

Parallel Structure

FOR THE SAT®

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Parallel Structure Questions




On the SAT, parallel structure questions will ask you to recognize and correct errors in sentence structure by fixing inconsistencies in areas such as:

- Verb and “Verbal” Forms (biking vs. to bike)
- Verb tense (covered already in “Verbs” chapter)
- Items in a list joined by “and” or “but”
- Items joined by idiomatic word pairings
- Sentences in proximity that maintain a specific pattern

Some of these questions are pretty straightforward to solve: given a series of items in a sentence, which are supposed to be in parallel, simply change the odd item out to be in the same form as the rest of the items in the phrase. Some parallel structure questions, particularly those involving multiple sentences, are more challenging.



How to Recognize Parallel Structure Questions:

-  **Lists** (with three or more items) – each item in the list must be in the same form (i.e. noun, noun and noun NOT noun, adjective, and clause)
WRONG: I like **apples, bananas** and **eating papaya**.
RIGHT: I like **apples, bananas** and **papayas**.
-  **Conjunctions** (and, but, or, yet, so, etc.) – items connected by conjunctions must be in the same format.
WRONG: He loved **to sail** and **biking**.
RIGHT: He loved **sailing** and **biking**.
-  **Word pairs** (either/or, not only/but also, etc.) – items connect by correlative conjunctions must also be in the same format.
WRONG: He was **not only** a great swimmer, **but** danced amazingly.
RIGHT: He was **not only** a great swimmer **but also** an amazing dancer.


How to Recognize Parallel Structure Questions:

Sentence Patterns

“Which choice best **maintains the style** established in the paragraph?”

WRONG: Sustainability managers offer many benefits to their organizations: They monitor the environmental impact of the organization’s practices. They balance the need to reduce a carbon footprint with profitability. **Environmental conditions in the workplace that impact worker health are yet another area of analysis that these managers consider.**

RIGHT: Sustainability managers offer many benefits to their organizations: **They monitor** the environmental impact of the organization’s practices. **They balance** the need to reduce a carbon footprint with profitability. **They analyze the impact of environmental conditions in the workplace on worker health.**



Objectives and Tips

Items in a list in a sentence must be parallel!
If you find a parallel structure problem in the form of a list:

- Identify the form of the non-underlined items
- Select the answer that best places the underlined section in the desired form

Parallelism: Lists


EXAMPLE #1

Even with earplugs, many tourists had a hard time falling asleep due to the noise coming from the garbage trucks, towing vehicles, and late-night partygoers' noise outside.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. the noise of the late-night partygoers
- C. that of late-night partygoers
- D. late-night partygoers

Answer: **D**

Explanation: We can see that the first two, non-underlined items in the list are nouns that make noise. However, the third term in the sentence is a noise itself. Only one answer choice will change the third item into a noun that makes noise: Our answer is choice D.



Parallelism: Lists

EXAMPLE #2

Every night on the piazza, you can find denizens drinking cups of tea, playing games of chess, and a bicycle ride in the moonlight.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. taking a ride on a bicycle in the moonlight.
- C. riding bicycles in the moonlight.
- D. bicycles in the moonlight.

Answer: **C**

Explanation: This time we have a list of gerunds, as the second and third items in the list are “-ing” verbs.

Answer C makes the underlined section into an equivalent gerund phrase without creating a noun agreement error. Because “cups” and “games” are plural, so should “bicycles” be. Answer B is also parallel, but unnecessarily wordy, so C is better.

Keep in Mind: List Format


The last item in list is typically preceded by “and,” “but,” or “or.” BE CAREFUL to notice what is underlined and what is not!

Example:

An increase in employee access to healthy snacks, campus-wide daily morning jogs, the use of the on site gym’s free meditation lessons helped encourage a low-stress lifestyle.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. and the use of
- C. in addition the use of
- D. OMIT the underlined portion

Only answer choice B properly includes AND to terminate the list; yes it’s wordy, but the OMIT choice erroneously omits the AND!



Review: Conjunctions and Word Pairs

Parallel ideas are often connected by:

Conjunctions

Just remember "**FANBOYS**"

F = for

A = and

N = nor

B = but

O = or

Y = yet

S = so

Word Pairs

aka correlative conjunctions

- Either ... or
- Neither ... nor
- Not only ... but
- Both ... and
- No sooner ... than
- Not ... but

Parallelism: Conjunctions and Word Pairs

Objectives and Tips

Items connected by conjunctions or correlative conjunctions must be parallel.

For parallel structure problems using conjunctions:

- Identify the form of the non-underlined portion
- Select the answer that best places the underlined section in the desired form

Parallelism: Conjunctions and Word Pairs

EXAMPLE #1

In their free time, campers are either playing video games or they are noshing on treats from the canteen.

