

CHAPTER 18

COORDINATION, PARALLELISM, AND BALANCE

Much of this chapter is a review of what we have already worked with in nearly every chapter in this book. Because there is so much power in using coordination well, we are going to look at it one more time before we end.

SYNTAX

Coordination

When we have a series of two or more subjects, two or more verbs, two or more direct objects -- two or more of any sentence elements that are grammatically equal --we have **coordination**. We also have the possibility of parallelism and balance, which we will deal with in the next two sections of this chapter.

Coordination usually involves conjunctions called coordinating conjunctions. We have already looked at the seven coordinating conjunctions that can be used between independent clauses: *and*, *but*, *or*, *nor*, *for*, *yet*, and *so*. Many of those coordinating conjunctions can also be used between subjects, verbs, direct objects, and other sentence elements when there are two or more of them.

Marcia and Louisa baked a chocolate cake for their mother's birthday.

They *frosted* the cake **and** *licked* the frosting knife.

They ate *cake and ice cream* for dessert.

They gave their *mother and her new husband* a surprise visit.

Of course *and* is not the only coordinating conjunction that can be used in these situations.

Jeanine or Wendy will help you with your taxes.

Lawrence was *honest but kind*.

Reality is *harsh yet forgiving*.

There are also some coordinating conjunctions that work in pairs. We have already seen some subordinating conjunctions that worked in pairs in chapter 11, calling them subordinating correlative conjunctions. Coordinating conjunctions that work in pairs are called **coordinating correlative conjunctions**. Some common pairs are *both . . . and*, *either . . . or*, *neither . . . nor*, and *not (only) . . . but (also)*. The basic rule for using coordinating correlative conjunctions is that whatever grammatical structure comes after the first conjunction in the pair must also come after the second conjunction in the pair. If there is an entire independent clause after the first conjunction in the pair, then there must be an entire independent clause after the second conjunction in the pair. Likewise, if there is a subject complement after the second conjunction in the pair, there must be a subject complement and only a subject complement after the first

conjunction in the pair.

Both *Karen and* her *sister* are getting married this summer.
Alice is **neither** *at work* **nor** *at home*.
Roscoe is **either** *tired* **or** *sick*.

We must be careful never to do the following.

Ø**Either** Roscoe is tired **or** sick.
ØAlice **neither** is at home **nor** at work.

In the first sentence, a subject, verb, and subject complement come after *either*, but only a subject complement comes after *or*. In the second sentence, a verb and prepositional phrase come after *neither*, but only a prepositional phrase comes after *nor*.

The same rule is true for *not (only) . . . but (also)*; however, there is an additional complication here. When *not only* comes before the subject and the verb, the word order is reversed from subject verb to verb subject in the first independent clause; in addition the verbs are limited to *be* or to a verb with an auxiliary. And in the second clause, the *but* is usually separated from the *also*.

Not only *is Marianne* a member of the board, **but** she is **also** the chair.
Not only *does Abraham* swim in the event, **but** he **also** dives.
Not only *will Jerome* arrive on time, **but** he will **also** arrive hungry.

When the *not only* comes before less than a whole clause, the order is not reversed.

Jamal **not only** swims **but also** dives.
Adrienne is **not only** intelligent **but also** kind.

Native speakers of English usually handle these complications without thinking, but English as Second Language speakers have to think about them.

Parallelism

Parallelism is the use of coordinate elements as exemplified in all the preceding sentences. In other words, things that are coordinate are also parallel. The term *parallelism* to describe syntax is usually reserved for a series that involves more than two elements, and usually those elements themselves involve more than one word.

After the shouting, after the punching, after the knife throwing, Lawrence and Frieda would make up.
The president hoped **that the war would end, that the economy would improve, and that he would be reelected.**

When we write a series, it is very important that all the elements in the series have the same syntactic function in the sentence. If the first two elements in the series are subject complements, then the third element must also be a subject complement, not a verb. An error in this is called faulty parallelism.

ØStella is energetic, upbeat, and makes friends easily.
Stella is energetic, upbeat, and friendly.

ØAlexie is tall, muscular, and has big hands.
Alexie is tall and muscular and has big hands.

The second example could not be corrected to “Alexie is tall, muscular, and big-handed” because *big-handed* is not a viable adjective. Instead we need to add a second verb to the sentence. Don’t be afraid to use two *ands* near each other to connect different series.

Here is another problem sentence.

ØPeople of different cultures need to learn about one another's **needs, wants, skills,** and **benefit from each other.**

Needs, wants, and skills are all objects of the preposition *about*; so far, so good. But *benefit*, although it can be a noun, is an infinitive in this sentence; the sentence seems to be suggesting that people need two things, two infinitives: *to learn* and *to benefit*. The *to* does not have to be repeated with *benefit*, but it is there in the syntax of the sentence, and in this case, repeating it will help the reader interpret the sentence accurately.

