Update

Final Draft of Your Creative Nonfiction Essay:

- Extension of Due Date to Dec. 13, Thursday, by 12 noon (Last Day of Finals)

See Lesson 4.24 for the topics and requirements for this final essay of the semester. This final essay should bring the word count for your polished writing for the class to 5000 or more words, the minimum required for Eng 100.

Lesson 4.29: Punctuation and Style: Parallel Structure

Parallel structure is a technique of sentence construction. As Purdue OWL points out: "Parallel structure means using the same pattern of words to show that two or more ideas have the same level of importance. This can happen at the word, phrase, or clause level." ("Parallel Structure"). It involves coordinating two or more items in a list, with the items in the list in parallel grammatical form.

There are two sentence types in which to consider using parallel grammatical structure: (1) when you compare or contrast two things and (2) when you make a list of things.

Comparing and Contrasting Two Ideas in a Sentence

Parallelism provides structure and rhythm and gives a sentence style. The following sentence, by the poet T.S. Eliot, has two parallel structures:

```
Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality.
```

In this sentence, the parallel grammatical structures (noun + preposition + noun) emphasize two contrasts:

- **not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion**
- **not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality**

The two contrasting phrases in each part are balanced on either side of "**but,**" a conjunction that indicates contrast between two ideas.
In addition, the two parts are parallel to, balanced with, and repeat each other, with a semicolon marking the boundary:

- Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, **but** an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, **but** an escape from personality.

The semicolon is used to separate two equal grammatical elements in a sentence.

In the following sentence by Dorothy Parker, a contrast is made using two verb phrases (to + verb) "to be tossed ." and "to be hurled ."

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This novel is not to be tossed lightly aside, **but** to be hurled with great force.
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**Parallelism when Making Lists**

When phrasing is not parallel, as in the following list, a sentence may read awkwardly.

```
When we went to Maui, we enjoyed swimming, hiking, horseback-riding and the restaurant food was good.
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In this sentence, the writer lists activities enjoyed on Maui, using verbs with "-ing" ending: **swimming**, **hiking**, **horseback-riding**.

The third item adds the noun **horseback** to the "-ing" verb, but still maintains the "-ing" parallelism.

The fourth activity about food, however, breaks the grammatical pattern with a sentence that has no "-ing" verb: "the restaurant food was good."“

A break in a pattern can be seen in two ways: on the one hand, it may seem awkward as the fourth sentence doesn’t fit the pattern of the first three items; on the other hand, the broken pattern makes the item that is not similar stand out. Thus, setting up a pattern, then breaking out of it can be an effective way to call attention to and emphasize an idea.

However, if you want to maintain consistency in the list, you should use "-ing" verbs to describe all four activities:

```
When we went to Maui, we enjoyed swimming, hiking, horseback-riding and eating good restaurant food.
```

The last item stands out because it has more words than the other three, but the "-ing" parallelism is maintained.

More variation is possible, if the writer adds more modifier to each verb:

```
When we went to Maui, we enjoyed swimming in the waters off Kaanapali beach, hiking in Haleakalā crater, horseback-riding in the pastures on the eastern slopes of the volcano, and eating gourmet cooking at the Hana Hotel’s excellent restaurant.
```

While there are more words in each item in the list, the "ing" verbs that starts each item maintains the parallelism of the list.
Revising for Parallelism

The following example illustrates options in revising items in a list to maintain parallel structure. The following sentence has a list of three things that are not phrased in parallel structure:

```
The reviews of the play were uniformly positive: unstinting praise for the actors; the director's interpretation was acclaimed; and the reviews applauded the playwright's technique.
```

Each item in the list has a different grammatical structure:

- unstinting praise for the actors (noun phrase + prepositional phrase)
- the director's interpretation was acclaimed (passive sentence)
- the reviews applauded the playwright's technique (active sentence)

You can rephrase the original in parallel structure by following the any of the grammatical pattern:

If you wanted to use the **noun phrase + prepositional phrase pattern**, the revision would read like this:

