

Composition

Second Year

Second Semester

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Comparison and Contrast Essay:

Here is a model comparison and contrast essay. In this essay both similarities and differences are included in the essay. Study it and find the organizational pattern followed by the writer.

Japan and the USA—Different but Alike

The culture of a place is an integral² part of its society whether that place is a remote Indian village in Brazil or a highly industrialized city in Western Europe. The culture of Japan fascinates Americans because, at first glance, it seems so different. Everything that characterizes the United States—newness, racial heterogeneity,³ vast⁴ territory, informality, and an ethic of individualism⁵—is absent in Japan. There, one finds an ancient and homogeneous⁶ society, an ethic that emphasizes the importance of groups, and a tradition of formal behavior governing every aspect of daily living, from drinking tea to saying hello. On the surface at least, American and Japanese societies seem totally opposite.

10 One obvious difference is the people. Japan is a homogenous society of one nationality and a few underrepresented minority groups, such as the ethnic Chinese and Koreans. All areas of government and society are controlled by the Japanese majority. In contrast, although the United States is a country with originally European roots, its liberal immigration policies have resulted in its becoming a

15 heterogeneous society of many ethnicities—Europeans, Africans, Asians, and Latinos. All are represented in all areas of American society, including business, education, and politics.

Other areas of difference from Japan involve issues of group interaction and sense of space. Whereas Americans pride themselves on individualism and

20 informality, Japanese value groups and formality. Americans admire and reward a person who rises above the crowd; in contrast, a Japanese proverb says, "The nail that sticks up gets hammered down." In addition, while Americans' sense of size and scale developed out of the vastness of the North American continent, Japanese genius lies in the diminutive and miniature.⁷ For example, America builds airplanes,

25 while Japan produces transistors.

In spite of these differences, these two apparently opposite cultures share several important experiences.

Both, for example, have transplanted cultures. Each nation has a "mother"

society—China for Japan and Great Britain for the United States—that has influenced the daughter in countless ways: in language, religion, art, literature, social customs, and ways of thinking. Japan, of course, has had more time than the United States to work out its unique interpretation of the older Chinese culture, but both countries reflect their cultural ancestry.

Both societies, moreover, have developed the art of business and commerce, of buying and selling, of advertising and mass producing, to the highest levels. Few sights are more reassuring to Americans than the tens of thousands of bustling¹ stores seen in Japan, especially the beautiful, well-stocked department stores. To American eyes, they seem just like Macy's or Neiman Marcus at home. In addition, both Japan and America are consumer societies. The people of both countries love to shop and are enthusiastic consumers of convenience products and fast foods. Vending machines selling everything from fresh flowers to hot coffee are as popular in Japan as they are in America, and fast-food noodle shops are as common in Japan as McDonald's restaurants are in America.

A final similarity is that both Japanese and Americans have always emphasized the importance of work, and both are paying penalties for their commitment to it: increasing stress and weakening family bonds. Americans, especially those in business and in the professions, regularly put in twelve or more hours a day at their jobs, just as many Japanese executives do. Also, while the normal Japanese workweek is six days, many Americans who want to get ahead² voluntarily work on Saturday and/or Sunday in addition to their normal five-day workweek.

Japan and America: different, yet alike. Although the two societies differ in many areas such as racial heterogeneity versus racial homogeneity, individualism versus group cooperation, and informal versus formal forms of behavior, they share more than one common experience. Furthermore, their differences probably contribute as much as their similarities toward the mutual interest the two countries have in each other. It will be interesting to see where this reciprocal fascination leads in the future.