People of different cultures need **to learn** about one another's needs, wants, and skills and **to benefit** from each other.

Notice that the *and* signals the end of one series; at that point another kind of series can be continued. In this case, the objects of the preposition end and the infinitives continue.

Balance

Balance is a term that is sometimes reserved for parallelism between sentences rather than within one sentence.

Before the Vietnam War, few Americans had heard of Vietnam. After the Vietnam War, few Americans have not heard of it.

As you can see, there is a repetition of structures here that is similar to parallelism. We could call this parallelism, but the repetition is not just of one structure--it is of every structure and of nearly every word. This gives a sense of balance, as though we have a teeter-totter perfectly balanced at the fulcrum. Balance is a powerful device for achieving coherence within a paragraph; just like road signs that warn of curves ahead, and the guardrails and white lines

that mark the edges of strange roads for the driver, balance is a device that guides the reader through unknown territory.

This balance can also be achieved within a sentence.

To do your homework is to be ready for class.

Laughing at one's parents is asking for trouble.

It is not necessary that every part of the balanced structures be exactly the same, nor is it necessary in parallel structures that every part of the parallel elements be exactly the same. What is necessary is that the basic elements themselves be the same structure.

How Coordination, Parallelism, and Balance Are Punctuated

The widely accepted rule today for punctuating items in a series is to place a comma after each item, including the next to last one before the final conjunction, usually *and*. The rule bothers people who remember being taught to omit the comma before the final *and* or *or*, but it makes sense if punctuation is intended to help the reader follow sentences accurately. Sometimes we coordinate elements within a larger series of coordination; when we say such sentences aloud, we use pauses to indicate which elements belong together; in writing, the use and non-use of the comma does this.

For breakfast, I like toast, bacon and eggs, **and** coffee.

A series of coordinate elements, especially longer ones, is sometimes interrupted by a word or phrase inserted for emphasis or explanation. This happens most frequently before the last item in a series. The interrupter is usually enclosed in a pair of commas or--for special emphasis--dashes.

Kent is my roommate, my co-worker, and, **above all**, my friend.

The disaster was blamed on the commanders in the field, on their superiors in Washington, and--**despite all the efforts of White House staffers**--on the president himself.

RHETORIC

How to Use Coordination and Parallelism Effectively

1. Tighten, Clarify, and Strengthen Your Writing

Using coordination and parallelism can tighten and focus your sentences and paragraphs.

The newcomers were determined to take the land. One method they were prepared to

try was persuasion. Force was also an option for them.

The newcomers were determined to take the land, either **by persuasion** or **by force**.

Notice the added power of *taking the land by force* in the second version, which is totally missing in the first version.

2. Focus on Comparison and Contrast

Parallelism lines things up so their similarities and differences stand out. This works in individual sentences as well as between paragraphs in a longer comparison and contrast discussion.

"We have always known that heedless self-interest was bad morals; we know now that it is bad economics." (Franklin D. Roosevelt, Second Inaugural Address, January 20, 1937)

"Shallow understanding from people of good will is more frustrating than absolute misunderstanding from people of ill will. Lukewarm acceptance is much more bewildering than outright rejection." (Martin Luther King, Jr., Letter from Birmingham Jail, April 12, 1963)

Parallel elements can also use inverted order within a sentence to achieve a focus on the important element by placing it at the end of the sentence, creating suspense and a surprise ending.

He was kind and gentle **to his friends and co-workers; to his family**, he was a beast.

3. Combine Ellipsis and Repetition for Clarity and Effectiveness

The first sentence in the next example uses ellipsis to omit the bracketed words, words that are unnecessary because the parallelism makes the missing words clear to a reader. After that, the paragraph uses repetition with some variation to make a forceful point.

Communism's failures are seen as evidence of an unsound system, capitalism's [failures are seen] as exceptions to a sound one. When people go hungry in a communist country, we blame it on communism; when they go hungry in a capitalist society, we blame it on them. Communism has victims; capitalism, we assure ourselves, has only losers.

Sometimes we have been told to watch out for unnecessary repetition and so we assume that all repetition is bad. Repetition is a problem when the idea is going nowhere. Repetition is not a problem when it is used to heighten the focus on the important words in a structure. When using parallelism for comparison or contrast in writing, vary only the words that count.

Ø Training prepares you for a job; education gets you ready for life.
Training prepares you **for a job**; **education** prepares you **for life**.

Ø Give me liberty or let me receive death.
"Give me **liberty** or give me **death**." (Patrick Henry, March 23, 1775 speech advocating resistance to British policy.)

