PARALLEL STRUCTURE

Parallel is a word from mathematics. Teachers of writing have adopted the word "parallelism" to mean close resemblance or similarity; that is, when two or more ideas in a sentence are related and serve a similar purpose, they are phrased in the same parts, similarly put together. Parallelism aids the flow of a sentence and emphasizes the relationship of the ideas in the parallel elements. Parallel sentence elements regularly appear in lists or series, in compound structures, in comparisons using than or as, and in contrasted elements.

Parallel: The weather is wet, cold, and rainy.
Non-Parallel: The weather is wet, cold, and it is raining.

FAULTY PARALLELISM

Faulty Parallism is an error in which two or more parts of a sentence are parallel in meaning but not parallel in form.

Faulty: I want to learn how to write with simplicity, clarity and accurately.
Parallel: I want to learn how to write with simplicity, clarity, and accuracy.

Whenever you list a series of things, actions, or ideas, they should be similarly expressed to avoid faulty parallelism.

Faulty: We called the meeting to elect new members, for raising money, and that we could plan for the dance.
Parallel: We called the meeting to elect new members, to raise money, and to plan for the dance.

Be careful to avoid faulty coordination because when words, phrases or clauses linked by and are not similar, they sound confusing and illogical.

He plays football and skillfully.
He does his homework and without mistakes.

NOTE that when two words or groups are linked by and, they must have the same grammatical function.
(Notice the same similarity of words, phrases and clauses linked by and in the following sentences)

1. He enjoys reading plays and poetry. [two nouns]
2. He blocks and tackles skillfully. [two verbs]
3. He looked in the drawers and under the beds. [two prepositional phrases]
4. He is a man who has worked hard and whom we all respect. [two dependent clauses]
5. I shall return to Purdue, and she will return to Smith. [two independent clauses]

The most common kind of faulty coordination is the and who or and which sentence. This type of sentence makes an illogical link between a dependent and an independent clause,

Faulty: My father is a lawyer and who has been a judge.
Correct: My father is a lawyer who has been a judge. [OR]
My father, who is a lawyer and who has been a judge, is retired.
One other kind of faulty coordination is the misuse of correlative conjunctions. These are conjunctions used in pairs. [Examples: not only...but also; both...and; neither...nor; either...or] The construction that follows the first half of the pair should be exactly balanced by the construction that follows the second half of the pair.

**Faulty:** Not only practicing at 6 am during the week, but the team also scrimmages on Sunday afternoons.

**Correct:** Not only does the team practice at 6 am during the week, but it also scrimmages on Sunday afternoons.

**Faulty:** He is either a madman or he is a fool.

**Correct:** He is either a madman or a fool. [OR] Either he is a madman, or he is a fool.

When making a comparison using the word than or as, be certain that the things you compare are similar logically as well as grammatically.

**Faulty:** The girls in Texas are more beautiful than California. [This sentence compares the girls to states]

**Correct:** The girls in Texas are more beautiful than the girls in California.

**PRACTICE ITEMS:**

In each item, CIRCLE the element that DOES NOT BELONG in the series.

1. in the country, fishing, at the river
2. going to work, coming home, to eat dinner
3. ate lunch, hungry, ate dinner, ate breakfast

Rewrite the following, making them parallel.

1. Schultz used to like girls, football, and to play chess.
2. In the woods, under a tree, a stream alongside, I left the insect repellent.
3. He chose neither to referee nor playing.

The following sentence is written both in a parallel and non-parallel way. Notice the differences.

*The boy, frightened beyond measure and shaken by the ordeal, collapsed after the rescue.*

*The boy, in great fear and shaken by the ordeal, collapsed after the rescue.*