

## Academic Writing Tip #6

### Parallelism

One of the most basic and important writing techniques is *parallelism*. Basically, parallelism is using a series of words, phrases, clauses, or even sentences that are grammatically equal. When Abraham Lincoln (who was a fantastic writer) used the expression “of the people, by the people, and for the people” he was using parallelism. In this case, he repeated three prepositional phrases.

Commonly used connectives requiring parallel structures are **and, or, but, either...or, neither...nor, both...and, not only...but also**. Here are some examples of faulty parallelism

**EX:**

The movie star was **charming, intelligent** and a **beauty**.

**Charming** and **intelligent** are adjectives, but **beauty** is a noun. To make this sentence parallel, the writer merely needs to change the noun **beauty** to the adjective **beautiful**.

**EX:**

Her goals were not only **to study** and **travel**, but also **having** a family.

Parallelism is faulty here because a writer cannot connect two infinitive verb phrases with a gerund. The writer could correct the error in either of the following two ways:

**Revised:**

Her goals were not only **to study** and **travel**, but also **to have** a family.

Her goals were not only **studying** and **traveling**, but also **having** a family.

When writers use a series of words, all the words in the series must be grammatically alike. That is, they must be all nouns, all infinitive verbs, all gerunds, all adjectives, all adverbs, or whatever, but not mixed. (Notice the usage of “all” to create parallelism)

Parallelism applies to all elements of our language. Here is an example of faulty parallelism in a series of clauses:

**EX:**

He wanted to know **why he went**, **the time he went**, and **where he went**.

In this case, the two clauses that begin with the subordinators why and where are joined to the noun clause beginning with the word time. To correct this, we only have to use the word when instead of the time.

*Note:* Parallelism is also required in itemizing, such as in bullets, charts and graphs.