Ø To be or not to exist, that is the question.
"**To be** or **not to be**, that is the question." (William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, III,1,55.)

Ø "I see one-third of a nation ill clothed, not well housed, and insufficiently nourished.
"I see one-third of a nation **ill-housed, ill clad, ill-nourished**." (Franklin D. Roosevelt, Second Inaugural Address, January 20, 1937.)

4. Use Pairs and Triads

English speakers especially like parallelism in groups of two and three. In a doctor's office, one of us found the following in a pamphlet that describes symptoms of ear wax, nosebleeds, and middle-ear infection in groups of three. Surely it is a habit of mind and not a fact of nature that exactly three symptoms are listed for each medical problem; in fact, in one case two symptoms have been combined into one, using coordination in order to make a total of three.

Old ear wax is constantly being transported from the ear canal to the ear opening, where it usually **dries, flakes, and falls out**.

Infection in the inner ear **causes earache, a red inflamed eardrum, and a buildup of pus and mucus behind the eardrum**.

Here are two more examples.

Jeff likes **swimming, skiing and snowboarding, and sailing**.

One current Republican proposal would remove taxes from **bank account interest, capital gains and other investment income, and all inheritances**.

5. Omit the Final Coordinating Conjunction

It can sometimes be effective to omit the coordinating conjunction that signals the end of a coordinate series. Frequently the effect of doing this is to give the sense that this is only part of a list that could go on and on. It also tightens the writing, giving a sense of tension.

Maureen tried too hard **to spend time with her children, to cook interesting meals for her husband, to provide for her retirement, to do the housework, to feed her own creativity**.

Figure 18.1 Punctuating Coordination

Two items in a coordinate series are connected with a coordinating conjunction with no punctuation.

Christa and James picnicked at Deception Pass.

Martha and Bob drove to California and Nevada on their vacation.

In a series of three or more coordinate items, all of the elements are generally separated with commas.

Casey has attended Cedar Park Community College, the University of Chicago, the University of Illinois, and Ball State University.

EXERCISES

A. Sentence Combining

Combine or revise the following sentences using coordination, parallelism, and balance.

Example

Joan likes desserts.

Joan does not like sweet desserts.

Joan has a rich tooth.

She does not have a sweet tooth.

Joan likes desserts, but she does not like sweet desserts; she has a rich tooth, not a sweet tooth.

- Benjamin got as far as he got by being several things.
He was hardworking.
Thriftiness was another of his qualities.
He practiced honesty.
This last quality was important above all the others.
- Shakespeare's history plays show something about the qualities that make a good king.
They may be different from the characteristics that go into the creation of a good person.
- Our conversation last night went a long way toward resolving some of our differences.
Also, communication between us was improved by it.
In the end, it has made our whole future together look much brighter.
- Patriotism consists not only of waving your country's flag.
The attempt to correct your country's faults is also part of patriotism.

5. At the beginning of the year, they were inseparable lovers.
Twelve months later? Bitter enemies!
6. Couples were everywhere.
They whirled around the dance floor in the ballroom.
They were whispering in corners of the terrace.
Into the deep shadows of gardens beyond some wandered.
7. He thought he was cheating the system.
It was he himself who got cheated.
8. The digestive process begins in the mouth.
The stomach is where the digestive process continues.
The completion of the digestive process is in the intestines.
9. As Martin Luther King Jr. pointed out, freedom is not usually given to the oppressed.
Usually the oppressed take it from the oppressor.
10. A home computer can do many things.
It can keep track of your finances.
It is capable of becoming a whole shopping center at your fingertips.
Turning on your coffeemaker at different times on different mornings is among its capabilities.
It can be programmed to read the weather report and decide whether to run the sprinkler system.
Your alarm system can be run by the computer.
How about having it remind you that your mother's birthday is coming up?
If you want to make up your own poem about how much she means to you, it can even supply you with rhyming words.
11. Some people consider multiculturalism a dangerous trend in the United States.
In the opinion of others, it could be better described as an important goal.
A third group views it as a simple fact of life in this country.
12. That we are now a nation of many cultures seems beyond question.
That many religions exist in this nation seems beyond question.
That ethnic identities come in many varieties in this nation seems beyond question.
13. Until recently, the nation thought of itself as a melting pot that people went into Italian or German or Russian Jewish.
They came out with an American identity.
14. Because this American identity was essentially white European in origin, the melting pot worked somewhat well for European immigrant groups with white skin.

Others experienced it less favorably.

