



Common Core Language Standards: “I Came, I Saw...”

Focus: Using Parallel Structure

Overview

Students will be introduced to parallel structure at the level of the word, phrase/clause, and sentence. After identifying errors in parallel structure, students will practice writing some of their own based on Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address.”

Standards

- 9-10.L.1. Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
 - a. Use parallel structure.
 - b. Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.
- 9-10.L.3. Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Objectives

- To recognize parallel structure in a variety of sources
- To recognize types of phrases and clauses in parallel structure
- To correct faulty parallelism in specific examples
- To recognize effective use of parallel structure

Materials

- If possible, a classroom set of a good grammar book. ¹
- Access to the Internet

¹ I highly recommend the venerable *Warriner’s English Grammar, Sixth Course*. It is currently published as part of the Holt “Traditions” textbook line through Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

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Activity 1

Lecture

Start by defining parallel structure for your students, explaining that although the definition alone may not be sufficient enough to get the concept, the examples should really help!

Parallel Structure Definition

- Parallel structure is the repetition of grammatical elements to express similar ideas.

NOTE: It is not just the repetition of words!

- You can have parallel structure at the level of the word, at the level of the phrase or clause, or at the level of the sentence.

Lead students through parallel structure at the level of the word, at the level of the phrase and clause, and at the level of the sentence with the following examples:

Parallelism of Words

- My brother Billy likes *marmosets*, *fungus*, and *cheese*.
- *Running*, *twitching*, and *giggling* are Billy's favorite activities.
- Billy loves bacon *truly*, *madly*, and *deeply*.

Parallelism of Phrases and Clauses

- *"To die, to sleep; to sleep, perchance to dream,"* said Hamlet.
- *Riding on a pterodactyl*, *skiing with sharks*, and *beating an octopus at an underwater tap-dance contest* are three of the most amusing activities ever.
- Billy added bacon *to his eggs*, *to his hamburger*, and *to his bacon*, living in a worldly paradise of salty crunchiness.

Parallelism of Sentences

- I came. I saw. I conquered.
- Don't use "quotations" "irresponsibly." Don't slap apostrophes in



front of every “s” you see.

Small-Group Work

Fix the Problem!

Students can work together in small groups to fix the problems with faulty parallel structure in the examples below. Work through the first example and explain why it is an example of faulty parallel structure:

Example: Billy rode to school on a manatee, to work on a unicorn, and he took the bus to the mall.

Essentially, explain that finding parallel structure problems is like playing that childhood game of “Which one of these things is not like the others?” If students are having a hard time understanding it (or even if they’re not), this trick helps: In the previous example, “stacking” the parallel elements vertically often makes the difference in faulty or non-parallel phrasing more immediately obvious.

Billy rode to school on a manatee
to work on a unicorn,
and he took the bus to the mall.

Here, it’s easy to see which one of these things is not like the others. Have students rewrite the sentence to fix the problem. (Note: You’ll probably get variations on, “Billy rode to school on a manatee, to work on a unicorn, and to the mall on the bus”).

Have students work together to fix the problems in the examples below. The problems are explained to the right.

| | |
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| <p>1. Billy ate bacon in the morning and noon.</p> | <p>Problem: “Stack” the parallel elements to see the issue:</p> <p>Billy ate bacon in the morning and noon</p> <p>We don’t say “in noon,” so we have to fix it as follows:</p> <p><i>Billy ate bacon in the morning and at noon.</i></p> |
|--|--|



| | |
|---|---|
| | (The parallel elements are the prepositional phrases.) |
| 2. We went to the beach to swim, frolic in the sea, and to eat somewhat sandy caramels. | Again, "stack" the parallel elements: We went to the beach to swim frolic in the sea to eat...caramels Suggested fix: Change "frolic" to "to frolic." |
| 3. You must either learn to box dinosaurs or you must go home. | With either/or" or "neither/nor," the elements have to be parallel, and the "either" is the pivot point, as it were. Again, "stack" them: You must either learn to box dinosaurs Or you must go home You can see that "learn to box" is not parallel with "you must go." Suggested fix: Get rid of "you must": <i>You must either learn to box dinosaurs or go home.</i> |

Discuss with students why parallelism is faulty in the examples above, using the "stacking" method to show where the issues lie. Students tend to find word/phrase/clause parallelism problems relatively easy once they get the essential idea. Other issues such as using the correct preposition with a particular verb and using correct parallelism with either/or or both/and constructions are somewhat more challenging, as discussed briefly below.