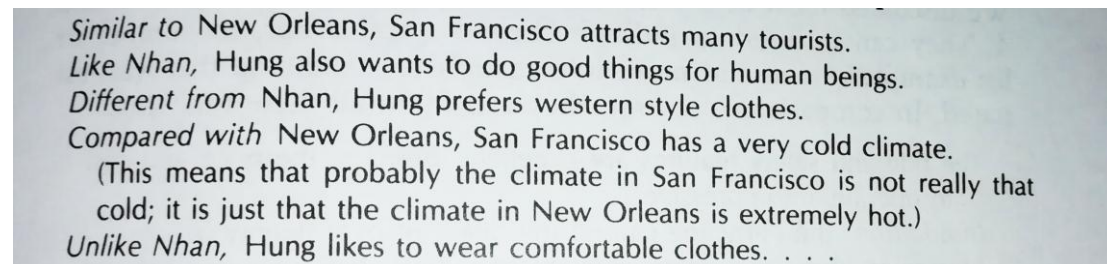
Coherence

Transitions for Comparison and Contrast

Transitional expressions give writing coherence; that is, they help to move smoothly from one idea to the next. In addition, a variety of transitions adds interest to an essay. There are quite a number of transitions that can be used for comparison and contrast.

1. TRANSITIONS IN PHRASES

All of the transitions in this group need to be followed by a noun or a noun phrase. The following transitions indicate similarity: **similar to, like**. The following indicate difference: **different from, in contrast to, compared with, unlike**.



Similar to New Orleans, San Francisco attracts many tourists.
Like Nhan, Hung also wants to do good things for human beings.
Different from Nhan, Hung prefers western style clothes.
Compared with New Orleans, San Francisco has a very cold climate.
(This means that probably the climate in San Francisco is not really that cold; it is just that the climate in New Orleans is extremely hot.)
Unlike Nhan, Hung likes to wear comfortable clothes. . . .

Note: **like**, and **alike** are also used as adjectives to mean **similar**.

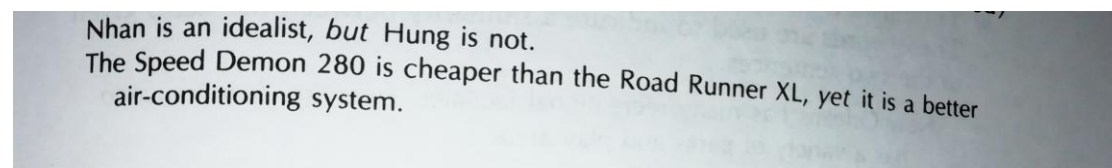
Example:

The second dispute was stored out in a *like* manner. (only used before a noun)

John and Jack are *alike*. (not used before a noun)

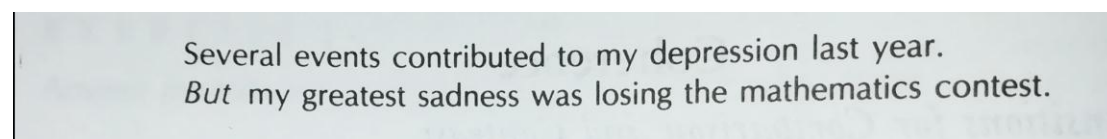
2. COORDINATING CONJUNCTIONS AS TRANSITIONS

The coordinating conjunctions **but** and **yet** are often used as transitions to indicate the opposite of what was expected. Coordinating conjunctions occur between two clauses and are preceded by a comma.



Nhan is an idealist, *but* Hung is not.
The Speed Demon 280 is cheaper than the Road Runner XL, *yet* it is a better air-conditioning system.

Note: Sometimes these conjunctions are used as transitions at the beginning of a sentence.



Several events contributed to my depression last year.
But my greatest sadness was losing the mathematics contest.

3. TRANSITIONAL EXPRESSIONS BETWEEN SENTENCES

The transitions in this group generally occur between two independent clauses. When they do, they must be preceded by either a period or a semicolon.

Ramos is very intelligent. *In addition*, he is very rich.
Ramos is very intelligent; *in addition*, he is very rich.

Ramos is very rich. *Moreover*, he has a nice personality.
Ramos is very rich; *moreover*, he has a nice personality.

