



# The Parallel Form Rule

## Overview

Parallelism is an important element in English writing, especially when you are listing and comparing and contrasting items or ideas. Parallelism means that each item in a list or comparison follows the same grammatical pattern. For example, if you are writing a list and the first item in your list is a noun, write all the following items as nouns also. If you are making a comparison or contrast, make sure that the items you are comparing or contrasting are the same.

Notice how the rule of parallelism is followed in the second sentence in each of the following sets:

All of the words in the first item do not always have to be repeated in the second. You may repeat all or some of the words, depending upon what you wish to emphasize.

**Example:** Before you write a paper or (before) (you) take a test, you must organize your thoughts.

“Before” and /or “you” may be deleted from the second item without breaking the rule of parallelism: *Before you write a paper or take a test, you must organize your thoughts.*

## Coordinators: And/Or/But

Words, phrases, and clauses that are joined by **and**, **or**, and **but** are written in parallel form. Notice the parallel structures joined by coordinators in the following:

**Example:** You know you are truly bilingual when you can calculate in your second language and when you can begin to dream in it.

**Example:** You can learn another language in the classroom, at home, or in a country where the language is spoken.

## Correlative Conjunctions

Use parallel forms with **both... and**, **either...or**, **neither...nor**, and **not only...but also**. Correlative conjunctions are placed directly before the elements they join in the sentence.

**Example:** At the present time, air pollution is controlled through laws passed **not only** to reduce the pollutants at their sources **but also** to set up acceptable standards of air quality

## Practice Exercise

Rewrite the following sentences in parallel form:

1. The disadvantages of using a credit card are overspending and you pay high interest rates.
2. Credit cards are accepted by department stores, airlines, and they can be used in gas stations.
3. You do not need to risk carrying cash or to risk to pass up a sale.
4. With credit cards, you can either pay your bill at once, or you can stretch out your payments.
5. You can charge both at restaurants and when you stay at hotels.

**Source:** Oshima, A. (1999). *Writing Academic English*. Longman Press.