

## CONSISTENCY: FOLLOWING THE PATTERN

The more freight a sentence carries, the more it needs a clear pattern that the reader can follow. A sentence becomes confusing when it snaps out of a pattern that the first part of the sentence has set up.

1. Elements that serve a similar function in a sentence should be similar in grammatical form. They should be **parallel**. When two or more similar elements are joined by *and*, *but*, or *or*, avoid shifting from an adjective to a noun, or from the *to* form to the *-ing* form of the verb.

**Nonparallel:** My grandfather liked *the country* and *to walk* in the fields.

**Parallel:** My grandfather liked *to live* in the country and *to walk* in the fields.  
(two infinitives)

**Nonparallel:** The students were *new* and not really *participating* in political decisions.

**Parallel:** The students were *new* and not *ready* to participate in political decisions.  
(two adjectives)

**Nonparallel:** I asked him *for money* and *if he could give me advice*.

**Parallel:** I asked him *for money* and *for advice*. (two prepositional phrases)

2. Avoid shifting from *I* or *they* to *you* when you are still talking about the same person or people. Avoid similar shifts in **reference** from a *person* to *you*, from *we* to *you*, or the like.

**Shift:** I hate to live in a city where *you* cannot walk the streets at night.

**Revised:** I hate to live in a city where *I* cannot walk the streets at night.

**Shift:** All around *us* stood giant evergreen trees that gave *you* a feeling of being humble.

**Revised:** All around *us* stood giant evergreen trees that gave *us* a feeling of being humble.

3. Avoid shifts in **tense** from past to present, or vice versa, when events are really taking place at the same time. Show *differences* in time as needed to prevent confusion.

**Shift:** It *was* about ten o'clock when suddenly all hell *breaks* loose. (from past to present)

**Revised:** It *was* about ten o'clock when suddenly all hell *broke* loose.

**Shift:** Mrs. Grose *was* only the downstairs maid, but she was now the housekeeper and *is* acting as governess for Flora.

**Revised:** Mrs. Grose *had been* only the downstairs maid, but she was now the housekeeper and *was* acting as governess for Flora. (*distant past* and *more recent past*)

4. Avoid shifting from **active** verbs (I *ate* my dinner) to **passive** verbs (my dinner *was eaten*) when the same person or thing is still active in the sentence.

**Shift:** I *piled* the bedclothes on the floor, and a potent insecticide *was sprayed* over everything.

**Revised:** I *piled* the bedclothes on the floor and *sprayed* a potent insecticide over everything.

**Shift:** The agents *searched* the house thoroughly, but somehow the attic *had been overlooked*.

**Revised:** The agents *searched* the house thoroughly, but somehow they *overlooked* the attic.

Rewrite the italicized part of each sentence to make it fit better into the pattern set up by the first part of the sentence.

1. The teacher reminded my classmates and me *to save all work in progress on your storage disks*.

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2. Stowing everything we need, we *prepared the raft for the trip down the river*.

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3. Generally my friends at the cannery were chatting, joking, and *happy with their work*.

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4. There were many students who could be called conservative *but still not constituting a majority.*

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5. My friends looked at school *as a place to enjoy yourselves.*

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6. My private thoughts are like a treasure that should be shared only with those *that really understand you.*

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7. After the rain, the air was always clear and fresh *and making you want to go for a walk.*

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8. College students cannot expect teachers to take them by the hand and *making sure everyone does the work.*

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9. My father lectured us about hypocrisy, *and religious fads were also attacked.*

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10. We lighted the splintered wood stacked under the rocks *and before long have a big fire blazing.*

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