



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



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.