Improve Your Writing Style #4

Parallelism

What is Parallel Construction?

When you express coordinate ideas in similar form.

Example: I love to travel on the train and to ride on the rollercoaster.
(Two parallel constructions)

Why do it?

• It makes it easier to understand ideas when they are presented in similar form

• Readers expect items in a series to appear parallel. If this form isn’t followed, the sentence sounds needlessly awkward.

With Words and Phrases

Use with gerunds (the –ing form) of words:

X Not Parallel: Mary likes hiking, swimming, and to ride a bicycle.

✓ Parallel: Mary likes hiking, swimming, and bicycling.

Use with infinitive phrases

✓ Parallel: Mary likes to hike, to swim, and to cycle.

✓ Mary likes to hike, swim, and cycle.

With Clauses

A parallel structure that begins with clauses must keep on with clauses. Changing to another pattern or changing the voice of the verb (from active to passive or vice versa) will break the parallelism.

X The coach told the players that they should get a lot of sleep, that they should not eat too much, and to do some warm-up exercises before the game.

✓ The coach told the players that they should get a lot of sleep, that they should not eat too much, and that they should do some warm-up exercises before the game.

✓ The coach told the players that they should get a lot of sleep, not eat too much, and do some warm-up exercises before the game.

In pairs

You can emphasize the connection between paired ideas by putting them in parallel form.

Paired ideas are usually connected with 1) and, but, or or 2) Either...or 3) A comparison word such as than or as
At RMC, plagiarism can result in suspension or even being expelled from school.

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Lists after a Colon

Be sure to keep all the elements in a list in the same form.

- The dictionary can be used for these purposes: to find word meanings, pronunciations, correct spellings, and looking up irregular verbs.
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Repeat function words to clarify parallels

Sometimes you have to add function words such as prepositions (by, to) and subordinating conjunctions (that, because). They signal the grammatical structure of the words to follow.

- Many smokers try switching to a brand they find distasteful or a low tar and nicotine cigarette.
- Many smokers try switching to a brand they find distasteful or to a low tar and nicotine cigarette.

Proofreading strategies

- Skim your paper, pausing at the words "and" and "or." Check on each side of these words to see whether the items joined are parallel. If not, make them parallel.
- If you have several items in a list, put them in a column to see if they are parallel.
- Listen to the sound of the items in a list or the items being compared. Do you hear the same kinds of sounds? For example, is there a series of "-ing" words beginning each item? Or do your hear a rhythm being repeated? If something is breaking that rhythm or repetition of sound, check to see if it needs to be made parallel.

Sources

Strunk and White *Elements of Style*
Purdue *Online Writing Lab*
Diana Hacker *A Writer’s Reference*
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