

CONSISTENCY AND PARALLELISM

Consistent Discourse

Consistent discourse relates to direct and indirect quotations. A direct quotation occurs when the exact words of the speaker are quoted: Joe said, "I'll meet you after work." An indirect quotation occurs when the exact words of the original speaker are not used: Joe said that he would meet me at the movies after work. These are both examples of consistent discourse.

Inconsistent discourse occurs when the two types of quotations are mixed incorrectly. The problems can be corrected by revising the sentence so that it will be either a direct or an indirect quotation. Study the following:

Inconsistent Discourse:

Jan said, "I'll be late and that we should not wait up for her."
Jan said that she'd be late and don't wait up for me.

Consistent Discourse:

Jan said, "I'll be late. Don't wait up for me."
Jan said that she'd be late and that we shouldn't wait up for her.

Consistent Pronoun Reference

Pronouns should always have a clear reference in a sentence. Here are several common errors many beginning writers make with pronoun reference:

Inconsistent use of "you"--

People in this town know that you should not be out alone after dark.

Corrections:

People in this town know that they should not be out alone after dark.
In this town, you should not be out alone after dark.

Inconsistent use of "their"--

Everyone had to wait their turn. (Note: "Everyone" is a singular pronoun whereas "their" is a plural pronoun. Other words similar to "everyone" are "everybody," "nobody," "anyone," "anybody," etc.)

Corrections:

Everyone had to wait his (or her) turn.
They had to wait their turn.

Inconsistent use of "they"--

Any student can be successful if they put forth enough effort.

Corrections:

Any student can be successful if he (or she) puts forth enough effort.
All students can be successful if they put forth enough effort.

Consistent Verb Tense

Being consistent with verb tense (past, present, future) simply means that writers should not shift from one tense to another unnecessarily.

Inconsistent verb tense: Alice ate supper and then goes to the game.

Correction: Alice ate supper and then went to the game.

Parallelism

Parallelism means that related parts of a sentence should be balanced, coordinated, written in a similar structure. Here are a few examples of parallelism:

Ann has always been a loyal, honest, and kind friend. (parallel adjectives)

Harris walks, talks, and eats too fast. (parallel verbs)

In addition to examples such as those above, parallelism is important when writers use pairs of correlative conjunctions, such as either/or, both/and, neither/nor, not only/but also, whether/or. Study the following examples:

Neither my brother nor my uncle will be at the game.

That teacher is not only a fair grader but also a good lecturer.

Here are a few examples of non-parallel construction and possible corrections:

Non-parallel: Sandy studies in the morning, exercises at noon, and attending classes in the afternoon.

Parallel: Sandy studies in the morning, exercises at noon, and attends classes in the afternoon.

Non-parallel: Either Bart will pick you up or you will be picked up by Rex.

Parallel: Either Bart or Rex will pick you up.

Either Bart will pick you up or Rex will pick you up.

You will be picked up by Bart or Rex.

Practice: Revise the following sentences to correct errors in consistency or parallelism.

1. Whenever people visit Dayton, you should be sure to visit the Air Force Museum.
2. Everybody I know has their driver's license.
3. Our neighbors will either be gone one week or they will be gone two weeks.
4. His mom said that she can remember her days in grade school and what a good time I had.