

Revising for Consistency and Parallelism

PART A Consistent Tense

PART B Consistent Number and Person

PART C Parallelism

All good writing is **consistent**. That is, each sentence and paragraph in the final draft should move along smoothly without confusing shifts in **tense**, **number**, or **person**. In addition, good writing uses **parallel structure** to balance two or more similar words, phrases, or clauses.

Although you should be aware of consistency and parallelism as you write the first draft of your paragraph or essay, you might find it easier to **revise** for them—that is, to write your first draft and then, as you read it again later, check and rewrite for consistency and parallelism.

Part A

Consistent Tense

Consistency of tense means using the same verb tense whenever possible throughout a sentence or an entire paragraph. Do not shift from one verb tense to another—for example, from present to past or from past to present—unless you really mean to indicate different times.

1. Inconsistent tense: We *stroll* down Bourbon Street as the jazz bands *began* to play.
2. Consistent tense: We *strolled* down Bourbon Street as the jazz bands *began* to play.
3. Consistent tense: We *stroll* down Bourbon Street as the jazz bands *begin* to play.

- Sentence 1 begins in the present tense with the verb *stroll* but then slips into the past tense with the verb *began*. The tenses are inconsistent since both actions (strolling and beginning) occur at the same time.
- Sentence 2 is consistent. Both verbs, *strolled* and *began*, are now in the past tense.
- Sentence 3 is also consistent, using the present tense forms of both verbs, *stroll* and *begin*. The present tense here gives a feeling of immediacy, as if the action is happening now.*

Of course, you should use different verb tenses in a sentence or paragraph if they convey the meaning that you wish to convey:

4. Last fall I *took* English 02; now I *am taking* English 13.

- The verbs in this sentence accurately show the time relationship between the two classroom experiences.†

PRACTICE 1 Read the following sentences carefully for meaning. Then correct any inconsistencies of tense by changing the verbs that do not accurately show the time of events.

Example I took a deep breath and opened the door; there stands a well-dressed man with a large box.

Consistent: I took a deep breath and opened the door; there ^{stood} stands a well-dressed man with a large box.

or

Consistent: I ^{take} took a deep breath and ^{open} opened the door; there stands a well-dressed man with a large box.

1. Two seconds before the buzzer sounded, Kevin Garnett sank a basket from midcourt, and the crowd goes wild.
2. Nestlé introduced instant coffee in 1938; it takes eight years to develop this product.
3. We expand our sales budget, doubled our research, and soon saw positive results.
4. For twenty years, Dr. Dulfano observed animal behavior and seeks clues to explain the increasing violence among human beings.
5. I knew how the system works.

* For more work on spotting verbs, see Chapter 24, "The Simple Sentence," Part C.

† For more work on particular verb tenses and forms, see Chapters 27, 28, and 29.

6. I was driving south on Interstate 90 when a truck approaches with its high beams on.
7. Two brown horses graze quietly in the field as the sun rose and the mist disappeared.
8. Lollie had a big grin on her face as she walks over and kicked the Coke machine.
9. Maynard stormed down the hallway, goes right into the boss's office, and shouts, "I want curtains in my office!"
10. The nurses quietly paced the halls, making sure their patients rest comfortably.

PRACTICE 2 Inconsistencies of tense are most likely to occur within paragraphs and longer pieces of writing. Therefore, it is important to revise your writing for tense consistency. Read this paragraph for meaning. Then revise, correcting inconsistencies of tense by changing incorrect verbs.

It was 1850. A poor German-born peddler named Levi Strauss came to San Francisco, trying to sell canvas cloth to tent makers. By chance he met a miner who complained that sturdy work pants are hard to find. Strauss had an idea, measures the man, and makes him a pair of canvas pants. The miner loved his new breeches, and Levi Strauss goes into business. Although he ordered more canvas, what he gets is a brown French cloth called *serge de Nîmes*, which Americans soon called "denim." Strauss liked the cloth but had the next batch dyed blue. He became successful selling work pants to such rugged men as cowboys and lumberjacks. In the 1870s, hearing about a tailor in Nevada adding copper rivets to a pair of the pants to make them stronger, Strauss patents the idea. When he died in 1902, Levi Strauss was famous in California, but the company keeps growing. In the 1930s, when Levi's jeans became popular in the East, both men and women wear them. By 2000, people all over the world had purchased 2.5 billion pairs of jeans.

