Parallel Structure

If two or more ideas are parallel, they are more readable when expressed in parallel grammatical form. Single words should be balanced with single words, phrases with phrases, clauses with clauses.

- A kiss can be a comma, a question mark, or an exclamation point. –Mistinguett
- This novel is not to be tossed lightly aside, but to be hurled with great force. –Dorothy Parker
- In matters of principle, stand like a rock: in matter of taste, swim with the current. –Thomas Jefferson

Balance parallel ideas linked with coordinating conjunctions.

Coordinating conjunctions (“fanboys”: for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so) are used to connect a pair or a series of items. When those items are closely parallel in content, they should be expressed parallel grammatical form.

- Theft, vandalism, and cheating can result in suspension or even being expelled from school.
  (The revision balances the noun “expulsion” the noun “suspension.”)

  David is responsible for stocking merchandise, all in store repairs repairing items in the store, writing orders for delivery, and sales of selling computers.
  (The revision uses –ing forms for all items in the series.)

Balance parallel ideas linked with correlative conjunctions.

Correlative conjunctions come in pairs: either . . .or, neither . . .nor, not only . . .but also, both . . . and, whether . . .or. Make sure that the grammatical structure following the second half of the pair is the same as that following the first half.

- The shutter was not only too long but also was too wide.
  (The words “too long” follow “not only,” so “too wide” should follow “but also.”)
I was advised **either** to change my flight **or** (to) take the train.

(To change my flight follows “either,” so to take the train should follow “or.”)

**Balance comparisons linked with “than” or “as”**

- It is easier to speak in abstractions **than** grounding-to-ground one’s thoughts in reality.

  * Repeat function words to clarify parallels.

- Many smokers try switching to a brand they find distasteful **or** (to) a low tar and nicotine cigarette.