

THE COMPARATIVE ESSAY

Compare and Contrast

To compare two things is to find similarities between them, while contrasting two things is to find differences. Often you will be asked to do both for essay assignments. Comparing and contrasting helps one to understand something in two ways: by finding similarities and then by finding differences.

Comparing and contrasting is used when one wants to make a choice or judgement about things. For this reason, the two things have to be similar. For instance, if you were trying to choose whom to vote for as president, it would be more meaningful to compare and contrast two presidential candidates rather than a presidential candidate and a senate candidate. Comparing and contrasting same elements of each thing is also another way to see similarities and differences. For example, one could compare two presidential candidates' positions on healthcare reform.

Organization of a Compare and Contrast Essay

There are three ways of organizing such an essay:

1. *Point-to-point analysis*: examines one feature at a time for both similarities and differences
2. *Whole-to-whole analysis*: examines one object/idea as a whole and then the other.
3. *Similarity-and-difference analysis*: presents all of the similarities between the two things and then the differences (or vice versa).

Point-to-point and *Similarity-and-difference* methods should be used for long explanations of complex things, while a *whole-to-whole* analysis can be used for simple objects that readers can more easily comprehend.

Examples:

1. *Point-to-point analysis*:
Compare and contrast two exhibits from the Egyptian exhibit at the Museum of Fine Arts.
 - I. Material used
 - A. Compare and Contrast materials of Exhibits A and B
 - II. Original use of the two exhibits
 - B. Compare and Contrast original use of Exhibits A and B
 Etc.
2. *Whole-to-whole analysis*
 - I. Discuss Exhibit A
 - A. Material Used
 - B. Original use
 - II. Discuss Exhibit B (making references to Exhibit A)
 - A. Material Used
 - B. Original Use
3. *Similarity-and-Difference analysis*
 - I. Discuss similarities between exhibits A and B
 - A. Material Used
 - B. Original Use
 - II. Discuss differences between exhibits A and B
 - A. Material Used
 - B. Original Use