

Keeping It in Balance: Parallel Structure

Clear communication is achieved by expressing powerful and important ideas with effective language. Additionally, using repetition and balance can enhance the suspense in a work of fiction. As you read the following sentence from “The Fall of the House of Usher,” notice how Edgar Allan Poe uses repetition and balance to enhance suspense.

I looked **upon** the scene before me—**upon** the mere house, and the simple landscape features of the domain—**upon** the bleak walls—**upon** the vacant eyelike windows—**upon** a few rank sedges—and **upon** a few white trunks of decayed trees—

Using the same grammatical form to express ideas of equal importance creates **parallel structure**. Using parallel structure will help you link ideas within a sentence, an especially important skill in persuasive writing, in which rhythm and balance contribute to the overall effect.

NOT PARALLEL: Hearing someone read “The Raven” is scarier than to read it on your own. [Hearing is a gerund; to read is an infinitive.]

PARALLEL: **Hearing** someone read “The Raven” is scarier than **reading** it on your own. [two gerunds]

PARALLEL: **To hear** someone read “The Raven” is scarier than **to read** it on your own. [two infinitives]

Exercise Rewriting Sentences to Achieve Parallel Structure

Rewrite the following sentences by expressing equal ideas in the same grammatical form. In most cases, more than one parallel structure is possible. You may have to add or delete words for clarity.

EXAMPLE: The raven both perches on the bust of Pallas Athena and is repeating only one word.

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- Elizabeth believes that couples should share their intimate thoughts and in couples' being truthful with each other.

- Moby-Dick is the sailors' quarry, the captain's obsession, and a main symbol in the book.

- The narrator's ability to help Roderick is compromised by Roderick's inability for clear thinking.

NAME _____ CLASS _____ DATE _____

4. Mr. Hooper is a minister, a bachelor, and mysterious.

5. The challenge Ishmael faces is to obey his captain yet trusting his own instincts.

6. The narrator wants to help Roderick, to help Roderick's sister, Madeline, and the solution to the mystery of the House of Usher.

7. For Mr. Hooper, redemption requires self-sacrifice and taking his secret to the grave.

8. Roderick suffers from nervous agitation and is not understanding why he is ill.

9. Mr. Hooper's duties include speaking at funerals, officiating at weddings, and consolation of the dying.

10. Starbuck tells Ahab that pursuing Moby-Dick is dangerous, madness, and blasphemous.

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