PARALLELISM

What is parallelism?

Parallelism is the use of the same grammatical structure in a sentence that has several elements. The consistent structure not only makes the sentence easier to understand but sounds better as well.

What does this mean in practice?

Whenever a sentence has two or more items connected by words such as and, but, or, or than, make sure the items have the same form. All the items could be nouns, or verbs, or prepositional phrases, or even entire clauses, but whatever they are, they should have the same structure.

Before:

The film *Some Like it Hot* is funny, well-written, and *many considered it daring* for its time.

Arriving at the lake in a storm, the campers found it safer to remain in their cars than *setting up* their tents.

Be sure the nurse has taken a detailed medical history, asked the patient to describe current symptoms, and *the patient’s vital signs* before the doctor steps in.

Better:

The film *Some Like it Hot* is *funny, well-written, and daring* for its time. (All adjectives)

Arriving at the lake in a storm, the campers found it safer to remain in their cars than to set up their tents. (Both infinitives)

Be sure the nurse has *taken* a detailed medical history, *asked* the patient to describe current symptoms, and *recorded* the patient’s vital signs before the doctor steps in. (All verbs)
Before:

Important topics in environmental science include safeguarding the earth’s atmosphere, charting the path to sustainable energy, and conservation of global forests.

In planning her essay, she considered the library’s weekend hours, how long it would take to do footnotes, and whether her teacher expected a works cited page.

Better:

Important topics in environmental science include safeguarding the earth’s atmosphere, charting the path to sustainable energy, and conserving global forests. (All –ing words)

In planning her essay, she considered when the library was open, how long it would take to do footnotes, and whether her teacher expected a works cited page. (All subordinate clauses introduced with a question word)