Parallel structure means that two (or more) sentence elements—words, phrases, or clauses—have the same function and grammatical structure in a sentence. Parallelism adds clarity, balance, and symmetry to a sentence—or to a whole passage. Tip: Check for parallelism in a sentence by writing the items to be paralleled in a column, on a separate, parallel lines (like the equal sign = )

Parallel words and phrases:
- He enjoys reading, fishing, and hiking in the woods. (3 –ing verb forms)
- During the exam, we were instructed to read the article, to take notes about our responses, and to write a short essay. (3 phrases)

Parallel clauses:
- The company is looking for employees who are reliable, who express themselves well, and who show initiative.

Faulty parallelism occurs when the grammatical forms don’t all match.
- He enjoys reading, fishing, and to hike in the woods. (2 –ing verb forms (gerunds) + (to-) verb (infinitive) don’t match)
- A good leader has creativity, wisdom, and knows how to get along with people. (2 nouns + verb phrase don’t match)

Use parallelism in these cases:

Three or more items in a series:
- The cooks prepared fish, chicken, and beef for the feast.
- He crashed the party, drank all the punch, ate some finger sandwiches, and left without a word.

Closely related, paired ideas linked by a coordinating conjunction (and, but, or, yet, so, for, not) or a semicolon:
- In the years since Hurricane Katrina, many residents have spent all their time gutting their homes and rebuilding their lives.
- Some parts of the city were spared, but most areas were devastated.
- Some parts of the city were spared; most areas were devastated.

Closely related, paired ideas linked by correlative conjunctions (either . . . or, neither . . . nor, not only . . . but also, both . . . and, whether . . . or). Make sure that the sentence elements that follow directly after the correlative conjunctions match:
- Correct: He was told either to leave the meeting or to turn off his cell phone.
- Faulty: He was told either to leave the meeting or he was told to turn off his cell phone.

- Correct: The city was devastated not only by the hurricane’s ferocious winds, but also by the flooding caused by the levee breaks.
- Faulty: The city was devastated not only by the hurricane’s ferocious winds, but also the levee breaks caused catastrophic flooding.

Comparisons linked with than or as:
- Correct: For many New Orleanians, buying a home in another part of the city is a better option than trying to rebuild a ruined structure.
- Faulty: For many New Orleanians, buying a home in another part of the city is a better option than to try to rebuild a ruined structure. (verb forms do not match)