PRACTICE 3 The following paragraph is written in the past tense. Rewrite it in consistent present tense; make sure all verbs agree with their subjects.*

In the late afternoon light on the plains of Botswana, Dereck and Beverly Joubert spotted what appeared to be a gray boulder a thousand yards away. It was a bull elephant, about 40 years old, in his prime. Dereck grabbed his movie camera while Beverly swooped up her Nikon. They barely began to shoot when the five-ton bull became enraged, trumpeted, spread his ears, and charged full-speed. The Jouberts continued filming—even as the elephant suddenly dug both front legs into the ground, skidded forward in a cloud of dust, and came to a halt within yards of the couple. Later, in their Land Cruiser, the Jouberts admitted that while danger sometimes came a bit too close, they loved their lives as documentary filmmakers in Africa. Together they lived in tents in the wild, wrote, produced, shot, and edited award-winning films. By educating the public, they helped stop the poaching of lions, elephants, and other big game.

Based on Susan Schindehette and Terry Smith, "Animal Passions," *People*

PRACTICE 4 The following paragraph is written in the present tense. Rewrite it in consistent past tense.†

On the night of December 2, 1777, in Philadelphia, a woman stands breathlessly at a closed door in her house. While she listens at the keyhole, the British soldiers inside plan a surprise attack on George Washington's army. On the morning of December 4, carrying an empty flour sack, Lydia Darragh sets out. As she passes the British soldiers who occupy the town, she tells them she is on her way to buy flour. She walks five miles to the miller's, leaves her sack to be filled, and then heads toward the American camp. On the road, she meets American Colonel

* For more work on agreement, see Chapter 27, "Present Tense (Agreement)."

† For more work on the past tense, see Chapter 28, "Past Tense."

Thomas Craig and gives him her message. Craig gallops off to warn Washington of the danger—and Darragh goes back to pick up her flour. When British General Howe marches his army out of Philadelphia that night, the American troops are ready for the attack. Although Lydia Darragh's actions help the Americans win the Revolutionary War, she is never suspected.

PRACTICE 5 Longer pieces of writing often use both the past tense and the present tense. However, switching correctly from one tense to the other requires care. Read the following essay carefully and note when a switch from one tense to another is logically necessary. Then revise verbs as needed.

A Quick History of Chocolate

Most of us now take solid chocolate—especially candy bars—so much for granted that we find it hard to imagine a time when chocolate didn't exist. However, this delicious food becomes an eating favorite only about 150 years ago.

The ancient peoples of Central America began cultivating cacao beans almost 3,000 years ago. A cold drink made from the beans is served to Hernando Cortés, the Spanish conqueror, when he arrives at the Aztec court of Montezuma in 1519. The Spaniards took the beverage home to their king. He likes it so much that he kept the formula a secret. For the next 100 years, hot chocolate was the private

drink of the Spanish nobility. Slowly, it makes its way into the fashionable courts of France, England, and Austria. In 1657, a Frenchman living in London opened a shop where devices for making the beverage are sold at a high price. Soon chocolate houses appeared in cities throughout Europe. Wealthy clients met in them, sipped chocolate, conducted business, and gossip.

During the 1800s, chocolate became a chewable food. The breakthrough comes in 1828 when cocoa butter was extracted from the bean. Twenty years later, an English firm mixed the butter with chocolate liquor, which results in the first solid chocolate. Milton Hershey's first candy bar come on the scene in 1894, and Tootsie Rolls hit the market two years later. The popularity of chocolate bars soar during World War I when they are given to soldiers for fast energy. M&Ms gave the industry another boost during World War II; soldiers needed candy that wouldn't melt in their hands.

On the average, Americans today eat ten pounds of hard chocolate a year. Their number-one choice is Snickers, which sold more than a billion bars every year. However, Americans consume far less chocolate than many Western Europeans. The average Dutch person gobbled up more than fifteen pounds a year while a Swiss packed away almost twenty pounds. Chocolate is obviously an international favorite.

Part B

Consistent Number and Person

Just as important as verb tense consistency is consistency of **number and person**.

Consistency of Number

Consistency of number means avoiding confusing shifts from singular to plural or from plural to singular within a sentence or paragraph. Choose *either* singular or plural; then be *consistent*.