Occasionally these expressions are used in an independent clause. In this case, the expression should be set off with commas (exception: *also*):

Ramos is very intelligent. He is, *in addition*, very rich.
Ramos is very rich. He has, *moreover*, a nice personality.

a. Additive Transitions: *first, next, besides, in addition, moreover, furthermore, also, then.*

The ride and safety features are excellent. *Besides*, the price and cost to operate are impressive.
In addition, the hurricane caused the death of over twenty people.
Moreover, there are seven convenient outlets that provide quiet and cool air without drafts.
She *also* likes to attend concerts regularly.
Also, the Audi's larger gasoline tank provides a cruising range of 690 miles.

b. Transitions to Indicate Similarity: *likewise, similarly, in the same way.*

New Orleans has a big seafood business. *Similarly*, a great deal of fishing and oyster farming is done around San Francisco.

New Orleans has many recreational facilities. *Likewise*, San Francisco has a variety of parks and play areas.

c. Transitions to Indicate Difference: *on the other hand, conversely, in contrast, however.*

Nhan prefers the more traditional role of the son. Hung, *on the other hand*, prefers the modern Western role.

New Orleans has hot, humid summers. *In contrast*, San Francisco's summers are cool and windy.

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.

The expression ***on the contrary*** is also in this group, but it is restricted in its use. It indicates that the two ideas being expressed cannot both be true. It is often confused with ***on the other hand***.

Jose: It's rather hot today.
Hong: It is not very hot today. *On the contrary*, it is quite cool.
It is not very hot today. *On the other hand*, it is not cool either.

Jose: You know, New York City is an interesting place.
Hong: New York City is not very interesting to me. *On the contrary*, I find it boring.

New York City is not an interesting place. *On the other hand*, San Francisco is a fascinating place.

Note that *on the contrary* really means "No, it isn't." Another transition that can sometimes be used in its place is *in fact*.

It is not very cold today; *in fact*, it's quite hot.

4. ADVERBIAL CLAUSES OF COMPARISON, CONTRAST, AND CONCESSION

For sentence variety and for even more smoothly flowing sentences, try to use adverbial clauses.

a. Adverbial Clauses of Comparison: ***just as, in the same way that***.

Just as Nhan and Hung differ in looks, they also differ in personality.

So is often used in the main clause following the clause that contains *just as*. Note the inverted subject-verb order:

Just as Bill is a fine student, *so is* his sister.
Just as I am producing a new novel, *so is* Mary Peters producing one.
Just as we are taking a trip next fall, *so are* Sam and Beth.
Just as I wrote a letter to the senator, *so did* Sharon.

b. Adverbial Clauses of Contrast: ***while, whereas***.

Whereas Nhan enjoys tea and classical verses, Hung prefers Coca-Cola.
Nhan is concerned with spiritual values, *while* Hung is concerned with material things.

Note: Unlike most other adverbial clauses that occur at the end of a sentence, *while* and *whereas* require commas before them.

c. Adverbial Clauses of Concession: ***although, though, even though***.

An adverbial clause of concession is a clause that admits a contrast or an unexpected idea. The subordinators roughly mean "despite the fact that."

Although Einstein enjoyed learning, he had problems in school.
 Although there are other things to do on a rainy weekend, writing letters, playing cards, and reading mystery novels are pleasant ways to cast off the gloom brought on by the storm.
 Although the laser does have tremendous potential for destruction, my unreasonable fear of the laser is fading.
 Even though not all tornadoes cause such massive devastation, if they touch down in populated areas, you can expect considerable damage.
 He refuses to walk to school, claiming it makes him too tired to work well, even though he has plenty of energy to play ball after school.

Note: Do not confuse *even though* and *even*. As you have seen, *even though* is a subordinator that introduces an adverbial (and therefore dependent) clause. *Even*, when used as an adverb, is a word used to intensify the meaning of another element in the sentence. It can be used to introduce an independent clause.

As an intensive word, *even* can be used to

a. Emphasize a modifier (adjective or adverb):

She looked tired, *even* exhausted.

b. Indicate something unexpected:

Even John laughed at the joke. (Apparently John does not laugh much at jokes.)

c. Stress the comparative degree:

A lot of rain fell yesterday and *even more* rain fell today.

Note: *in spite of* and *despite* are followed by a noun or a noun phrase.

Despite all our efforts to save the school, the authorities decided to close it.

She went to Spain **in spite of** the fact that her doctor had told her to rest.