Purpose: To discuss how to use parallel construction to enhance the sentence and paragraph clarity.

Parallel construction

Definition: Writers use parallel construction when they present two or more ideas in parallel grammatical form.

Reason: To show that the ideas in a series are equally important.

Outcome: Sentences and paragraphs that are symmetrical, elegant, and clear.

In contrast: When one (or more) items in a series is not parallel, the reader’s expectation of symmetry is violated. The sentence is confusing and awkward.

Examples of parallel structures: (Note: words and phrases in italics are parallel)

I came;  
I saw;  
I conquered.

Julius Caesar

Coming, seeing, and conquering are equally important. Conquering is as easy as coming and seeing.

In many ways writing is the act of saying I, of imposing oneself upon other people, of saying listen to me, see it my way, change your mind.

Joan Didion

Didion gives equal importance to saying I, imposing oneself, and voicing certain commands. She also builds one parallel construction into another.

(From: http://faculty.washington.edu/davidgs/ParallelConstruc.pdf)

How to achieve parallel construction:

- Balance single words with single words, phrases with phrases, clauses with clauses.

Examples:
I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears, and sweat.
Winston Churchill (four nouns)

. . . That government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.
Abraham Lincoln (three prepositional phrases)

- Use coordinating conjunctions (and, but, or, nor, for, so, yet)
  (From: http://faculty.washington.edu/davidgs/ParallelConstruc.pdf)
Example: At North High School, vandalism can result in suspension or even expulsion.

- Use correlative conjunctions (either.. or, neither…nor, not only…but also, both…and)
Example: In the 19th century, tuberculosis spared neither the wealthy nor the poor.

- Link comparisons with than or as
Example: Giving is as much joy as receiving.

- Repeat function words (by, to, because, that) if otherwise the parallel structure could be missed
Examples: Many smokers try switching to a brand they find distasteful or to a low tar and nicotine cigarette.
The ophthalmologist told me that Julie was extremely farsighted but that corrective lenses would help considerably.

Exercise: Edit the following sentences to correct faulty parallelism.

1. The results show that such changes could be made without affecting error rate and latencies continued to decrease over time.
2. We recorded the difference between the performance of subjects that completed the first task and the second task.
3. The children were between 6 – 8 years old.
4. Neither the responses to the auditory stimuli nor to the tactile stimuli were repeated.
5. The participants were told to make themselves comfortable, to read the instructions, and that they should ask about anything they did not understand.
6. The chapter is divided into three sections: (a) organizational culture, (b) global organization, and (c) how identity is shaped.
7. Roger explained to the immigration officer that his visa had expired and of his applying to have it renewed.