

## Composition

### Second Year

### Second Semester

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#### Comparison and Contrast Essay:

Comparison or contrast writing begins with the way you ordinarily think about things. You *compare* two things that share similar qualities; you *contrast* two things that seem similar but display several differences. You routinely compare or contrast two brand-name products, two jobs, two people or two solutions to a problem.

Comparing and contrasting is a process we all do every day. We compare and contrast to determine the superiority of one thing over another. When we buy a car, for instance, we usually shop around and compare deals. We explain something that is unknown by comparing it to something that is known. We also compare and contrast when we want to show that two apparently similar things are in fact quite different in important ways, or to show that two apparently dissimilar things are really quite similar in significant ways. It might, for instance, be quite enlightening to discover that two very different cultures have some important things in common. We also compare and contrast to show how something or someone has changed.

We have many reasons for comparing and contrasting, and since comparison and contrast is such a common method of thinking and of developing topics, it is important to write a well-organized comparison and contrast essay. There is one thing to keep in mind, however. With comparison and contrast, the purpose is not just to point out similarities and differences; the purpose is to persuade, explain, or inform. Think of comparison and contrast as a method of development rather than a purpose for writing.

## Points of Comparison

Let us say that you were asked to compare and contrast two people such as two politicians. You could compare their looks, backgrounds, philosophies, the way they treat people, their attitudes toward life, their intelligence, and so on. When comparing and contrasting, especially for a standard 300- to 500- word essay, it is best to restrict the points of comparison to two to four. Therefore, be selective and choose the most significant points for comparison that would support the central idea in your essay. For instance, if you were comparing two politicians in order to show that one is better as a public servant, you would not bother with comparing and contrasting their tastes in food; it would be irrelevant.

## Emphasis on Comparison or Contrast

In a comparison and contrast essay, the emphasis is usually on one or the other; in other words, you focus on either comparing or contrasting, depending on your purpose. If you are comparing two rather similar things, acknowledge the obvious similarities, but focus on the differences. If you are comparing two obviously dissimilar things, acknowledge the obvious contrasts, but emphasize the less obvious similarities.

## Patterns of Organization

There are two basic patterns for developing the comparison and contrast essay.

### Pattern A (Point-by-Point)

Suppose you were comparing two automobiles: the Road Runner XL and the Speed Demon 280. Your points of comparison might be the cost of maintenance, performance, and comfort. Using Pattern A, you could organize the essay in the following way:

*Thesis Statement:* The Speed Demon 280 is a better car than the Road Runner XL.

- I. Cost of Maintenance
  - A. The Road Runner XL
  - B. The Speed Demon 280
- II. Performance
  - A. The Road Runner XL
  - B. The Speed Demon 280
- III. Comfort

- A. The Road Runner XL
- B. The Speed Demon 280

Pattern A ("Point-by-Point") is useful for organizing complex topics. In the developmental paragraph in the comparison and contrast essay, the writer introduces the point of comparison, but the topic is broken down into two parts to make the comparison. Here is how that paragraph might be developed:

The Road Runner XL and the Speed Demon 280 differ in cost of maintenance. The Road Runner is rather expensive to maintain. This car gets rather poor mileage, with twenty-three miles per gallon on the highway and eighteen miles per gallon in the city. Moreover, it requires the more expensive premium gasoline. In addition, the Road Runner has to have a tune-up every four months and an oil change every ninety days. The average driver who owns a Road Runner must pay approximately \$1,400 a year to keep this car running. The Speed Demon, on the other hand, is quite economical. It gets an impressive forty mpg on the highway and thirty-five in the city, and unlike the Road Runner, the Speed Demon takes the less costly regular gasoline. In addition, whereas the Road Runner requires tune-ups and oil changes, the Speed Demon requires little maintenance. It needs to be tuned-up only every twelve months; the oil needs to be changed only every four months. In summary, instead of paying \$1,400 per year to keep the car running, the owner of a Speed Demon only has to pay \$600, which is significantly less.

### **Pattern B (All of One/ All of the Other)/ (subject-by-subject)/ (Block Method)**

Using Pattern B, you could organize the essay in the following way:

*Thesis Statement:* The Speed Demon 280 is a better car than the Road Runner XL.

