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PARALLELISM

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...a repeat of patterns in: **Words**
Sentences
Paragraphs
Transitions

Parallelism is the repetition of similar grammatical structures that can be used to simplify information, emphasize a point, or even surprise a reader.

EXAMPLE:

Nonparallel: Jenny is an artist, spends time at athletes, and flies planes.
Parallel: Jenny is an *artist*, an *athlete*, and a *pilot*.
Q: What is the difference?
A: In the first sentence, the objects are all hodgepodge.
In the second sentence, the objects are presented in a consistent manner.

EXAMPLE:

Nonparallel: He slowed down and came sliding. The winning run was scored.
Parallel: He *slowed* down, *slid*, and *scored* the winning run.
Q: What is the difference?
A: The first sentence has three hodgepodge verbs, creating chaotic action.
In the second sentence, the verbs are written in the same tense.

EXAMPLE:

Nonparallel: The car was big, had beauty, and it cost a lot.
Parallel: The car was *big*, *beautiful*, and *expensive*.
Q: How are *big*, *beautiful*, and *expensive* parallel words?
A: All 3 words are straightforward nouns.

EXAMPLE:

Nonparallel: They raced across the roof, and the fire escape is where they came down.

Parallel: They raced *across the roof* and *down the fire escape*.

Q: How are *across the roof* and *down the fire escape* parallel phrases?

A: Both are made into pairs of prepositions with nouns.

Something to Remember: Certain special word constructions *require* parallel structure.

1. both...and
2. either...or
3. not only...but also
4. rather...than
5. on one hand...on the other hand

These special word constructions have two parts. Therefore, the words, phrases, or clauses following them **must** be parallel.

For example:

1. The ball game was *both* crowded *and* tense.
2. You *either* understand grammar *or* you don't.
3. My son *not only* plays music *but also* composes music.
4. My boyfriend would *rather* stew about being lost *than* ask for directions.
5. On the one hand, I can go home. On the other hand, I can stay here.

You can use parallelism for special affect

1. Increase progression of thought.

ex:

I was *annoyed* at the teacher, *irritated* with the school, but *furious* with myself.

Here I used past tense verbs in ascending velocity to make the point of self-responsibility.

2. Save the best or most important until last.

ex:

My great-grandfather was a *career* Mountie, and *original* Mountie, and the *youngest* Mountie in Canadian history.

Exercise: Identify the two uses of parallelism in the following sentence.

As the buildings burned, swayed, and collapsed, as people cried, screamed, and jumped to their deaths one question passed through the minds of people all over the world—who would do such a heinous act?