

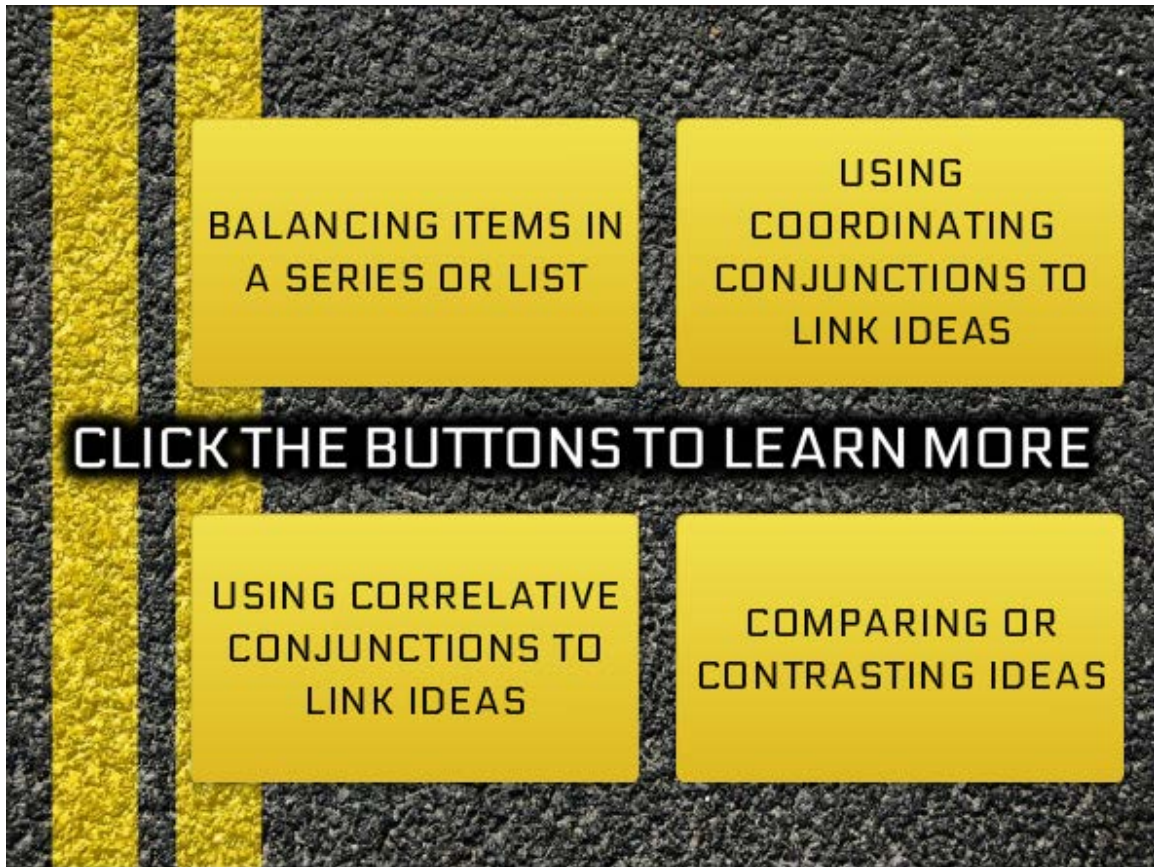
Module 9: Nonfiction
Topic 6 Content: Situations That Call for Parallel Structure Notes



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Parallel structure is an important tool for writers. Although parallelism appears in many different forms, there are four common situations that require parallel structure. Take a moment to examine the contexts that call for parallelism so that you can avoid common mistakes in parallel structure within your own writing.



Balancing Items in a Series or List

When including a list or series of items in a sentence, all of the items should have the same grammatical structure. In other words, avoid mixing nouns with adjectives, verbs with adverbs, or any other mismatching combination of grammar structures.

Pay special attention to the forms of verbs that are part of a series or list. Can you identify the error in this example?

I like running, swimming, and to play volleyball.