- A. NO CHANGE
- B. or noshing on treats from the canteen.
- C. and they enjoy noshing on treats from the canteen.
- D. as opposed to noshing on treats from the canteen.

Answer: **B**

Explanation: This sentence uses the correlative conjunction "either/or" so the two items it connects should be parallel. Whatever is after "either" should be parallel to whatever is after "or." "Playing video games" is a gerund phrase, so our underlined portion must be a gerund phrase as well. Our answer is choice B.

Parallel Structure: Prepositions

Review: Prepositions

Common prepositions:

- For
- In
- Of
- At
- About
- Against
- On

Parallel Structure: Prepositions

The *same* preposition must work for words in parallel position after the preposition OR another preposition must be added.

WRONG: She drove **on** the bridge and the tunnel.

RIGHT: She drove **on** the bridge and **through** the tunnel.

Parallel Structure: Placement

The *placement* of word pairs and prepositions matters. Elements after each trigger word in an idiomatic word pair should be parallel.

WRONG: He *not only* **disliked mushrooms** *but also* **eggplants**.

RIGHT: He disliked *not only* mushrooms *but also* eggplants.

Parallelism: Placement

EXAMPLE #1


Considered one of the greatest American rock and roll artists of the twentieth century, Elvis Presley was famous not only for the brilliance of his voice but also in the energy of his performances.

- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. with regard to
 - C. for
 - D. OMIT the underlined word
-

Parallelism: Placement

EXAMPLE #1

Considered one of the greatest American rock and roll artists of the twentieth century, Elvis Presley was famous not only for the brilliance of his voice but also in the energy of his performances.

- A. NO CHANGE
 - B. with regard to
 - C. for
 - D. OMIT the underlined word
- 

Answer: **C**

Explanation: First, "in" is non-idiomatic— you aren't famous "in" something— you are famous "for" it— so we need the word "for." You might be tempted to OMIT the underlined word because "for" is earlier in the sentence— but the elements after NOT ONLY and BUT ALSO must be totally parallel in structure "not only FOR...but also FOR...". We can't move the first "for" ("for not only the...but also the...") so we need a 2nd instance.

Parallel Structure: Clarity

When articles, prepositions, or conjunctions appear before the first of a series of parallel items, they may have to be repeated before the other items.

Ambiguous: "The computer science professor gave a better explanation on bools than recurrences."

Clear: "The computer science professor gave a better explanation on bools than on recurrences."

Ambiguous: Our dog Mary likes women more than most men.

Clear: Our dog Mary likes women more than most men do.

Clear: Our dog Mary likes women more than she likes most men.

Quick Final Notes:

Keep in mind that it is acceptable to remove the preposition before the second noun in a parallel series.

Ex. "Elvis Presley was famous for his voice and his performances.



a "for" is not required here, but could optionally be added

Also, when two adjectives are placed in parallel with a single verb, it is acceptable to omit the verb after the first time (this is called an elliptical construction).

Ex. "The rug was outdated, and the curtains dilapidated."



"were" is not required here

(you could even cut the "and" and this would still be correct)

Parallel Structure Exercises SAT

Choose the correct answer from the following options

1. A few amusement parks, such as Great America, have invested in rest spots that provide artificial shade, offer drinking fountains, and nicely reminding visitors to apply sunscreen.
 - a. NO CHANGE
 - b. nicely remind
 - c. nicely to remind
 - d. nicely reminding of

2. In order to qualify for the job, applicants must be proficient in research, collecting data, graphs, and analyzing results.
 - a. NO CHANGE
 - b. applicants graphing,
 - c. to graph,
 - d. graphing,

3. The bathroom was tight and cluttered, with an oversized shower taking up a whole wall, a defunct toilet and leaking sink along another wall, and a small basket of towels on the floor by the third wall.
 - a. NO CHANGE
 - b. a small basket of towels was on the floor by the third wall.
 - c. by the third wall on the floor was a small basket of towels.
 - d. the third wall had a small basket of towels.

4. Studies have shown that dogs are quieter, calmer, and better behaved when they have a lifestyle in which they receive sufficient exercise for their breed.
 - a. NO CHANGE
 - b. calmer, being better
 - c. calm, and better
 - d. calmer, and they are

5. For weeks, Steve has been working on his project, creating vibrant graphs, charts, and other visual aids that could help viewers understand his results, not to mention brought color to an otherwise boring poster board.
 - a. NO CHANGE
 - b. bringing
 - c. bring
 - d. to bring