Fabulous Resources

More resources and explanations are available at this tremendously helpful site: <http://www.myenglishteacher.net/parallelism.html> . Teachers may wish to write example sentences based on some of the issues this site addresses. It is extremely helpful and thorough! Finally, *Warriner's English Grammar, Sixth Course* is extremely helpful for providing many, many exercises, explanations, and examples for students to work through.



Differentiating Instruction

Depending on students’ ability levels and proficiency with this task, you may want touch on the “easy” parallel structure issues more lightly or more thoroughly. Similarly, you may wish to proceed to the “harder” parallel structure issues if students demonstrate easy mastery of the basic material.

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Easy Parallel Structure Issues</p> | <p>Simple word parallelism, e.g., Billy eats <i>cheese, milk, and Spam</i>.</p> <p>Simple phrase parallelism: I went <i>to the mall, by the store, and through the park</i>.</p> <p>Simple clause parallelism: <i>I want to eat Spam; I love to drink warm Jell-o, and I live to dance with dinosaurs</i>.</p> |
| <p>Harder Parallel Structure Issues</p> | <p>Either/Or You must either <i>dance with dinosaurs or drink your warm Jell-o</i>.</p> <p>Both/and I am both <i>a teacher and a pterodactyl</i>.</p> <p>Not only X, but also Y Billy is not only <i>a lover of dinosaurs</i>, but also <i>an eater of bacon</i>.</p> |

Activity 2: Learn from the Pros

In this activity, students will be presented with the following classic text of American literature, the Gettysburg Address, a masterpiece of deceptively simple and powerful prose.

Small groups

Students are to work in groups to find examples of parallel structure in the piece, and then on their own, they are to develop sentences written in imitation of Lincoln’s, using the same essential “setup”

Some examples of parallelism within this speech have been highlighted below.



The Gettysburg Address

Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, **conceived** in liberty and **dedicated** to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now **we are engaged** in a great civil war, testing whether that nation or any nation **so conceived and so dedicated** can long endure. **We are met** on a great battlefield of that war. **We have come** to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, **we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow** this ground. The brave men, living and dead who struggled here have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note nor **long remember what we say here**, but it can **never forget what they did here**. It is for us the living rather to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us -- that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion -- that we here highly resolve that **these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.**

Individual Work

After student groups have shared all of the examples of parallelism they have found in this speech, students working alone and individually may write at least three sentences using Lincoln’s sentences as models. It is helpful to students if they set up their papers as follows:

| Lincoln’s Sentence | Student ‘s Sentence |
|---|---|
| We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow this ground. | We cannot accept, we cannot understand, we cannot believe that unicorns do not exist. |

Students can be encouraged to share their sentences with the rest of the class to reinforce the many uses to which parallel structure may be put.

Closure

Reinforce the notion that parallelism can come in pairs (especially in *either/or* and *both X and Y* constructions) or groups of three, that parallelism creates a sense of rhythm and expectation in



a sentence, that parallelism is often used in speeches to emphasize a particular point of importance, and that parallelism provides an awesome example of what one teacher calls “sentence bling” -- well-written sentences that demonstrate a student writer’s competence and mastery.

Extension Ideas

1. Using some current school-appropriate song lyrics or poetry, identify parallel structure or encourage students to find parallel structure examples on their own. This could be done in a show-and-tell format in which those who share must be able to explain how the lyrics or poetry lines are parallel. (Note: Since many lyrics have grammatical errors in them, you may need to talk about poetic license here.)
2. Try writing a short descriptive or narrative piece that includes examples of parallel structure. You could assign a certain number or type; you could have students label the parallelism in their papers. Additionally, students could share their work and have others find the parallel structures in each other’s papers.

Helpful Resources

- **Purdue Online Writing Lab**
<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/623/1/>
Note: This is probably the **very best** web site for examples of grammar and writing available to you!
- **Thomas Jefferson “The Declaration of Independence”**
<http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>
- **Patrick Henry “Speech to the Second Virginia Convention”**
<http://libertyonline.hypermall.com/henry-liberty.html>
- **Abraham Lincoln “The Gettysburg Address”**
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gettysburgaddress.htm>
- **Parallel Structure Overview**
<http://www.evergreen.edu/writingcenter/handouts/grammar/parallel.pdf>
 - This one is good for examples of non-parallel structure and rewrites of parallel structure.
- **My English Teacher.Net**
<http://www.myenglishteacher.net/parallelism.html>



- This one is simple and straightforward; it stresses not repeating.
- **More Examples!**
 - <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/parallelism.htm>
 - This one is a bit more complex, but it has some great examples.
- **UNLV Writing Center**
 - <http://writingcenter.unlv.edu/writing/parallel.html>
 - Some good examples; UNLV includes some song lyrics at the end of this site.