Parallelism

Parallelism involves using the same grammatical structure for items in a sentence or list. When words within a sentence or between multiple sentences follow the same grammatical form, the ideas presented are easier for the reader to understand. This can happen with words, phrases, or clauses.

Parallel Structure in a Series
When items are presented in a series within the same sentence, those items should be in the same word form. This will provide greater cohesion in the sentence, and help with the overall coherence of the writing.

Incorrect: I enjoy hiking, swimming, and to ski.
Correct: I enjoy hiking, swimming, and skiing.

Incorrect: She told her students to study, that they should rest a lot, and be waking up early for the exam.
Correct: She told her students to study, to rest a lot, and to wake up early for the exam.

Parallel Structure in Pairs
When two ideas are paired together with connecting words like and, but, or, nor, yet, either/or, not only/but also, than, or as, those ideas should follow the same grammatical form.

Incorrect: Detentions in high school can result in suspension or even being expelled from school.
Correct: Detentions in high school can result in suspension or even expulsion from school.

Incorrect: I love to paint, but not drawing.
Correct: I love to paint, but not draw. OR I love painting, but not drawing.

Parallel Structure in Lists, Headings, and Outlines
When presenting items in a bulleted list (such as in a résumé), or using various headings within the same work (like the headings in this handout), it is important to make sure that each entry matches the others.

Incorrect:
- Maintained watering system for three greenhouses
- I taught monthly gardening classes to community groups
- Overseeing downtown community gardening project

Correct:
- Maintained watering system for three greenhouses
- Taught monthly gardening classes to community groups
- Oversaw downtown community gardening project

Note: While parallelism can be important throughout a paper, parallelism does not mean using the same sentence structure for every sentence in your paper.