6. The ticket price for children under twelve is significantly lower than those for adults--six dollars versus the twenty charged for adults.
- NO CHANGE
 - compared with
 - than that for
 - than of
7. The newly implemented test has a positive effect on the company by regulating the quality of the products, to create a standard, and bringing in more customers.
- NO CHANGE
 - creating a standard,
 - for a standard creation,
 - the creation of a standard,
8. Previously assigned tests, old homework too, and readings were being reused by the professor year after year.
- NO CHANGE
 - also old homework,
 - in addition to homework,
 - homework,
9. More sustainable for the environment than gas cars, electric cars minimize carbon dioxide pollution, they decrease spending on gas, and help reduce the the carbon footprint of the automobile owner.
- NO CHANGE
 - spending on gas
 - decrease spending
 - also they decrease spending
10. It is often considered bad luck to gift newlywed couples with knives (considered a symbol for severing the relationship) or handkerchiefs (small, square pieces of cloth).
- NO CHANGE
 - (from ancient superstitions)
 - (considered a symbol for wiping away tears)
 - (used for wiping away tears)
11. The naming of a dog, fish, or other types of household pets can cause an instant connection between owner and animal and make the relationship feel more personal.
- NO CHANGE
 - household pet
 - type of household pets
 - household pet type

12. Hundreds of harmless, microscopic new insects living underwater were discovered during this period in history, some in oceans but many more in smaller streams, under riverbed rocks, or buried between lake floor vegetation.
- NO CHANGE
 - between
 - they were buried between
 - DELETE the underlined portion
13. Some believe the banana to be the best fruit: it is an excellent source of potassium, serves as an instant energy booster, and it comes in an easy-to-peel protective skin.
- NO CHANGE
 - coming
 - comes
 - will come

Parallel Structure Answer Key SAT

1. A few amusement parks, such as Great America, have invested in rest spots that provide artificial shade, offer drinking fountains, and nicely reminding visitors to apply sunscreen.
 - a. NO CHANGE
 - b. nicely remind**
 - c. nicely to remind
 - d. nicely reminding of

Choice B is the correct answer because the verb form “remind” parallels the previous verbs (“provide” and “offer”) in the sentence.

2. In order to qualify for the job, applicants must be proficient in research, collecting data, graphs, and analyzing the results.
 - a. NO CHANGE
 - b. applicants graphing,
 - c. to graph,
 - d. graphing,**

Choice D is the best answer because the verb form “graphing” parallels the other verbals (“collecting” and “analyzing”) in the series. This is an example of parallelism in lists. Choices A, B, and C are incorrect because each interrupts the parallel structure in the verb series, either through an incorrect verb form or with an unnecessary subject/noun. This is a bit tricky as “research” is not in the “ing” form. But $\frac{2}{3}$ of the adjacent elements are, so it’s safest to stick to the -ing form if we can rather than leave the noun “graphs.” Furthermore, research is an activity, while “graphs” are not an activity, so graphing is also more parallel in spirit.

3. The bathroom was tight and cluttered, with an oversized shower taking up a whole wall, a defunct toilet and leaking sink along another wall, and a small basket of towels on the floor by the third wall.
 - a. NO CHANGE**
 - b. a small basket of towels was on the floor by the third wall.
 - c. by the third wall on the floor was a small basket of towels.
 - d. the third wall had a small basket of towels.

Choice A is the best answer because the clause is most similar to the two preceding clauses, which both end with a reference to a specific wall. Choices B, C, and D are incorrect because each adds an unnecessary verb to the element of the list (“was” or “had”).

4. Studies have shown that dogs are quieter, calmer, and better behaved when they have a lifestyle in which they receive sufficient exercise for their breed.
 - a. NO CHANGE**
 - b. calmer, being better
 - c. calm, and better
 - d. calmer, and they are

Choice A is the best answer because the comparative adjective “calmer” and the word “better” to make “behaved” comparative creates a parallel structure within the list that begins with “quieter.” Choices B, C, and D are incorrect because none creates a parallel structure: B) adds the unnecessary word “being,” C) includes “calm” which does not have a comparative ending (-er), and D) adds a non-parallel subject and verb (they are).

5. For weeks, Steve has been working on his project, creating vibrant graphs, charts, and other visual aids that could help viewers understand his results, not to mention bring color to an otherwise boring poster board.
- NO CHANGE
 - bringing
 - bring**
 - to bring

Choice C is the best answer. It creates parallelism with the verb “could help” that appears earlier in the clause (“visual aids that could help... [and could] bring color...”) Choices A and D are incorrect because they have incorrect verb form/tense that do not match with the present-tense verb (“could help”) and subject “graphs, charts, and other visual aids.” B is tempting because if this element is parallel to the word “working” then “bringing” could be correct. Think about it though, his “working” allows for the “bringing color” -- because both are essentially part of the same activity-- he adds color by working on the poster-- or more specifically, the visual aids BRING the color. Also, we’re into another clause in the sentence (the “that” pushes us into a dependent clause) so it’s more reasonable to see that the color comes as a result of these visual additions rather than in parallel form with his “working” on his project. This is tough and this is nuanced. It may seem reasonable to think “working” and “bringing” could be parallel, but because of the nature of the relationship-- and the fact that these aids are “vibrant” it’s more appropriate to see this as a result of his creation rather than a parallel element to the word “working.” In a best case scenario, two words joined by “and” should be parallel in scope but distinct ideas. I.e. saying “I like music and jazz” is kind of weird because they aren’t exactly distinct. Same idea here.

