GRAMMAR 101: Eliminating Awkward Sentences

Two Locations: In the Lyman Beecher Brooks Library, First Floor and Madison 109

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Introduction

In this workshop, you will learn about faulty parallel structure and tips to help identify and revise awkward sentences in your writing.
Parallel structure, or parallelism, means using the same pattern of words to show that two or more words or ideas are of equal importance.

Yeah, right... so what?
Question: How do you find parallel structure in your writing?

Answer: Whenever you include a list of actions or items, you must use equal grammatical units.

➔ If the first item is a **noun**, then the following items must also be nouns.

➔ If the first action is a **simple past tense verb**, then make the other items **simple past tense verbs** too.

◆ “Lions, tigers, and bear, oh my!”
Every morning, we make our bed, eating breakfast, and feed the dog.

Do these phrases follow the same pattern of words?
This is an awkward sentence construction because these phrases are not parallel.

... make our bed = present tense verb + object
... eating breakfast = verb + -ing
... feed the dog = present tense verb + object
Fixing Faulty Parallelism

**Faulty parallelism** (also sometimes called *parallel structure error* or a *parallel construction error*) occurs when the structure of a sentence is not grammatically parallel. This error occurs most often in sentences that contain lists.

Every morning, *we make our bed, eating breakfast and feed the dog.*

Corrected:
Every morning, *we make our bed, eat breakfast and feed the dog.*
Fixing Faulty Parallelism: Example

The writer interviewed two subject matter experts, editing four drafts, and she intends to compose two press releases.

Do these phrases follow the same pattern of words?

Corrected:
The writer interviewed two subject matter experts, edited four drafts, and composed two press releases.

The pattern is past tense verb + plural object
Fixing Faulty Parallel Structure

Example
She mowed the lawn, trim the shrubs, and edging the sidewalk took her two hours to complete.

Possible Revision
Fixing Faulty Parallel Structure

Example
My grandfather’s favorite activities are taking a walk around the old neighborhood, chatting at the barber shop, he listens to jazz in Downtown Norfolk, and goes to Joe’s Crab House for dinner.

Possible Revision
Fixing Faulty Parallel Structure

Example

He has shown signs of improvement in his ability to focus and behavioral changes.

Possible Revision
Parallel structure, or parallelism, means using the same pattern of words.

Look for long sentences. Re-read and check parallelism.

Read your paper aloud. If you stumble when reading, the sentence may have faulty parallelism.