- I. The Road Runner XL
  - A. Cost of Maintenance
  - B. Performance
  - C. Comfort
- II. The Speed Demon 280
  - A. Cost of Maintenance
  - B. Performance
  - C. Comfort

Pattern B is more useful for more limited topics. In the developmental paragraph in the comparison and contrast essay, the writer discusses one of the two people or things compared. Note that the points of comparison are the same and that they are discussed in the same order under each section.

## Writing Your Thesis Statement for a Comparison or Contrast Essay

Writing an effective thesis for a comparison and contrast essay requires you to have a purpose for examining and interpreting the results of setting up likenesses and/or differences. That purpose is crucial; it becomes your point, your thesis.

A comparison or contrast thesis does not announce "A and B are very different," or "A and B have important similarities." Neither of these offers a point derived from comparing or contrasting. Instead, an effective thesis offers readers what the writer discovered from setting one thing up against another. For example, "A and B's similarities are so pronounced that buyers could easily be fooled."

Therefore, a formula for a comparison/contrast thesis might be:

■ **Topic + intention to compare or contrast + suggestion or statement of outcome/ discovery gained from comparing and/or contrasting**

An example of a comparison essay's thesis, following the formula above, would be:

**The coverage of the student walk-out in the Vancouver Sun and the Vancouver Province was so similar that the reporters might have plagiarized each other.**

**Study the following essays.**

### MY TWO BROTHERS

No two people are exactly alike, and my two older brothers, Nhan and Hung, are no exceptions. When I think of them, I think of Rudyard Kipling's words:

*East is East  
West is West  
Never the twain shall meet.*

Even though they have the same parents, their considerable differences in looks, personality, and attitude toward life reflect the differences between Eastern and Western cultures.

Like the majority of oriental men, Nhan is short, small, and has a full moon-shaped face. His smooth white skin and small arms and feet make him look somewhat delicate. Nhan always likes to wear formal, traditional clothes. For example, on great holidays or at family rice celebrations, Nhan appears in the traditional black gown, white pants and black silky headband, all of which make him look like an early twentieth-century intellectual.

In contrast to Nhan, Hung, who is his younger brother by ten years, looks more like an American boxer. He is tall, muscular and big-boned. He is built straight as an arrow and his face is long and angular as a Western character. Unlike Nhan, Hung has strong feet and arms, and whereas Nhan has smooth skin, Hung's shoulders and chest are hairy, large and full. Unlike Nhan, too,

Hung likes to wear comfortable T-shirts and jeans or sports clothes. At a formal occasion, instead of wearing traditional formal clothes, Hung wears stylish Western style suits.

Nhan and Hung also differ in personality. I don't know how my father selected their names correctly to reflect their personalities. Nhan's name means "patience," and his patience is shown in his smile. He has the smile of an ancient Chinese philosopher that western people can never understand. He always smiles. He smiles because he wants to make the other person happy or to make himself happy. He smiles whenever people speak to him, regardless of whether they are right or wrong. He smiles when he forgives people who have wronged him. Nhan likes books, of course, and literature and philosophy. He likes to walk in the moonlight to think. Nhan also enjoys drinking hot tea and singing verses. In short, in our family, Nhan is the son who provides a good example of filial piety and tolerance.

Hung, on the other hand, does not set a good example of traditional respectful behavior for his brothers and sisters. His name means strength, but his strength is self-centered. As a result, unlike Nhan, Hung only smiles when he is happy. When he talks to people, he looks at their faces. Because of this, my eldest brother Nhan considers him very impolite. As one might expect, Hung does not like philosophy and literature; instead, he studies science and technology. Whereas Nhan enjoys tea and classical verses, Hung prefers to take sun baths and drink Coca-Cola while he listens to rock and roll music. And like many American youths, Hung is independent; in fact, he loves his independence more than he loves his family. He wants to move out of our house and live in an apartment by himself. He is such an individualist that all the members in my family say that he is very selfish.

