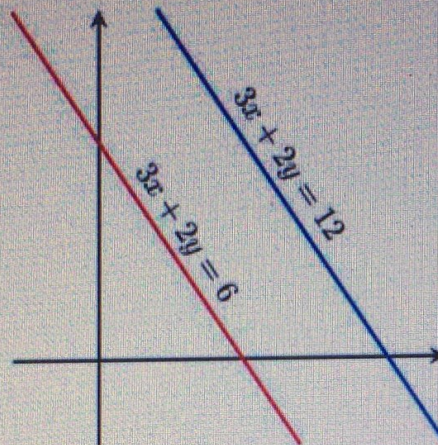
Parallelism

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Two ideas that are parallel are expressed with similar words, phrases, or clauses.

In writing, **parallelism** is used to create balance between two or more related ideas by using similarly-structured words, **phrases**, or clauses. Consider this sentence:

My favorite season is the summer; the fall is what my husband prefers.

The two halves of this example are **independent clauses** that express related information. In each, the speaker describes a favorite season. However, the clauses are structured differently, making it difficult to see the connection between the two ideas.

Changing the second half of the sentence will make it easier to read.

My favorite season is the summer; my husband's favorite season is the fall.

Both halves of this sentence are now parallel because they follow the same basic pattern:

Person	Topic	Season
Me	favorite season	summer
My husband	favorite season	fall

Writing Environment: Everyday

Because parallelism adds rhythm and flow to your writing, it is often used in poems or song lyrics. Can you think of any specific examples?

Parallelism also includes using consistent coordinating conjunctions (*either/or*, *neither/nor*). *Neither* must be followed by *nor*, and *either* must be followed by *or*. *Not only* must be used with *but also*.

- | **Not only** did the company change its hiring policy, **but also** it adjusted its pay scale accordingly.
- | **Either** we will meet next week, **or** we will have to reschedule.
- | **Neither** our marketing department **nor** our advertising agency has approved the changes.

On Your Own

Use the items below to write a complete sentence with a parallel list. You may need to change the wording.

- | Getting a haircut
- | Going shopping
- | Picking up dog food

You should also use parallelism for lists.

- Not Parallel** Before she could go to the beach, Beth had to eat breakfast, pass a math test, and running errands.
- Parallel** Before she could go to the beach, Beth had to eat breakfast, pass a math test, and run errands.
- Not Parallel** My neighbor's parakeet, the cat belonging to my grandmother, and my best friend's hamster came to my dog's birthday party.
- Parallel** My neighbor's parakeet, my grandmother's cat, and my best friend's hamster came to my dog's birthday party.

These sentences are easier to read when each item in the list follows the same structure.

Each of the following sentences is *missing* parallel structure. This is jarring for the reader because it upsets the rhythm.

Writing Environment: Academic

For class assignments and research papers, your professors will expect strong organization in your ideas and arguments. It's essential for them to quickly find your thesis and follow it throughout your paper. Parallelism can be a great tool for organizing transitions, style, and length at the paragraph level. Keeping paragraphs similar in structure helps the reader focus on your convincing argument and compelling information.

On Your Own

Take a look at the following examples and identify the list item in each sentence that doesn't seem to fit with the others.

My favorite hobbies include playing the guitar, watching action movies, and anything with basketball.

The committee resolved to cut funding for after-school programs, decided to hold nominations for a new chairperson, and interviewing the recently hired police chief.

Lesson Wrap-up

Key Terms

Comma: a punctuation mark used to separate items in a list; join compound sentences; mark introductory words, phrases, and clauses; add extra or unnecessary details to a sentence; and separate similar adjectives

Coordinating Conjunction: a conjunction that joins similar words or groups of words together

Coordination: a method for combining similar ideas

Conjunction: a word that makes a connection between other words or a group of words

Independent Clause: a group of words with a subject and a verb that expresses a complete thought

Parallelism: a method for showing a relationship between ideas by using similarly structured words, phrases, or clauses

Phrase: a word group that does not form a complete thought because it is missing a subject and/or verb

Semicolon: a punctuation mark used to combine two independent clauses and separate long list items

Subordinating Conjunction: a conjunction that introduces a dependent clause

Subordination: a method for combining unequal ideas