Parallel Construction

Parallel construction means keeping similar parts of a sentence in the same form, so a reader can see they form a connected list of words or phrases being used in the same way:

- I like going to the store and to eat the bakery samples.

"Going to the store" and "To eat the bakery samples" are both not in the same syntactic form (the first is a gerund and the second is an infinitive); therefore, it is not clear that they are the direct object—that they are each what "I like" (i.e. they are the direct object of the sentence).

It doesn't matter which form we use, as long as they are parallel:

- I like going to the store and eating the bakery samples.
- I like to go to the store and to eat the bakery samples.

Here’s a more complicated example:

- They alienated voters by the billboard advertisement, Marcus running for office, and the convention being held in Hawaii.

The three underlined phrases all have the same function in the sentence—each is a reason the voters were alienated. But they are not in the same syntactic form: the first is a noun phrase, the second and third are participial phrases.

AND they are not the same kind of thing. The billboard is a thing, Marcus running for office is an action and “the convention is being held in Hawaii” is an event.

Notice that in our revision, we have to change the information in the sentence to put these phrases in the same form.

- They alienated voters by nominating Marcus for office, using the billboard advertisement, and choosing Hawaii for the convention site.

Now all three phrases are parallel syntactically (participial phrases). We can make it clear all three are actions and are being done by the same people simply by the way we phrase the sentence’s multiple subjects.
More examples of parallel construction:

- Unparallel: I need to find the dog, the soup, call my girlfriend, and to finish my term paper.
- Parallel: I need to find the dog and the soup, call my girlfriend, and finish my term paper.

- Unparallel: There are two chapters, the introductory chapter and the short chapter which is the conclusion.
- Parallel: There are two chapters, the introductory chapter, which is long, and the concluding chapter, which is short.

- Unparallel: A student should study a lot, keep his grades up, needs to set aside time for extracurricular activities, to talk to his friends and for hanging out, and he probably should be looking for a part-time job.
- Parallel: A student should study a lot; he should keep his grades up; he should set aside time for participating in extracurricular activities, for talking to his friends, and simply for hanging out; and on top of this he probably should be looking for a part-time job.

Like in the first example, there is not one single 'right way' to revise the sentence. There are multiple ways each of these sentences could be revised, as long as the similar parts of the sentence are made parallel. Note the matched underlined (and bold) phrases in these examples that have been made clearly parallel.