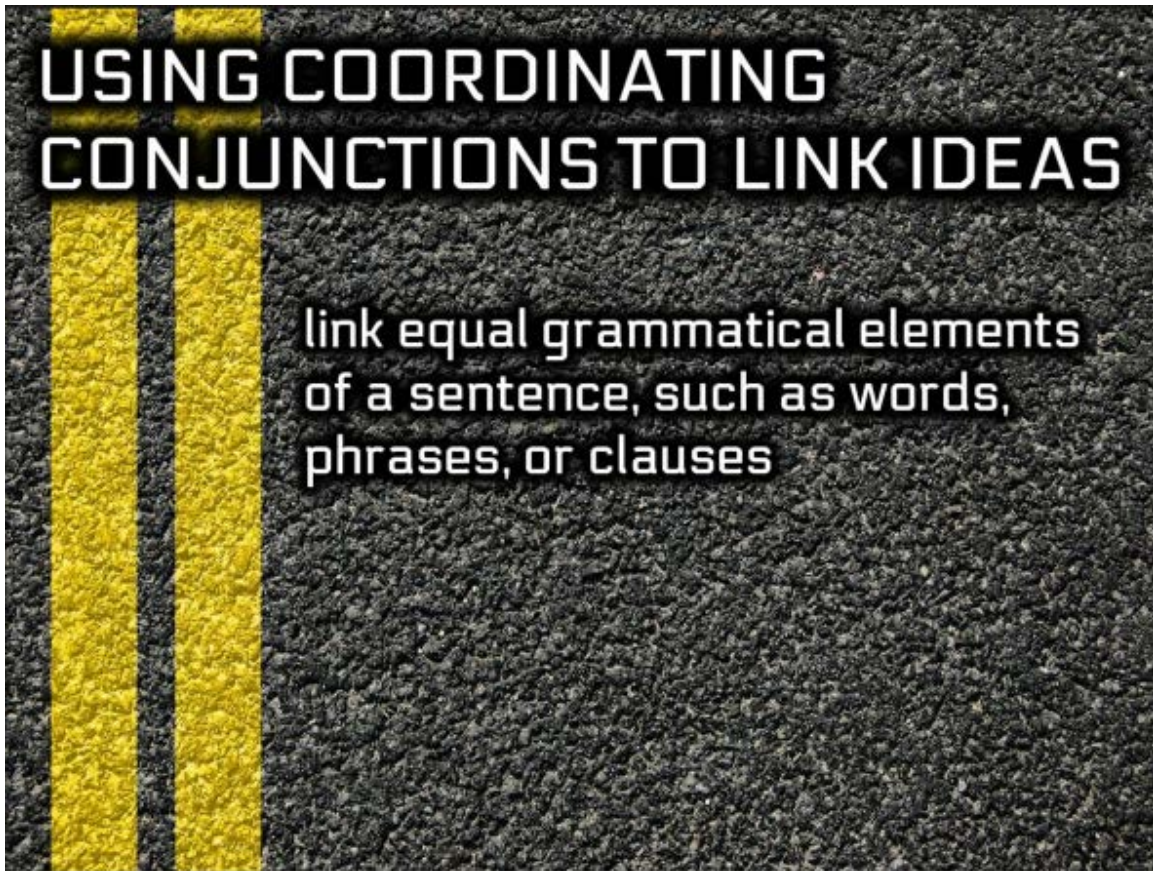
In this series, all three items listed are verbs, but they are different forms of verbs. *Running* and *swimming* are verb forms called gerunds, which function as nouns. *To play* is a verb form called an infinitive. Working as separate sentences, either verb form is correct in English.

If you want to use all these verbs in the same sentence, you risk creating awkward wording if you mix gerunds with infinitives. Therefore, when creating parallelism using verbs, ensure that they are conjugated consistently.

I like running, swimming, and playing volleyball. In this sentence, all of the verbs are gerunds.

I like to run, swim, and play volleyball. In this sentence, all of the verbs are infinitives.

Module 9: Nonfiction
Topic 6 Content: Situations That Call for Parallel Structure Notes



Using Coordinating Conjunctions to Link Ideas

Coordinating conjunctions link equal grammatical elements of a sentence, such as words, phrases, or clauses. There are seven commonly recognized coordinating conjunctions: *for*, *and*, *nor*, *but*, *or*, *yet*, and *so*. A common mistake is to use faulty parallelism when using coordinating conjunctions. Consider this example that has faulty parallelism while using *yet* as a coordinating conjunction.