6. The ticket price for children under twelve is significantly lower than those for adults--six dollars versus the twenty charged for adults.
- NO CHANGE
 - compared with
 - than that for**
 - than of

Choice C is the best answer because the idiom is parallel and matches (a ticket price FOR adults is better than OF adults); also, “that” agrees with the singular antecedent “price” and compares two similar things: the ticket price for children under twelve and that (the ticket price) for adults. (Note: this is also sometimes denoted as an “incomplete comparisons” question. Comparisons trigger a certain type of parallelism. We cover these separately in the “comparisons” section, but put this here as the preposition choice is also one of parallelism).

7. The newly implemented test has a positive effect on the company by regulating the quality of the products, to create a standard, and bringing in more customers.
- NO CHANGE
 - creating a standard,**
 - for a standard creation,
 - the creation of a standard,

Choice B is the best answer. The participle “creating” keeps the parallel with “regulating” and “bringing,” the other participles in the sentence.

8. Previously assigned tests, old homework too, and readings were being reused by the professor year after year.
- NO CHANGE
 - also old homework,
 - in addition to homework,
 - homework,**

Choice D is the correct answer because it keeps a parallel structure in the sentence and eliminates unnecessary words. It is clear and concise and is consistent with the other topics in the list in which “tests” and “readings” are equally important. It’s clear all of these are recycled given the end of the sentence, so it makes the most sense to leave off the word “old” on this item in the list so that “previously assigned” at the top of the sentence modifies everything.

9. More sustainable for the environment than gas cars, electric cars minimize carbon dioxide pollution, they decrease spending on gas, and help reduce the the carbon footprint of the automobile owner.
- NO CHANGE
 - spending on gas
 - decrease spending**
 - also they decrease spending

Choice C is the correct answer because it maintains the parallelism of the other two verbs “minimize” and “help” without unnecessary subjects (they). The plural present verb “decrease” also agrees in number with the plural noun “electric cars.” B) sounds correct if you don’t read the whole sentence; be careful to check the third element in the list, as you can’t always tell where the parallel structure begins from the first item in the list. You must check the 2nd and/or 3rd element to verify what repeats.

10. It is often considered bad luck to gift newlywed couples with knives (considered a symbol for severing the relationship) or handkerchiefs (small, square pieces of cloth).
- NO CHANGE
 - (from ancient superstitions)
 - (considered a symbol for wiping away tears)**
 - (used for wiping away tears)

Choice C is the best answer. This choice explains why the handkerchief is considered bad luck, consistent with the information explaining why knives are considered bad luck. This choice also keeps a parallel sentence structure of with the prepositional phrase “a symbol for” with the previous prepositional phrase “a symbol for severing the relationship.” True, it has a bit of a noun agreement issue-- we go from the plural “handkerchiefs” to “a symbol”-- but the same shift is present in the part of the sentence we can’t touch, so we can assume SAT would be ok with this rule bending if they already did it once.

11. The naming of a dog, fish, or other types of household pets can cause an instant connection between owner and animal and make the relationship feel more personal.
- NO CHANGE
 - household pet**
 - type of household pets
 - household pet types

Choice B is the correct answer. In this case, there is one indefinite article “a” doing the work of all three. The sentence can be seen as “The naming of *a* dog, [*a*] fish, or [*an*] other household pet...” Because “dog” is singular, it’s best to keep the “pet” singular too. Likewise “animal” is singular later in the sentence.

12. Hundreds of harmless, microscopic new insects living underwater were discovered during this period in history, some in oceans but many more in smaller streams, under riverbed rocks, or buried between lake floor vegetation.
- NO CHANGE
 - between**
 - they were buried between
 - DELETE the underlined portion

Choice B is the best answer because it creates parallel in the list of locations that all begin with a preposition (“in smaller streams, under riverbed rocks, or between lake floor vegetation”). Choices A, C, and D do not keep this parallelism.

13. Some believe the banana to be the best fruit: it is an excellent source of potassium, serves as an instant energy booster, and it comes in an easy-to-peel protective skin.
- NO CHANGE
 - coming
 - comes**
 - will come

Choice C is the best answer because the verb tense is consistent with the rest of the sentence. This is an example of parallelism in lists. This choice also does not contain the redundant “it,” which is not present in front of the word “serves” and thus shouldn’t be repeated. Choice A is incorrect because “it” creates a redundancy not present in the second element of the list “serves...” Choices B and D are incorrect because the verb form/tense are not consistent and destroy the parallelism in the list.