

how to write a compare-contrast essay

[Education](#)



The Elements of a Compare-Contrast Essay

What is comparison?

Explaining the similarities or points of connection between two ideas, people, or things to give the reader a deeper understanding of each

What is contrasting?

Explaining the differences or points of disconnection between two ideas, people, or things to give the reader a deeper understanding of each

Adapted from Webster's Third New International Dictionary

On what subjects can I write a successful compare-contrast essay?

Your subjects will need to each be significant in their own right to merit discussion. They will also need to have some sort of relationship to each other so that showing them side by side allows the reader to learn more about each. In other words, there must be a reason to compare them. Here are some reasons to compare and contrast. To consider two subjects side by side and show their distinctions. To choose between two things.

To explain one subject in terms of another.

What are the types of compare-contrast essays?

Writing Strategies for a Persuasive Essay

1. Read the question or essay prompt. Identify your topics and be sure that you understand what each really is. You may need to do a little research to be clear on this.
2. Decide what your purpose for writing is (to show distinctions, to choose, to explain).

3. Develop a thesis statement. Remember that a thesis statement must be more than “ X and Y have many differences and similarities.” Your thesis should reflect which purpose you chose. Example: “ Examining the similarities and differences between the work of Hemingway and Fitzgerald allows us to see how the contexts of their lives affected their work.”
4. Decide what your points of similarity (connection) and difference (disconnection) will be.
5. Research! Find relevant, credible publications, web sites, and individuals that offer evidence that supports your thesis and chosen points of connection and disconnection.
6. Write!

The style in which compare-contrast essays are written

Compare-contrast essays are similar to persuasive essays in a couple key ways:

- Point of view
- Level of personal voice

Point of View and Personal Voice in Persuasive Essays

A compare-contrast essay is almost always formal academic essay in which the writer presents a thesis, or. In most formal academic writing, the proper point of view for the essay is the third person (using the pronouns he, she, it, they). It is OK to use first person (I, me, we) in the conclusion

INCORRECT: First Person

I think that Fitzgerald and Hemingway share many similarities despite their very different use of descriptive language.

CORRECT: Third Person

Fitzgerald and Hemingway share many similarities despite their very different use of descriptive language.

Evidence & Citations

Compare-contrast essays rely on a lot of direct evidence from several sources. You will need to quote extensively to be successful.

Why use quotes?

1. They demonstrate you read the available information closely.
2. They serve as concrete evidence to support your position
3. They demonstrate a deeper level of understanding, which is persuasive to readers.

Where can evidence come from? What can I quote from?

Books, films, newspaper articles, credible websites, newscasts, etc.

What can't I use?

Wikipedia, encyclopedias, other student essays, interviews with non-experts, etc.

How should I weave in quotes and evidence?

The S-C-C-C Format

This is a very useful format for citations if you are not very familiar with citations and need to practice a tried and true method. As writers become

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experienced with citations, they can move away from this format and mix elements up as they see fit.

1. Set it up. Set up the context that the quote is from, so that the reader knows when and where the quote is from and who is doing the speaking/writing.
2. Citation. Write the quote out, in quotation marks.
3. Commentary: Explain how the quote supports your argument. (Commenting on the quote.)
4. Commentary: further commenting on the quote

Example

According to a recent article in the Seattle Times, " ...[t]he seemingly sure bet that higher education will pay off can be upended by any number of factors: broken marriages, illnesses, lost jobs, substandard schools and unrealized dreams." (With no way out of trouble, more students likely to default, October 6, 2008). Students used to feel that borrowing for college was always going to pay off, no matter what happened. Now, many are finding it harder to pay it back due to many factors.

The Embedded Citation

This is useful when you would prefer to pick out very small phrases to prove your points. Write your own sentence beginning, include the quote, and write your own sentence ending. The quote flows into and out of the sentence.

Example: Borrowing to pay for higher education used to be seen as a "sure bet" but now some students are finding that their plans to repay student loans can be disrupted by "... broken marriages, illnesses, lost jobs,

substandard schools and unrealized dreams.” (With no way out of trouble, more students likely to default, October 6, 2008). These unexpected obstacles may repayment difficult if not impossible

How to Write Commentary

Of all the skills students must learn in writing, writing commentary is considered the most difficult. Writing commentary means giving your own opinion and interpretation about something, which requires a higher level of thinking than most students are used to using. Using commentary makes an essay interesting to read and shows that you can analyze and evaluate information.

When you write commentary, you are commenting on a point you have made with evidence.

Synonyms for commentary

- analysis - breaking an idea into its parts
- interpretation - reading between the lines of an idea
- insight - adding personal experience to the explanation of an idea
- evaluation - judging the quality or validity of an idea
- explication/explanation - explaining what an idea means
- discussion - explaining what an idea means
- speculation - trying to predict what will happen if an action is taken or an idea is accepted

Source: Jane Schaeffer Publications, Style Analysis (1998)