My brothers' differences do not end with looks and personalities. Concerning their attitudes toward life, they are as different as the moon and the sun. My eldest brother Nhan is concerned with spiritual values. He is affected by Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist theories. These theories consider that the human life is not happy. Therefore, if a man wants to be happy, he should get out of the competitiveness of life and should not depend on material objects. For example, if a man is not anxious to have a new-model car, he does not have to worry about how to make money to buy one. Or, if he does not have a car, he does not have to worry about the cost of gas. My oldest brother is deeply affected by these theories, so he never tries hard to make money to buy conveniences.

In contrast to Nhan, my brother Hung believes that science and technology serve human beings and that the West defeated the East because the West was further advanced in these fields. Therefore, each person must compete with nature and with other people in the world in order to acquire different conveniences, such as cars, washing machines, and television sets. Hung is affected by the Western theories of real values; consequently, he always works hard to make his own money to satisfy his material needs.

In accordance with the morality of the culture of my country, I cannot say which one of my brothers is wrong or right. But I do know that they both want to improve and maintain human life on this earth. I am very lucky to inherit both sources of thought from my two older brothers.

—Ha Sau Hoa

- The thesis statement of the essay is: Even though they have the same parents, their considerable differences in looks, personality, and attitude toward life reflect the differences between Eastern and Western cultures.

- This essay focuses more on contrast.
- The points of comparison are looks, personality, and attitude toward life.
- The author uses the point-by-point organizational pattern.

Try to make a detailed outline of this essay. If a topic sentence is implied, write it out.

## MY OLD NEIGHBORHOOD

Several years ago I returned to Washington, D.C., and visited one of my old neighborhoods. I had not been on Nash Street for more than twenty years and as I walked along the street, my mind was flooded by waves of nostalgia. I saw the old apartment building where I had lived and the playground where I had played. As I viewed these once familiar surroundings, images of myself as a child there came to mind. However, what I saw and what I remembered were not the same. I sadly realized that the best memories are those left undisturbed.

As I remember my old apartment building, it was bright and alive. When I was a child, the apartment building was more than just a place to live. It was a medieval castle, a pirate's den, a space station, or whatever my young mind could imagine. I would steal away with my friends and play in the basement. This was always exciting because it was so cool and dark, and there were so many things there to hide among. Our favorite place to play was the coal bin. We would always use it as our rocket ship because the coal chute could be used as an escape hatch out of the basement into "outer space."

All of my memories were not confined to the apartment building, however. I have memories of many adventures outside of the building, also. My mother restricted how far we could go from the apartment building, but this placed no restrictions on our exploring instinct. There was a small branch in back of the building where my friends and I would play. We enjoyed it there because honeysuckles grew there. We would go there to lie in the shade and suck the sweet smelling honeysuckles. Our biggest thrill in the branch was the day the police caught an alligator there. I did not see the alligator and I was not there when they caught it, but just the thought of an alligator in the branch was exciting.

This is how I remembered the old neighborhood; however, as I said, this is not how it was when I saw it.

Unlike before, the apartment building was now rundown and in disrepair. What was once more than a place to live looked hardly worth living in. The court was dirty and broken up, and the windows in the building were all broken out. The once clean walls were covered with graffiti and other stains. There were no medieval knights or pirates running around the place now, nor spacemen; instead, there were a few tough looking adolescents who looked much older than their ages.

As for the area where I used to play, it was hardly recognizable. The branch was polluted and the honeysuckles had died. Not only were they dead, but they had been trampled to the ground. The branch itself was filled with old bicycles, broken bottles, and garbage. Now, instead of finding something as romantic as an alligator, one would expect to find only rats. The once sweet smelling area now smelled horrible. The stench from my idyllic haven was heart wrenching.

I do not regret having seen my old neighborhood. However, I do not think my innocent childhood memories can ever be the same. I suppose it is true when they say, "You can never go home again."

—Floyd Bonner

- The thesis statement of the essay and the purpose of writing about this topic is: what I saw and what I remembered were not the same. I sadly realized that the best memories are those left undisturbed.
- This essay focuses more on contrast.
- One of the paragraphs is only one sentence long. The function of this paragraph is to move from the first subject to the second one; it serves as a transitional paragraph.
- The author uses the block method to organize the essay.

Try to make a detailed outline of this essay.

Best of Luck!