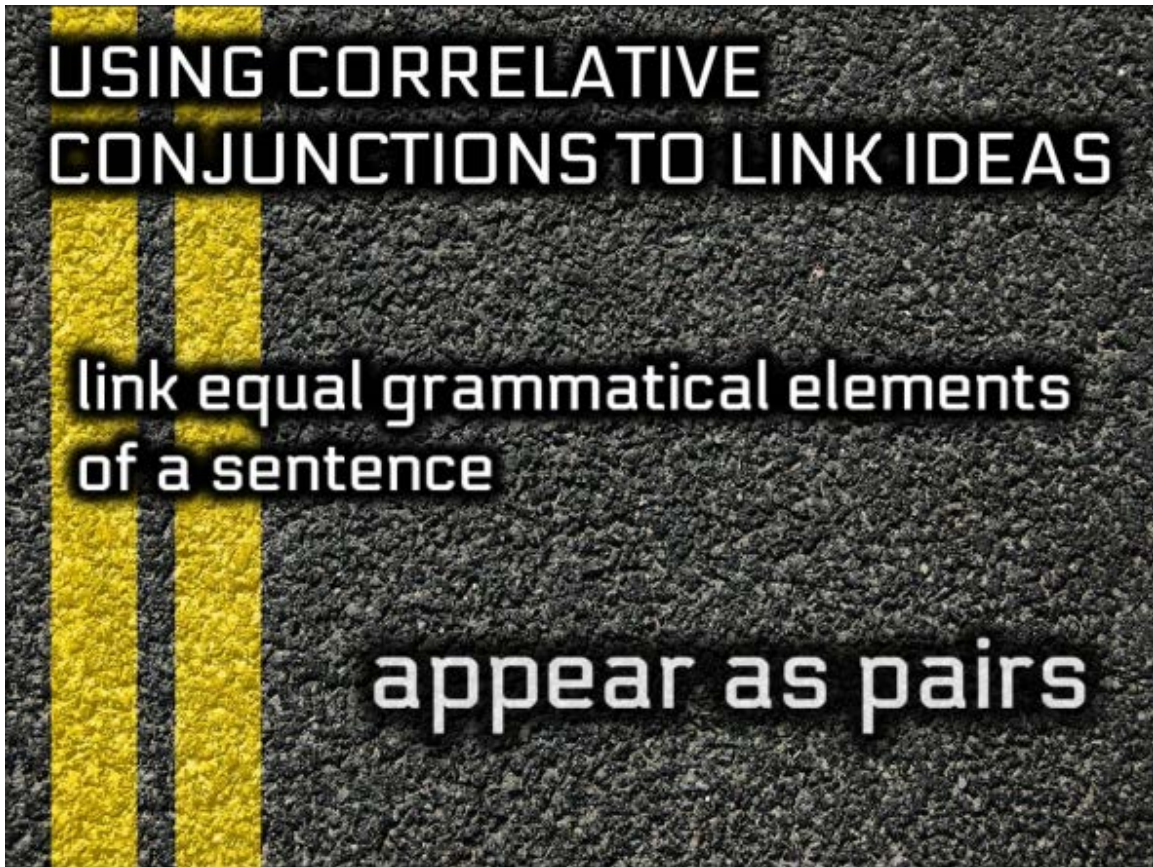
The poem is old, lengthy, *yet* serves in the classroom as a useful example of literary achievement.

The first two items in the series are adjectives, but the third item is a verb. To maintain parallelism, you can change the third item from an active verb to a descriptive adjective.

The poem is old, lengthy, *yet* useful in the classroom as an example of literary achievement.

Pay special attention to the use of prepositions when linking ideas with coordinating conjunctions.

Module 9: Nonfiction
Topic 6 Content: Situations That Call for Parallel Structure Notes



Using Correlative Conjunctions to Link Ideas

Correlative conjunctions link equal grammatical elements of a sentence, but they differ from coordinating conjunctions in that they always appear as pairs. The most common correlative conjunction pairs are shown here.

When using correlative conjunctions in a sentence, make sure that what follows each conjunction has the same grammar structure in order to avoid faulty parallelism. For example, examine this sentence that has faulty parallelism while using the correlative conjunctions *not only . . . but also*.

Women's gymnastics is a sport that not only *requires artistry* but also *physical strength*.

