

Good Writing Practice

Syntactic Structure

Dissonance

Nonparallelism: Comparison

Introduction

Dissonant nonparallelism occurs in two patterns of comparison: the typical adjective-based pattern (*x is similar to y; there is more x than y*) and the less common correlative conjunction-based pattern (*the more x... the more y*). In this article, examples of adjective-based (Parts 1 and 2) and correlative conjunction-based (Part 3 and 4) nonparallelism are analysed.

Part 1: Adjective-based comparison: ellipsis-caused noun nonparallelism

Example: Introduction section: research problem pertinent background

The masticatory apparatus of a bird is similar to a human.

Revision 1

The masticatory apparatus of a bird is similar to **that** of a human.

Revision 2

There is a similarity between the masticatory apparatus of a **bird** and a **human**.

Notes

In the Example, the noun phrase (noun + modifier) *masticatory apparatus of a bird* is non-parallel when compared to only the noun *human*. That is, the *apparatus* appears to be compared to the *human*, rather than to the *masticatory apparatus of a human*. Such comparisons often lack (ellipsis) the second noun (or noun phrase) of the comparison, but it is implied. In the Example, the underlined entities cannot literally be compared, even though the frequency of this pattern may render the implicit meaning understandable.

In Revision 1, the demonstrative pronoun *that* replaces the missing *masticatory apparatus* so the comparison is parallel. The *that* does elicit backtracking, but the sentence pattern is familiar. In Revision 2, the nouns being compared are structurally equivalent and at the sentence-end position of emphasis.

Related Examples

The masticatory apparatus of a bird and a human

are similar. In this example, *similar* elicits the question *similar to what?* The agreement in number between the singular *apparatus* and the plural *are* is grammatical because of the plural modifiers *of a bird and a human*. This extrinsically directed plurality of the subject may be notational, that is, singular in form but plural in context.

A bird's masticatory apparatus is similar to a human's. In this example, although the possessive nouns are parallel, the infrequency of this pattern may result from the informality of and distance between the possessive nouns. Also, just like ending a sentence with *similar*, a sentence ending of *human's* seems to be incomplete.

Part 2: Adjective-based comparison: ellipsis-caused verb nonparallelism

Example: Results section: data-based observation

Renal erythrocytes transferred more DHA to the foetus than foetal plasma.

Revision 1

Renal erythrocytes transferred more DHA to the foetus than **did** foetal plasma.

Revision 2

More DHA was transferred to the foetus **by renal erythrocytes than by foetal plasma**.

Revision 3

There was more DHA transferred to the foetus **by renal erythrocytes than by foetal plasma**.

Notes

In the Example, it seems that there was more transfer of DHS than transfer of foetal plasma. In a comparison, verb ellipsis causes confusion as to what is being compared, when the comparison is missing the second verb in the comparison. To avoid verb repetition in a comparison, the verb *do* is often used; however, a limitation of *do* as with other such concision techniques (e.g. *vice versa*) is backtracking to determine the exact meaning of *do*.

In Revision 1, parallel verbs are present, but *did* elicits backtracking and the unfamiliar subject-to-verb inversion. In Revision 2, the comparison is emphasised by the sentence-end-

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position of the compared nouns and by the repetition of the preposition *by*. Also, Revision 2 involves a shift from the active to passive voice. In Revision 3, the expletive *there* conveys a typical sentence pattern in a Results section by first identifying an observation and then by stating the comparison. In Revisions 2 and 3, the pattern is thematically focused on *more DHA transferred* rather than the narrative *something does this and another thing does that*.

Part 3: Correlative conjunction-based comparison: verb nonparallelism

Example: Introduction section: hypothesis

From a security perspective, the more that paths are used for routing, the more secure that the network is.

Revision

From a security perspective, the more paths for routing, the more secure the network.

Notes

The passive voice verb phrase *are used* in the first dependent clause conveying the condition is nonparallel to the linking verb *is* in the second dependent clause conveying the consequence.

In the Revision, the verb-free (elliptical) compound sentence is not uncommon and not ungrammatical. Its combination of succinctness and parallelism is memorable. Some readers may question whether the syntax of the compound dependent clauses structure is grammatical; however, the frequency of this pattern mostly in its elliptical form is evidence of its grammaticality.

Part 4: Correlative conjunction-based comparison: correlative conjunction nonparallelism

The more... the more functions as a correlative conjunctive, similar to *not only... but also*.



Example: Introduction section: research problem pertinent background

The more that collagen is in a triple helical arrangement, the more that it resists denaturation, and the less that it is solubilised by acetic acid.

Revision 1

The more that collagen is in a triple helical arrangement, the more that it resists denaturation, and the **more that it resists solubilisation** by acetic acid.

Revision 2

The more collagen in a triple helical arrangement, the more its resistance to denaturation and **solubilisation** by acetic acid.

Notes

If the first two clauses of a correlative con-

junction-based comparisons are in one direction (e.g. positive) and the third is in another (e.g. negative), the nonparallelism is distracting. If there are only two correlative conjunctions, the relation in the opposite (reciprocal) directions (e.g. *the more... the less*) is slightly distracting, but a third dependent clause in the opposite direction to the first two is distracting.

In Revisions 1 and 2, the progressive ellipsis of the compound dependent clause sentence is visualised: Revision 1, the full form; Revision 2, deletion of the complementing *that* and the redundant *the more it resists*. In both the Example and Revision 1, the narrativism is in contrast to the verb-free elliptical Revision 2. Note also that in Revision 2, the parallelism between the correlative conjunctions enables the coordination of *denaturation* and *solubilisation*.

Summary

Adjective-based comparison distractions may not be section-specific, because one example occurs in an Introduction and the other in the Results section. However, the correlative conjunctive-based examples both occur in the Introduction section.

The cause of the nonparallelism may also be different between the two comparison patterns. Ellipsis of either of the compared nouns or compared verbs seems to be the cause of the nonparallelism of the adjective-based comparison. Thus, revision for such nonparallelism involves addition of the ellipsed noun (with the demonstrative pronoun *that*) or verb (with the filler verb *do*) or a syntactic transformation to an end-of-sentence comparison, which enables a thematic subject.

In contrast, the lack of ellipsis may be the cause of nonparallelism for the correlative conjunction-caused comparisons because revision involves a shift to an elliptical verb-less option. For the nonparallel correlative conjunction example, replacement of the nonparallel conjunction is a facile revision as it is for non-parallel coordination.

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