Use Parallel Structures Effectively

When you express two or more ideas that are equal in emphasis, use parallel grammatical structures: nouns with nouns, infinitives with infinitives, adverb clauses with adverb clauses. The parallel structures clearly and emphatically indicate parallel ideas.

Effective: The hero is destroyed by his own strength, devoured by his own hunger, and impoverished by his own wealth. (parallel verb phrases)

Effective: It may be better, Eliot said, to do evil than to do nothing. (infinitive phrases)

Effective: Because of its acute hearing, because of its playful imagination, and most of all because of its amazing intelligence, the dolphin is a rare creature of the sea. (introductory phrases)

**In parallel structures, use only equal grammatical constructions.**

A common error among inexperienced writers is faulty parallelism—treating unlike grammatical structures as if they were parallel. This practice upsets the balance that the reader expects in a coordinate structure. Below are some of the more common types of faulty parallelisms:

Faulty: Denise has two great ambitions: to act and becoming a director.
Correct: Denise has two great ambitions: to act and to direct. (or…..acting and directing)

Faulty: Myron is intelligent, charming, and knows how to dress.
Correct: Myron is intelligent, charming, and well dressed.

**Repeat necessary words to make all parallels clear to the reader**

Awkward, confusing sentences often result if you do not repeat needed prepositions, signs of infinitives (to), auxiliary verbs, or other words needed to make the parallel clear:

Faulty: Central Florida is well known for its family-oriented attractions, such as Disney World, and its beaches, citrus groves, and retirement centers.
Correct: Central Florida is well known for its family-oriented attractions, such as Disney World, and for its beaches, citrus groves, and retirement centers.

Faulty: Mr. Simmons, the counselor, told Carmelita that she should be more realistic and dropping one course would not ruin her record.
Correct: Mr. Simmons, the counselor, told Carmelita that she should be more realistic and that dropping one course would not ruin her record.

**Always use parallel structures with correlative conjunctions such as both…and or neither…nor.**

Use correlative conjunctions to connect two closely related ideas; use the same grammatical form for both ideas. The most common correlative are both…and, either…or, not only…but also, whether…or.