

Parallel Structure Problems

(Keeping your balance in the gymnastics of writing)

Here are some general guidelines for keeping your balance in sentences:

★ **Words in a series must all be in the same form (all verbs, adjectives, nouns, etc.)**

YES: Chewing tobacco, dipping snuff, and smoking cigarettes all cause wrinkles.

YES: Tobacco, snuff, and cigarettes all cause wrinkles.

NO: Chewing tobacco, dipping snuff, and cigarettes all cause wrinkles.

★ **For two-word verbs, first make sure that you include all the appropriate parts of the verbs.**

YES: Please listen to and abide by the doctor's recommendations.

NO: Please listen and abide by the doctor's recommendations.

★ **Then if one of your verbs is negative, put it second.**

YES: Please ignore and don't make fun of Binky's huge ears.

NO: Please don't make fun of and ignore Binky's huge ears.

(The second one sounds like we should not ignore Binky's ears.)

★ **Do not mix passives and actives in one sentence.**

YES: After the surgeon fixed my nose, she gave me a face-lift.

NO: After my nose was fixed, the surgeon gave me a face-lift.

(In the second version, the first part is passive, making it sound as if someone else fixed your nose or it fixed itself.)

★ **Not only must the grammar or form be parallel, but the ideas must be parallel, too.**

First make sure that the ideas even belong together in the same place.

NO: The surgeon said I had a funny nose, a big rear end, a sagging face, and dirty hair.

Dirty hair *doesn't really seem to fit here because it is so much less important than the other three. It doesn't seem related and probably should be in some other sentence.*

Second, make sure to arrange your ideas in some logical order.

YES: The surgeon said she would fix my nose, lift my face, tuck my tummy, and reduce my thighs.

NO: The surgeon said she would fix my nose, reduce my thighs, lift my face, and tuck my tummy. *(In the first, we have something that moves from the nose down.)*