- | | |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Inconsistent number: | <i>The wise jogger</i> chooses <i>their</i> running shoes with care. |
| 2. Consistent number: | <i>The wise jogger</i> chooses <i>his or her</i> running shoes with care. |
| 3. Consistent number: | <i>Wise joggers</i> choose <i>their</i> running shoes with care. |

- Since the subject of sentence 1, *the wise jogger*, is singular, use of the plural pronoun *their* is *inconsistent*.
- Sentence 2 is *consistent*. The singular pronoun *his* (or *her*) now clearly refers to the singular *jogger*.
- In sentence 3, the plural number is used *consistently*. *Their* clearly refers to the plural *joggers*.

If you begin a paragraph by referring to a web site designer as *she*, continue to refer to *her* in the **third person singular** throughout the paragraph:

The web site designer _____; she _____
 _____ . The law may not protect *her* _____
 _____ . Therefore, *she* _____ .

Do not confuse the reader by shifting unnecessarily to *they* or *you*.

PRACTICE 6 Correct any inconsistencies of **number** in the following sentences.* Also make necessary changes in verb agreement.

Example | A singer must protect ^{his or her} their voice.

1. An individual's self-esteem can affect their performance.
2. Jorge started drinking diet sodas only last November, but already he hates the taste of it.
3. The headlines encouraged us, but we feared that it wasn't accurate.
4. The defendant who wishes to do so may ask a higher court to overturn their conviction.
5. Dreams fascinate me; it is like another world.

* For more practice in agreement of pronouns and antecedents, see Chapter 31, "Pronouns," Part B.

6. If a person doesn't know how to write well, they will face limited job opportunities.
7. Oxford University boasts of the great number of ancient manuscripts they own.
8. Always buy corn and tomatoes when it is in season.
9. The average American takes their freedom for granted.
10. Women have more opportunities than ever before. She is freer to go to school, get a job, and choose the kind of life she wants.

Consistency of Person

Consistency of person—closely related to consistency of number—means using the same *person*, or indefinite pronoun form, throughout a sentence or paragraph whenever possible.

First person is the most personal and informal in written work: (singular) *I*, (plural) *we*

Second person speaks directly to the reader: (singular and plural) *you*

Third person is the most formal and most frequently used in college writing: (singular) *he, she, it, one, a person, an individual, a student*, and so on; (plural) *they, people, individuals, students*, and so on

Avoid confusing shifts from one person to another. Choose one, and then be consistent. When using a noun in a general way—a *person, the individual, the parent*—be careful not to slip into the second person, *you*, but continue to use the third person, *he or she*.

- | | |
|------------------------|---|
| 4. Inconsistent person | <i>A player</i> collects \$200 when <i>you</i> pass "Go." |
| 5. Consistent person: | <i>A player</i> collects \$200 when <i>he or she</i> passes "Go." |
| 6. Consistent person: | <i>You</i> collect \$200 when <i>you</i> pass "Go." |

- In sentence 4, the person shifts unnecessarily from the third person, *a player*, to the second person, *you*. The result is confusing.
- Sentence 5 maintains consistent third person. *He or she* now clearly refers to the third person subject, *a player*.
- Sentence 6 is also consistent, using the second person, *you*, throughout.

Of course, inconsistencies of person and number often occur together, as shown in the next box.

7. Inconsistent person and number:	Whether <i>one</i> enjoys or resents commercials, <i>we</i> are bombarded with them every hour of the day.
8. Consistent person and number:	Whether <i>we</i> enjoy or resent commercials, <i>we</i> are bombarded with them every hour of the day.
9. Consistent person and number:	Whether <i>one</i> enjoys or resents commercials, <i>he or she</i> (or <i>one</i>) is bombarded with them every hour of the day.

- Sentence 7 shifts from the third person singular, *one*, to the first person plural, *we*.
- Sentence 8 uses the first person plural consistently.
- Sentence 9 uses the third person singular consistently.

PRACTICE 7 Correct the shifts in **person** in these sentences. If necessary, change the verbs to make them agree with any new subjects.

Example | One should eliminate saturated fats from ^{one's} your diet.

