

## Parallelism in Lists and Series

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When presenting a series of two or more similar items (e.g., items in a list, duties in a job description, steps in a procedure, or glossary entries), write all items using the same (i.e., parallel) structure, as in the following correct examples:

- He loved **to travel, to read, to sail,** and **to play** volleyball.
- He loved to **travel, read, sail,** and **play** volleyball.
- Please tell us **how** you learned about the job and **why** you want to work here.
- We recommend **implementing** the proposed plan and **reviewing** it annually.
- We recommend that you **implement** the proposed plan and **review** it annually.
- We recommend **that you** implement the proposed plan and **that you** review it annually.

Note that the repetition of “to” in the first example and of “that you” in the final example are stylistic choices. Writers may choose to repeat elements to add emphasis or to improve the rhythm or readability of a sentence.

## Lead-ins

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In any list, make sure that all the listed items flow logically and grammatically from the words leading into the list. In short, bulleted and numbered lists should be

- logical
- grammatically parallel
- clearly readable

Notice how, in the list just above, the lead-in to the list, “should be,” would form a complete grammatical sentence with each item on its own.

## Problem Items

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If one item in a list resists the parallel pattern, try including it in the lead-in to the list or in the following sentence. Consider how difficult it would be to change “being easy to implement” into a one-word adjective to fit into the following list:

- ✓ Besides *being easy to implement*, this plan is *transparent, economical, and effective*.

## Getting the punctuation right

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Use a colon [ : ] before a list **only if** the lead-in could stand as a complete sentence on its own. If the lead-in to a list could not stand on its own, then it should not be followed by any punctuation. (For example, see the inset list under “Crafting lead-ins” above.)

## Handling parallel pairs

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Be sure to use parallel structure when using the following pairs:

**either... or...; both...and...; not only...but also...; ...as well as...**

Here are a few examples (with the parallel items underlined):

- ✓ *The committee studied **not only** the original option, **but also** four new design options.*
- ✓ *They **not only** studied the original option, **but also** considered four new design options.*
- ✓ *The committee studied **both** the original option **and** four new design options for the bridge.*
- ✓ *The committee studied the original option **as well as** four new design options for the bridge.*

**Note:** Avoid using “both” with “as well as” when you have just two items:

- X *The committee studied **both** the original option **as well as** four new design options.*

## Revise the following to eliminate lapses in parallelism

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1. Our priorities include reducing hospital wait times, the addition of specialists in key areas, and the reduction of waste and duplication.
2. The new program is not only effective but also saves money.
3. The doctor advised him to eat regularly, that he should get consistent sleep and to consume plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables.
4. The school board required that the logo or name of the company should be used sparingly on tutorial materials, tutorial materials should not contain a spokes character and should not contain advertisements.
5. From the duties section of a job advertisement:
  - responsible for ensuring workers’ compliance with production targets
  - preparation of quarterly financial statements
  - must prepare reports for the monthly executive meetings
  - the job also requires attendance at many meetings and seminars
  - direct supervision of eight clerical staff
  - to assist the director in administrative tasks as required
6. From a summary section of a resume:
  - Eight years’ professional editing experience
  - Proven ability to work independently and as part of a team
  - Know a range of publishing, database, and word-processing programs