



## Comparison/Contrast Essay

### What is a Comparison/Contrast Essay?

A comparison shows how two subjects are similar; a contrast shows how two subjects are different. In writing, you must first decide whether you will compare, contrast, or do both.

### Follow These Steps When Writing a Comparison/Contrast Essay:

- 1. Identify similarities and differences.** If you have two items to compare or contrast, determine how they are similar and how they are different. You should find at least three points for comparison or contrast. Then write the detailed characteristics for each point. Let's say you want to compare two types of dogs.

The following is an example:

<b>Points</b>	<b>Labradors</b>	<b>Cocker Spaniels</b>
Appearance:	large, solid color, short hair	small, mixed color, long hair
Temperament:	easy going, smart, rarely bites	high strung, dumb, often bites
Performance:	retrieves in water, excellent swimmer, complex fetching	retrieves on land, average swimmer, simple fetching

- 2. State your purpose in the thesis sentence.** Identify the two subjects that you will compare or contrast and state whether you will focus on similarities, differences, or both. The thesis may also indicate which points you will compare or contrast.
- 3. Choose a pattern to organize your essay.** The two major patterns for organizing a comparison/contrast essay are
  - Subject by Subject (Whole to Whole).** Write first about one of your subjects, covering it completely, and then you write about the other, covering it completely. Each subject is addressed in a separate paragraph. The points of comparison or contrast should be the same for each subject and should be presented in the same order.

The following is an example of subject-by-subject organization:

Introduction

Labs

A. Appearance

B. Temperament

C. Performance  
Cocker Spaniels  
A. Appearance  
B. Temperament  
C. Performance  
Conclusion

- **Point by Point.** Each point is addressed in a separate paragraph. Discuss both of your subjects together for each point of comparison and contrast. Maintain consistency by discussing the same subject first for each point.

The following is an example of point-by-point organization:

Introduction  
Appearance:  
A. Lab  
B. Cocker Spaniel  
Temperament:  
A. Lab  
B. Cocker Spaniel  
Performance:  
A. Lab  
B. Cocker Spaniel  
Conclusion

- 4. Use appropriate transitions.** Transitions are important in comparison/contrast writing, especially with the point-by-point organization, to avoid confusion. Without transitions, the points you are comparing/contrasting may blur into one another. Also, a variety of transitions prevent monotony.

**A list of transitions follows:**

- **For comparison:** like, same, both, the same as, similar, in the same way, most important, similarly, as, too, have in common, as well as.
- **For contrast:** although, however, differ, unlike, even though, yet, but, instead, on the contrary, on the other hand, whereas, while, unless, contrary to, the reverse.

**To Evaluate the Effectiveness of a Comparison/Contrast Essay, Ask the Following:**

Is the essay balanced? The most common error in a comparison/contrast essay is spending too much time on one subject and too little on the other. Make sure the essay equally and thoroughly covers both subjects.