1. Sooner or later, most addicts realize that you can't just quit when you want to.
2. One problem facing students on this campus is that a person doesn't know when the library will be open and when it will be closed.
3. One should rely on reason, not emotion, when they are forming opinions about such charged issues as abortion.
4. I have reached a time in my life when what others expect is less important than what one really wants to do.
5. Members of the orchestra should meet after the concert and bring your instruments and music.
6. The wise mother knows that she is asking for trouble if you let a small child watch violent television shows.
7. The student who participates in this program will spend six weeks in Spain and Morocco. You will study the art and architecture firsthand, working closely with an instructor.
8. You shouldn't judge a person by the way they dress.

9. If you have been working that hard, one needs a vacation.
10. People who visit the Caribbean for the first time are struck by the lushness of the landscape. The sheer size of the flowers and fruit amazes you.

PRACTICE 8 The following paragraph consistently uses third person singular—the *job applicant*, *the job seeker*, *he* or *she*. For practice in revising for consistency, rewrite the paragraph in **consistent third person plural**. Begin by changing *the job applicant* to *job applicants*. Then change verbs, nouns, and pronouns as necessary.

In a job interview these days, the job applicant should stress his or her personal skills, rather than only technical skills. This strategy could increase his or her chances of getting hired. The job seeker should point out such skills as speaking and writing confidently, working well on a team, solving problems quickly, or managing people. These days, many employers assume that if an applicant has excellent “soft skills” like these, he or she can be trained in the technical fine points of the job.

PRACTICE 9 Revise the following essay for inconsistencies of person and number. Correct any confusing shifts (changing words if necessary) to make the writing clear and *consistent* throughout.

Immortality In Wax

“Madame Tussaud’s. Come and find out who’s in. And who’s out.” That’s how English advertisers lure visitors to a most unusual show—a display of the rich, the famous, and the infamous in the form of lifelike wax statues. Nearly three million people line up each year to rub shoulders with the images of historic and contemporary celebrities. You make Madame Tussaud’s the most popular paid tourist attraction in England.

Visitors can see and have one’s photograph taken with more than 400 eerily lifelike statues of such people as Princess Di, Joan of Arc, Elvis Presley, Naomi

Campbell, the Dalai Lama, and Britney Spears. The popular Chamber of Horrors displays the most notorious criminals of all time.

Recently two new Tussaud Museums have opened. In New York, tourists now can mingle with the likes of Whoopi Goldberg, Nicolas Cage, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Buffalo Bill. In Las Vegas, we can pose with Muhammad Ali, Liberace, Gloria Estefan, Lenny Kravitz, and nearly 100 others.

Each month, a committee decides who is in and who is out of the collections. A celebrity is chosen for your fame, recognizability, and publicity potential. You are invited to sit for moldings, a process that takes six months and costs \$45,000. Mother Teresa was one of the few persons ever to decline an invitation from Madame Tussaud's.

Part C

Parallelism

Parallelism, or **parallel structure**, is an effective way to add smoothness and power to your writing. **Parallelism** is a balance of two or more similar words, phrases, or clauses.

Compare the two versions of each of these sentences:

1. She likes dancing, swimming, and to box.
2. She likes *dancing, swimming, and boxing*.
3. The cable runs across the roof; the north wall is where it runs down.
4. The cable runs *across the roof and down the north wall*.
5. He admires people with strong convictions and who think for themselves.
6. He admires people *who have strong convictions and who think for themselves*.

- Sentences 2, 4, and 6 use **parallelism** to express parallel ideas.
- In sentence 2, *dancing, swimming, and boxing* are parallel; all three are the *-ing* forms of verbs, used here as nouns.
- In sentence 4, *across the roof and down the north wall* are parallel prepositional phrases, each consisting of a preposition and its object.
- In sentence 6, *who have strong convictions and who think for themselves* are parallel clauses beginning with the word *who*.

Sometimes two entire sentences can be parallel:

In a democracy we are all equal before the law. In a dictatorship we are all equal before the police.

—Millor Fernandes

- In what way are these two sentences parallel? _____

Certain special constructions require parallel structure:

7. The fruit is *both* tasty *and* fresh.
8. He *either* loves you *or* hates you.
9. Yvette *not only* plays golf *but also* swims like a pro.
10. I would *rather* sing in the chorus *than* perform a solo.