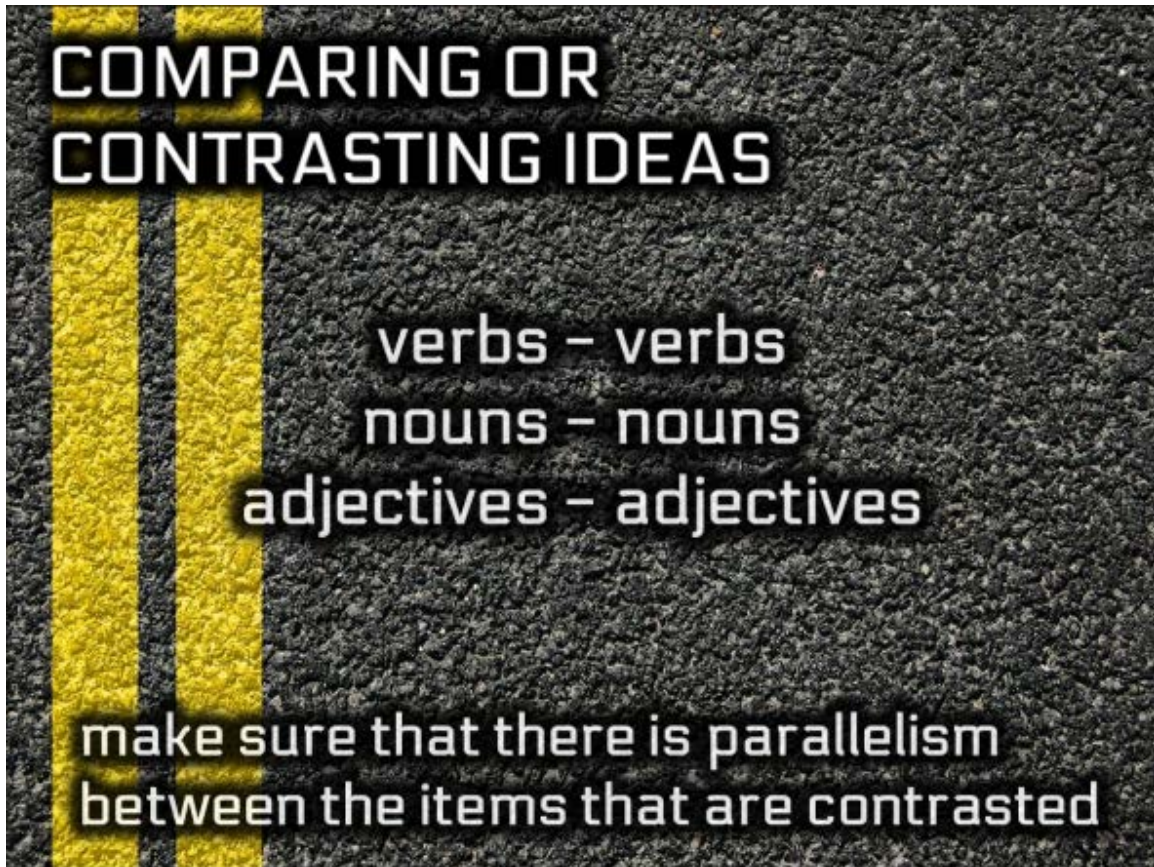
Note that the two items linked by the correlative conjunctions are the phrases *requires artistry* (which is an action) and *physical strength* (which is a thing). This break in parallelism is grammatically incorrect. To remedy the error, you can rewrite one of the items so that both are either actions or things.

Women's gymnastics is a sport that not only *requires artistry* but also *demands physical strength*.
(Both items linked are actions)

Women's gymnastics is a sport that requires not only *artistry* but also *physical strength*. (Both items linked are things)

Notice how both of these revised sentences do not use commas before the conjunction *but*. You should only use a comma before the conjunction *but* when the second clause is an independent clause, meaning that it can stand alone as a sentence.

Module 9: Nonfiction
Topic 6 Content: Situations That Call for Parallel Structure Notes



Comparing or Contrasting Ideas

When you contrast ideas using the word *than*, make sure that there is parallelism between the items that are contrasted. In other words, make sure that you are contrasting verbs with verbs, nouns with nouns, adjectives with adjectives, and so forth. How can you improve this sentence by creating parallelism?

Sometimes it is easier to write on paper *than* typing on a computer.

Because the first item is an infinitive, the second item being contrasted should also be an infinitive, not a gerund.

Sometimes it is easier to write on paper *than* to type on a computer.

Parallelism also applies when you are comparing ideas using the word *as*. How can you improve this sentence by creating parallelism?

Most chefs agree that appealing to the eyes is *as important as* o please the tongue.

Because the first item of the comparison is a gerund, you can easily change the second item from an infinitive to a gerund.

Most chefs agree that appealing to the eyes is *as important as* pleasing the tongue.