

Compare and Contrast Essay

Comparison/Contrast - The process of examining two or more things in order to establish their similarities and differences.

Background Info:

1. Any relationship between two or more things will involve some degree of SIMILARITY, as well as some degree of DIFFERENCE.
2. Comparisons can be found in any kind of writing: magazine articles, advertising, essays, news articles, letters, editorials, textbooks, scientific writing, reports, political speeches, and pamphlets.
3. We make comparisons when we have to choose between two or more things: careers, products, political candidates, goals, etc.
4. Comparisons underlie everything we do. Scientists use comparisons in their experiments. Logicians use them to draw conclusions. Politicians use them to formulate policies. Judges use them to render decisions. Ministers teach and admonish us with comparisons.

Tips for Writing a Compare/Contrast Essay:

1. *When writing a literary comparison, you will answer the question:*

So What?

In other words, you will not only explain the similarities and differences between the two (or more) literary works, but also explain the significance of your comparison. A comparison intends to inform readers of something they haven't thought of before. Therefore, for a comparison to be illuminating, the things compared must either:

- A. Appear different but have significant similarities; i.e., Star Wars and Return of the Jedi.
- B. Or, appear similar but have significant differences; i.e., Classic Star Trek and Star Trek: The Next Generation.

You must have a purpose for your comparison. The reader of the comparison should not have to ask SO WHAT? at the end of your essay.

2. *In a comparison/contrast essay you are explaining the differences between two or more things, as well as explaining, or at least alluding to, what the two things have in common.*

- Remember that comparison and contrast is an organizational and analytical structure that supports your ideas, but you still need a thesis in the introduction.
- The introduction should contain:
 - 1) The names the items to be compared
 - 2) The purpose of the comparison
 - 3) What is being compared and/or contrasted

Sample Thesis Statements:

Unacceptable — “I am going to compare the similarities and differences between the films *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* and *E.T., the Extraterrestrial*.”

Acceptable — “A close examination of the way Roy Neary, the protagonist of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, and Elliott, the protagonist of *E.T., the Extraterrestrial*, react to their encounters with aliens demonstrates that director Steven Spielberg uses both films to tell similar stories about the difficulties of growing up.”

Steps for Writing a Compare/Contrast Essay

1. Choose the works of literature you want to compare.
2. Choose the grounds for comparison; i.e. is there something they have *in common that makes it worthwhile to show how they are different?*
3. Answer the question So What? by determining a purpose for making a comparison.
4. Gather information and evidence from each literary selection to describe and support your grounds for comparison. You can use a graphic organizer or Venn diagram to help organize your comparisons.
5. Outline your essay.
6. Compose your thesis.
7. Write the draft of your essay.