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SSC - 245

Parallel Structure

Overview: When a sentence has several parts that are similar, you must maintain the same grammatical pattern in each part to maintain a parallel structure. Switching tenses within a sentence or ordering items incorrectly creates an imbalance in sentence structure, which can make it difficult for your reader to understand your point.

Incorrect structure, Example 1: Carlos enjoys running, painting, and to eat.

This sentence lists three things that Carlos enjoys. Notice that “running” and “eating” are not in the same form as “to eat”. If we change the last verb to match the others, the sentence will flow more smoothly.

Correct parallel structure: Carlos enjoys running, painting, and eating.

Incorrect structure, Example 2: Monica was upset about crashing her car and she also felt embarrassed. Monica has two similar feelings about the same event, so those feelings should be listed together. Doing this cuts down on wordiness and makes the overall point of the sentence easier to follow.

Correct parallel structure: Monica was upset and embarrassed about crashing her car.

Incorrect structure, Example 3: Drug side effects may include blurry vision, blindness, or teary eyes. Parallelism in writing may also mean listing items in degree of importance. In the above examples, the worst side effect of the drug is obviously blindness, and it should be the last item listed. This is also true for items that can be listed in chronological order; for example, “April, May, June,” not “April, June, May.”

Correct parallel structure: Drug side effects may include teary eyes, blurry vision, or blindness.

Incorrect structure, Example 4: Dr. Harris is the smartest professor I know; she is also the nicest.

The sentence is grammatically correct, but there is no need for the sentence to be split into two clauses. Combining the adjectives together makes the sentence concise and to the point.

Correct parallel structure: Dr. Harris is the smartest and nicest professor I know.

Incorrect structure, Example 5:

- Tutored students with diverse backgrounds
- Schedules appointments and maintains files
- To help students become better writers

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When using bullet points, such as on a job resume, it's important to make sure the points are parallel and use the same pattern. In this case, all the verbs must be in the same tense.

Correct parallel structure:

- Tutored students with diverse backgrounds
- Scheduled appointments and maintained files
- Helped students become better writers

Practice: The best way to make sure that your parallel structures are correct is to your read work out loud very carefully. Verbally stressing each word in a sentence makes you hear your writing in a new way and helps you catch your mistakes, especially when it comes to parallelism.