

The Compare/ Contrast Paragraph

First, let's explain compare and contrast:

When we compare, we show our readers a subject's similarities.

When we contrast, we show our readers a subject's differences.

Compare and Contrast paragraphs are learning-process paragraphs. You learn about your subject as you gather and organize information.

This type of paragraph takes a bit of organization, and it's this organizational process, this gathering of facts, that helps you learn as you go.



You will create lists of qualities or traits that each of your subjects has, and as you do this, you will discover insights to your subject that, at first glance, you may not have realized were there.

It's like buying a new shirt. The moment you spread it out on your bed, you start seeing things you hadn't noticed in the store. Perhaps a button is loose, or the pocket is torn, or it's a size too big. But there's more! As an intelligent, probing writer you're going to ask questions of this shirt: *why, what, where, when, how, who*. Why are buttons on the collar? What other type of shirt does this shirt remind you of? Where was it made? When was it made? How did it get to your store and into your hands? Who made it? The questions are endless. But you must ask them to understand your subject. Using *why, what, where, when, how, who*, you to probe into the core and the reason this shirt exists.



The same type of probing and uncovering will happen to you as you outline your subject's qualities. You'll discover all sorts of new things as you ask *why, what, where, when, how, who*, and as you uncover these new points, your essay will change. In the end, most paragraphs end up far different than expected.

Your Topic Sentence

You will offer a topic sentence as a way of setting the tone of your paragraph. In other words, through your topic sentence, you want the reader to understand what you plan to compare or contrast.

Keep it simple: Your topic sentence will be one sentence on what you want to offer (your subject), and if you're comparing or contrasting.

Getting Started

If possible, find an interesting subject about which you can write. This is important because your enthusiasm will show in your work.

This paragraph calls for an outline list: you are going to list the qualities of both subjects, qualities that can be compared, contrasted, or shared.

For example: let's say your comparing and contrasting surfing to snowboarding. Your first job is to list the qualities of each subject. From these qualities and your insight, you can then develop your thesis.

| Qualities of A: surfing | Shared Qualities | Qualities of B: snowboarding |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| surf on water | both use a water medium | snowboard on snow |
| need wetsuits and trunks | both require special clothing | need winter clothes and boots |

A topic sentence that will set the tone of your paragraph for the qualities above might read: Though surfing and snowboarding are done in different seasons, these sports have more similarities than differences.

Of course, the list above is incomplete, and, perhaps, not as academic as we would want it to be. But it's a start. You keep listing qualities until you believe you have enough information to write a valid essay. A list of five to seven qualities works well for the average paragraph, and then you will use the three strongest ones. You may have to list fifteen qualities to get three that will work for you. When listing, it is good to overdo it; this way, when you're ready to write your paper, you can weed out the qualities that won't work and pick the best of the bunch.

Three Parts

Opening: You will begin your paragraph, introducing the subjects you plan to compare and contrast.

Body: text by text (first discuss all of A and then discuss all of B) or point by point (alternate between A and B). In this class you will stick to point by point. And ***you will either compare or contrast, not both.*** Be



careful, sometimes going point by point can make your writing sound tedious and repetitive. Watch your language and transition words.

Ending: As in your other paragraphs, bring it all together in the end. Allow your ending to go back to your topic sentence. Use the transitional words on the next page to help your paper's coherence. Transitions and other connecting words and connecting sentences should be used throughout.

Remember: There are no hard and fast rules as to how many comparisons or contrasts you should offer. For a thorough look into your subject, you must offer enough comparisons or contrasts or both to make a valid statement, so I would suggest at least three points.

Transitional Words (Conjunctival Adverbs)

Use these words to help you connect your thoughts, your sentences, and your paragraphs:

(Lest you wish to sound pedantic, tiptoe with caution through words such as "indeed," and "of course.")

addition

again, also, and, and then, besides, equally important, finally, first, further, furthermore, in addition, in the first place, last, moreover, next, second, still, too

comparison

also, in the same way, likewise, similarly

concession

granted, naturally, of course

contrast

although, and yet, at the same time, but at the same time, despite that, even so, even though, for all that, however, in contrast, in spite of, instead, nevertheless, notwithstanding, on the contrary, on the other hand, otherwise, regardless, still, though, yet

emphasis

certainly, indeed, in fact, of course

example or illustration

after all, as an illustration, even, for example, for instance, in conclusion, indeed, in fact, in other words, in short, it is true, of course, namely, specifically, that is, to illustrate, thus, truly

summary

all in all, altogether, as has been said, finally, in brief, in conclusion, in other words, in particular, in short, in simpler terms, in summary, on the whole, that is, therefore, to put it differently, to summarize

time sequence

after a while, afterward, again, also, and then, as long as, at last, at length, at that time, before, besides, earlier, eventually, finally, formerly, further, furthermore, in addition, in the first place, in the past, last, lately, meanwhile, moreover, next, now, presently, second, shortly, simultaneously, since, so far, soon, still, subsequently, then, thereafter, too, until, until now, when

Topic Sentence

Quality #1 for first item (ie apple pie)

Specific support _____

Comparative/Contrasting for second item (brownies)

Specific support _____

Quality #2 for first item (ie apple pie)

Specific support _____

Comparative/Contrasting for second item (brownies)

Specific support _____

Quality #3 for first item (apple pie)

Specific support _____

Comparative/Contrasting Qualities (brownies)

Specific support _____

Conclusion

Compare or Contrast Checklist

_____ I have made it clear in my opening what two things I will write about and whether I will compare or contrast.

_____ I offered a good strong topic sentence letting the reader know what I plan to compare or contrast.

_____ I have offered three points in which I will compare and contrast my two subjects

_____ I stuck to my method of development: looking, in order, at one side at a time.

_____ I have used transition words as I moved to each subject and from sentence to sentence, so my paragraph reads smoothly like water rolling down a hill. There are no sudden changes of subjects without gracefully transitioning into them.

_____ My concluding sentence binds my two subjects together and brings me back to the topic sentence of my essay.

_____ My simple sentences offer one thought only.

_____ I vary my sentences. I make sure to use compound and complex sentences, so my essay has a musical quality to it, but I do not overdo it.

_____ I have reviewed my paragraph and removed all redundant words. I avoided wordiness and stuck to concision.

Checklist

- _____ Prewriting
- _____ Grid (comparing qualities)
- _____ Outline
- _____ Rough draft
- _____ Edited drafts (with correction marks)

Evaluate Your Essay

- _____ Read the paragraph once without making any comment
- _____ Draw a line under any awkward wording that is difficult to understand
- _____ Draw a two lines under questionable spelling or grammar
- _____ Highlight the topic sentence statement (or draw a wavy line under it)
- _____ Highlight or wavy line under the main qualities
- _____ Look for transitional words and phrases, and if there are none, make notes on your paper to put them in.
- _____ Write the words "vague" or "specific" in the margins next to specific details.
- _____ Circle or highlight: slang, clichés, repetition, and misspelled words
- _____ Pull out Hacker or open up the Hacker site: review your MLA. If format is off, fix it.