- Each of these constructions has two parts:
 - both . . . and
 - (n)either . . . (n)or
 - not only . . . but also
 - rather . . . than
- The words, phrases, or clauses following each part must be parallel:
 - tasty . . . fresh
 - loves you . . . hates you
 - plays golf . . . swims like a pro
 - sing in the chorus . . . perform a solo

PRACTICE 10 Rewrite each of the following sentences, using parallel structure to accent parallel ideas.

Example The summer in Louisiana is very hot and has high humidity.

The summer in Louisiana is very hot and humid.

1. Teresa is a gifted woman—a chemist, does the carpentry, and she can cook.

2. The shape of the rock, how big it was, and its color reminded me of a small turtle.

3. He is an affectionate husband, a thoughtful son, and kind to his kids.

4. Marvin was happy to win the chess tournament and he also felt surprised.

5. Dr. Tien is the kindest physician I know; she has the most concern of any physician I know.

6. Joe would rather work on a farm than spending time in an office.

7. Every afternoon in the mountains, it either rains or there is hail.

8. *Sesame Street* teaches children nursery rhymes, songs, how to be courteous, and being kind.

9. Alexis would rather give orders than taking them.

10. His writing reveals not only intelligence but also it is humorous.

PRACTICE 11 Write one sentence that is parallel to each sentence that follows, creating pairs of parallel sentences.

Example On Friday night, she dressed in silk and sipped champagne.

On Monday morning, she put on her jeans and crammed for a history test.

1. When he was twenty, he worked seven days a week in a fruit store.

2. The child in me wants to run away from problems.

3. The home team charged enthusiastically onto the field.

4. "Work hard and keep your mouth shut" is my mother's formula for success.

5. The men thought the movie was amusing.

PRACTICE 12 The following paragraph contains both correct and faulty parallel structures. Revise the faulty parallelism.

During World War II, United States Marines who fought in the Pacific possessed a powerful weapon that was also unbeatable: Navaho Code Talkers. Creating a secret code, Code Talkers sent and were translating vital military information. Four hundred twenty Navahos memorized the code, and it was used by them. It consisted of both common Navaho words and there were also about 400 invented words. For example, Code Talkers used the Navaho words for *owl*, *chicken hawk*, and *swallow* to describe different kinds of aircraft. Because Navaho is

a complex language that is also uncommon, the Japanese military could not break the code. Although Code Talkers helped the Allied Forces win the war, their efforts were not publicly recognized until the code was declassified in 1968. On August 14, 1982, the first Navaho Code Talkers Day honored these heroes, who not only had risked their lives but also been developing one of the few unbroken codes in history.

PRACTICE 13 The following essay contains both correct and faulty parallel structures. Revise the faulty parallelism.

Vincent Van Gogh

Vincent Van Gogh sold only one painting in his lifetime, but his oil paintings later influenced modern art and establishing him as one of the greatest artists of all time. Born in Holland in 1853, Van Gogh struggled to find an inspiring career. After failing as a tutor and being a clergyman, he began to paint. Van Gogh's younger brother Theo supported him with money and also sending art supplies. Eventually, Van Gogh went to live with Theo in Paris, where the young artist was introduced to Impressionism, a style of painting that emphasizes light at different times of day. Using vivid colors and also with broad brush strokes, Van Gogh made powerful pictures full of feeling. His favorite subjects were landscapes, still lifes, sunflowers, and drawing everyday people. Perhaps his most famous picture, "Starry Night," shows a wild night sky over a French village, with the moon and stars swirling in fiery circles.

When mental illness or feeling depressed clouded Van Gogh's spirit, Theo gentle and firmly urged him to keep painting. Gradually, however, the penniless Van Gogh sank into insanity and feeling despair. "Wheat Field with Crows," completed shortly before his death, shows a darkening sky spattered black with crows. Van Gogh committed suicide in 1890; his devoted brother died six months later. Theo's widow Johanna took the paintings back to Holland and working

hard to get recognition for her brother-in-law's genius. Thanks to Theo's encouragement during Vincent's lifetime and Johanna who made efforts after his death, the dynamic paintings of Van Gogh today are admired, studied, and receive love all over the world.



Exploring Online

<http://www.vangoghgallery.com/> Find "Starry Night" and "Wheat Field with Crows."
<http://www.vangoghmuseum.nl> Visit the Van Gogh Museum in the Netherlands, click the Permanent Collection, then periods on the timeline of Van Gogh's life.