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What is *parallelism*? When do I use it?

When making a list, you need to make sure that all the words running in that series match in their form. If you mix nouns and verbs or even kinds of verbs (for example “to eat” listed in a series with “taking a nap”), your sentence will not be parallel.

Examples:

My family and I went to Hawaii for Christmas and spent our time **surfing**, **sunbathing**, and **hiking**.

Barbra and her son love **to fly** kites, **to bake** cookies, and **to read** good books.

How can I check for parallelism when I am proofreading my paper?

A good rule of thumb when looking for parallelism is paying close attention to coordinating conjunctions (*for, and, nor, but, or, yet, and so*). Coordinating conjunctions are used in listing and therefore can help you spot faulty parallelism.

Using parallel structure in your writing will improve your clarity and make your paper easier for your readers to understand. When you have a firm grip on parallelism, you can communicate your ideas more clearly and write for a more extensive audience.

¹ Information included in this tip sheet has been suggested by:

Hacker, Diana. *Rules for Writers*. 2nd ed. New York: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2000. 110-114