15. People of non-European ethnicity or skin color were often excluded from the melting pot by various factors.
Laws were one factor.
They were also excluded by business practices.
Another factor was social prejudice.
16. Even those who could assimilate did so at a price.
The price included giving up their own cultural practices.
They never saw their experiences and contributions reflected in the country's history books.
17. This has led some people to call for the replacement of the idea of a melting pot.
They prefer the salad bowl image, in which ingredients retain their identities while making their distinctive contributions to the flavor of the whole.
18. Others do worry that it is not possible to have two things at once.
One would be cultural diversity.
The other would be a condition of being nationally unified.
19. Multiculturalists answer that it is not a matter of possibility.
It is simply necessary.
20. It is also, in their view, a glorious opportunity to achieve a nation even richer than the one we already have.
It would be stronger too.
Also, it would be even more beautiful.

B. On Your Own

1. Write three sentences that use a series of three or more prepositional phrases. (Example: *Gilgamesh journeys under a huge mountain, over a glittering sea, across the waters of death, and finally on to a forested island.*)
2. Write five sentences that use a series of subject complements. (Example: *He was tall, dark, handsome, and utterly boring.*)
3. Write three sentences that use effective repetition in a series or in balanced sentences or independent clauses. (Example: *Science can tell us how we got here; faith can tell us what we're here for.*)
4. Write three sentences that effectively eliminate and before the final word in a series. (Example: *They were brought closer together in their marriage by their common recognition that each of us is essentially single, separate, solitary.*)

C. Coordination, Parallelism, and Balance in Published Writing

Here is a passage by writer Jared Diamond. Locate the coordination and parallelism in the passage and comment on their use. How might the same information be conveyed without coordination and parallelism? Compare the effects of other possible phrasings with the effect of the original.

We have seen that large or dense populations arise only under conditions of food production, or at least under exceptionally productive conditions for hunting-gathering. Some productive hunter-gatherer societies reached the organizational level of chiefdoms, but none reached the level of states; all states nourish their citizens by food production. These considerations, along with the just mentioned correlation between regional population size and societal complexity, have led to a protracted chicken-or-egg debate about the causal relations between food production, population variable, and societal complexity. Is it intensive food production that is the cause, triggering population growth and somehow leading to a complex society? Or are large populations and complex societies instead the cause, somehow leading to intensification of food production?

Jared Diamond, *Guns, Germs, and Steel: The Fates of Human Societies* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), 284.

D. Combining in Context

In the following paragraphs, keep the focus and make the writing more effective by using parallelism and balance at one or more places in the paragraph. Consider this a kind of final exam. Use all that you know about the syntax that you have worked with in this book. There is no one right answer. Compare your paragraphs with your classmates'; what are the strengths and perhaps weaknesses of each.

1. Although she was in love with at least two men during her life and her councilors and Parliament also pushed her to marry, Elizabeth I had many reasons to remain a virgin queen. She did not want to be ruled by a man. The rules of marriage at that time dictated that a married woman was ruled by her husband. Succession was another problem that she was concerned about. If she had a son, there would be many in England who would be drawn to a rebellion around her son, who would be a male ruler. There were also many in the rest of Europe who would like the same thing. It is also possible that Elizabeth was afraid that she might die in childbirth. It was certainly not uncommon for a young healthy woman to die in childbirth in late medieval times. Not marrying also made it possible for Elizabeth to fashion herself the Virgin Queen, a Protestant replacement for the Virgin Mary. Elizabeth had herself dethroned the Virgin Mary when as a Protestant she succeeded her Catholic half-sister. As the Virgin Queen, she could be married only to the people of England and thus claim their adoration and loyalty.

2. On Memorial Day, Mom will come. She will have Grandma and aunts and uncles with her. They will come with flowers in hand. They will also have hoes and even rakes in hand. They will come in a procession up the hill to your corner. While they walk, they will chatter about the flowers on Uncle Dan's grave. They will also be talking about the weeds on Aunt Adeline's grave. And they will mention the new curb around Conrad's plot and the plastic flowers Bucks always bring. They will even talk about the Wolfrums, who never come at all. The weeds will be pulled from your plot by them, and they will pour water over your stone to wash off the dust of spring plowing. They will rake the sand into straight lines. Peonies, lilacs, and coral bells in a foil-covered can will be left by them over your bones as will a yellow rose on your tombstone.
Do they hear the silence into which the meadowlark sings?

E. Revising Your Writing for Rhetorical Effectiveness

Choose a piece of your own writing and revise it by using coordination, parallelism, and balance. Consider the following questions as you think about revising.

1. Are there places where the writing is repetitious and could be tightened with coordination, parallelism, or balance?
2. Are there places where you could more effectively point to comparison and contrast elements by using coordination, parallelism, or balance?
3. Are there places where you could combine ellipsis and repetition for clarity and effectiveness?
4. Are there places where you could effectively use a longer series of three or even more? Would it work to omit the final coordinating conjunction or to use an interrupting modifier to add clarity or information?