```
The reviews of the play were uniformly positive:
- unstinting praise for the actors,
- acclamation for the director's interpretation, and
- applause for the playwright's technique
```

If you wanted to use the **passive sentence pattern**, the revision would read like this:

```
The reviews of the play were uniformly positive:
- the actors were praised,
- the director's interpretation was acclaimed, and
- the playwright's technique was applauded.
```

If you wanted to use an **active sentence pattern**, the revision would read like this:

```
The reviews of the play were uniformly positive: the reviews
- praised the actors unstintingly,
- acclaimed the director's interpretation, and
- applauded the playwright's technique.
```

If you wanted to use an **"-ing" verb pattern**, the items in the list can be changed to "-ing" phrase:

```
The reviews of the play were uniformly positive,
```
praising the actors,
acclaiming the director's interpretation, and
applauding the playwright's technique.

You could also use just one verb and three parallel noun phrases:

| The reviews of the play were uniformly positive, praising  
| the actors' performances,  
| the director's interpretation, and  
| the playwright's innovative technique. |

Which type of parallelism you choose is a matter of style — what reads best to you, the writer, based on criteria such as conciseness, rhythm, emphasis, level of detail, etc.

When you have a list, there are options for arrangement. Sometimes the order is merely chronological—what happened first, what happened second, etc.; or the list may be structured from the least important to the most important; or from the least dramatic to the most dramatic, with the last item generally gates the greatest emphasis.

Thus in a description of a disaster, for dramatic effect, you might start with the least destructive event and end with the most destructive:

| The tsunami in Indonesia was devastating — cars were swept off the road, hundreds of building were demolished, tens of thousands of people were drowned. |

For more on Parallelism, see Parallel Structure. (Purdue OWL).

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**Assignment 4.29.a. Parallel Structure**

**Due by Dec. 7, Friday, at 12 Noon at Assignments**

The five sentences below contain unparallel phrasing. Revise them so that items in the lists are phrased in parallel structures. Add, delete, or change words as necessary to increase the effectiveness of each sentence.

1. The ancient Greeks celebrated four athletic contests: the Olympic Games at Olympia, the Isthmian Games were held near Corinth, at Delphi the Pythian Games, and the Nemean Games were sponsored by the people of Cleonae.
2. Each day the games consisted of either athletic events or holding ceremonies and sacrifices to the gods.
3. In the years between the games, competitors were taught wrestling, javelin throwing, and how to box.
4. Competitors participated in running sprints, spectacular chariot and horse races, and running long distances while wearing full armor.
5. The purpose of such events was developing physical strength, demonstrating skill and endurance, and to sharpen the skills needed for war.

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**Assignment 4.29.b. Style and Punctuation (6)**

**Due Dec. 7, Friday, at 12 noon, at Assignments**

Recall that in Lesson 4.25, you wrote sentence imitations of sentences from Louise Erdrich's
"Skunk Dreams."

Sample imitation

Original Sentence: Cornfed, razor-tusked, alert, sensitive ears pricked, the boar edged slightly backward into the convening shadows.

Imitation Sentence, with the Same Structure: Hunched over, white-haired, intense, eyes focusing sharply, the old man searched the forty-year old photograph for an image of his young self.

Write sentence imitations of the following three sentences that contain parallel structures.

1. from George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" (1936): parallelism and balance

   Alive, the elephant was worth at least a hundred pounds; dead, he would only be worth the value of his tusks, five pounds, possibly.

2. from George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" (1936): parallelism set off with a dash. In the following periodic sentence the list of parallel items opens the sentence, followed by a dash (after "bamboos"); the list is summarized by the word "all these," which is the subject of the sentence, followed by the verb and object "oppressed me":

   The wretched prisoners huddling in the stinking cages of the lock-ups, the grey, cowed faces of the long-term convicts, the scarred buttocks of the men who had been flogged with bamboos—all these oppressed me with an intolerable sense of guilt.

3. from Louise Erdrich's "Skunk Dreams": parallelism and repetition. (Note how Erdrich's repeats "not" three times to emphasize that no one else was there; the sentence builds in emphasis, and the last "not" is followed by "even" for even more emphasis.)

   I met no one: not a dog, not a squirrel, not even an early robin.