

WRITING – Parallel Structure



In the CELBAN writing assessment you will be asked to write a report. Lists of items or actions that occur in a particular sequence are common in written reports. Ordering these items with the same grammatical structure can help readers follow your writing. This is called parallel structure.

Parallel structure is also important in speaking in order to be clearly understood. Parallel structure can happen at the word, phrase, or clause level. Join parallel structures with coordinating conjunctions such as “and” or “or.”

Words and phrases that help build parallel structure.

Adjectives

The patient was **hostile**, **disoriented**, and **paranoid**.

Gerunds

The patient said he likes **dancing**, **hiking**, and **swimming**.

Infinitive phrases

The patient said he likes **to dance**, **to hike**, and **to swim**.

The patient said he likes to **dance**, **hike**, and **swim**.

Adverbs

The patient walks **slowly**, **carefully**, and **deliberately**.

Clauses

The nurse said **that I should sleep** more, **that I should eat** less fat, and **that I should refrain** from lifting heavy objects.

The nurse said that I should **sleep** more, **eat** less fat, and **refrain** from lifting heavy objects.

List after colon

Several factors contributed to the incident: the **dark room**, **broken light**, and **slippery floor**.

Correct the parallel structure

1. The nurse took his pulse, examined his heart, and his respiratory rate.
2. The nurse studied physiology, to assist in surgery, and anatomy.
3. After surgery don't exercise, lift heavy objects and no shopping.
4. Inform your doctor if you experience difficulty with speaking, how to follow directions, and remembering.

(1. checked his respiratory rate 2. surgical nursing 3. shop 4. following directions)

Additional strategies to develop parallel structure

- Review your writing, pausing at the words “and” and “or.” Check on each side of these words to see whether the items joined are parallel. If not, make them parallel.
- Check bulleted lists to make them parallel.
- Listen to the sound of the items in a list or the items being compared. Do you hear the same kinds of sounds? For example, is there a series of “-ing” or “-ed” endings on each item?