

3. Comparison

NOTE: The following is general information about the rhetorical mode. It is not meant to take the place of any specific instructions given by your instructor for this assignment. If your instructor wants you to write your paper in a different manner, then by all means do it the way your instructor requires you to do it.

The Comparison/Contrast Essay

When writing a comparison essay, you are trying to describe two things (or people or places or whatever) against each other. Remember these important ideas:

1. Select only TWO topics to compare.
2. The two topics must have at least a basis of similarity to them.
3. Select something with which you have direct personal experience.
4. Your essay must make a point about the two items being compared.

The overall framework for this essay is not a story or narrative; instead, you are writing a regular expository essay simply informing the reader about the similarities or dissimilarities between two “things” and drawing some sort of conclusion (i.e., your point) from that comparison.

Comparison is a form of descriptive writing, so remember everything we learned about writing a good description. You should definitely include some description in your comparison essay, but it does not have to be as intense or extensive as the description in your description essay.

Your comparison must follow either the one-at-a-time approach or the back-and-forth approach.

One-at-a-time

First, talk about (describe) Item A in great detail and in every aspect that’s important to the point of your paper. Don’t mention anything about Item B. Just keep on talking about Item A until you have exhausted everything you wanted to say about it. The whole first half of the essay should be only about Item A.

Then, after you are finished with Item A, do the same thing for Item B. Describe it, examine it, and tell everything you want the reader to know about it. Do not go back to Item A at all. This second part of your essay is for Item B only.

Back -and-forth-approach

Say something about Item A in two or three sentences, and then, within the same paragraph, switch to Item B in the next two or three sentences. Then go back to Item A in some other aspect, and then switch to Item B for the same aspect in Item B, and so on.

NOTE: In both of the above methods, follow the same order for what you say about each item. Do not jump around randomly from topic to topic.

Here are some possible topics in case you haven't come up with something on your own:

1. Mom vs. Dad

When you were a child, which parent was more patient, easier on punishment, easier to borrow money from, or easier to fool?

2. Compare the way you looked at something as a small child to the way you look at that same thing now as an adult.

- Christmas
- Money
- Friends
- School
- Birthdays
- Popularity
- Having fun
- Religion

3. Two similar businesses

- Grocery stores
- Restaurants
- Shopping malls
- Video rental stores

4. Two household pets (or two pets of different species, such as cat vs. dog, bird vs. fish)

5. Two similar types of jobs you've had

6. Two similar products (hint: actually use both products and see how you like them).

- Cereals
- Shampoos
- Soaps
- Canned or frozen foods

7. Living by oneself vs. living with a roommate
8. Living in a house vs. living in an apartment
9. Watching a movie in a theater vs. watching it at home (or watching a movie on video vs. watching it on a DVD)
10. Eating a meal at home vs. eating out at a restaurant

Suggestions for Comparison/Contrast

Consider choosing one of the following topics and writing a formal comparison/contrast essay about it.

In your essay, be sure to use either the one-at-a-time approach or the back-and-forth approach.

Make sure your comparison essay has a point to it.

1. Mom vs. Dad

Which one is more generous, easier on punishment, easier to borrow money from, or easier to fool?

2. Compare the way you looked at something as a small child to the way you look at that same thing now as an adult. For example:
 - Christmas
 - Money
 - Friends
 - School
 - Birthdays
 - Popularity
 - Having fun
 - Religion
3. Two similar businesses
 - Grocery stores (Kroger vs. Schnucks, Macks vs. Mad Pricer)
 - Restaurants (two fast food places, two family places, two buffet places, etc.)
4. Two household pets (or two pets of different species: cat vs. dog, bird vs. fish)
5. Two similar types of jobs you have held
6. Two teachers you have had (make up names or use no names at all)
7. Watching TV vs. listening to the radio

8. Living in a house vs. living in an apartment
Living by oneself vs. living with someone else
9. Watching a black-and-white movie vs. watching a color movie
10. Eating a meal at home vs. eating out at a restaurant

REMEMBER:

1. Select only two things to compare.
2. Select something with which you have direct personal experience.
3. The two things must have a basis of similarity.
4. Your comparison should have a point or purpose to it.