



Comparison and Contrast Essays

A comparison and contrast essay may discuss only similarities, only differences, but more often than not, both comparison and contrast is used. The essay may be organized in one of two patterns. Either is acceptable, but mixing patterns is not. Review the two patterns below carefully, noting the differences in structure that each presents.

- **Pattern A: The Block Method.** Present all the information about A, and then present parallel information about B. This pattern tends to work better for shorter papers, and those with few subtopics. It can be used when you have three or more principal similarities or differences.

First: All of A:

point 1 (plus support)
point 2 (plus support)
point 3 (plus support)

Second: All of B:

point 1 (plus support)
point 2 (plus support)
point 3 (plus support)

The danger built into Pattern A is that the writer can end up with two separate essays instead of one unified comparison and contrast essay. To insure unity, take note of the following guidelines:

- Each subtopic in Part I must also be discussed in Part II.
- Subtopics should be discussed in the same order in both parts.
- Subtopics in Part II should generally include reminders of the point made about the same subtopic in Part I.

- **Pattern B: The Point-by-Point Method.** Present one point about A, and then go to the parallel point about B. Move to the next point, and do the same thing. This pattern tends to work better for long papers and those with many subtopics. Use this pattern when you have only two principal similarities or differences.

First A:	point 1 (plus support)
Then B:	point 1 (plus support)
Then A:	point 2 (plus support)
Then B:	point 2 (plus support)
Then A:	point 3 (plus support)
Then B:	point 3 (plus support)

► Guidelines for a Successful Comparison-Contrast Essay:

- Choose items that are related in some way so they can be compared or contrasted.
- Compare according to a single organized idea.
- Choose a method of development that works well with your organizing idea.
- Use specific and relevant examples for support.
- Give equal treatment to both elements that you are discussing
- Use transitional words or phrases to help the reader understand the similarities and differences in your subject.
- Conclude your paper by restating your thesis, summarizing the main points, and give the reader the final 'so what' of the major similarities and/or differences that you discussed.

► Outlines of Sample Essays:

Thesis: Although dogs are often called man's best friend, cats make more convenient pets.

Block Method Outline:

Part A	Point 1:	Cats can clean themselves.
	Point 2:	Cats can exercise by themselves.
	Point 3:	Cats do not require training.
Part B	Point 1:	In contrast to cats, dogs need baths.
	Point 2:	Unlike cats, dogs must be walked regularly.
	Point 3:	Whereas cats need no training, dogs must be trained.

Point-by-Point Method Outline:

Point 1:	Para. 1:	Cats can clean themselves.
	Para. 2:	In contrast to cats, dogs need baths.
Point 2:	Para. 3	Cats can exercise by themselves.
	Para. 4	Unlike cats, dogs must be walked regularly.
Point 3:	Para. 5	Cats do not require training.
	Para. 6	Whereas cats need no training, dogs must be trained.

Note that the transitions used in each outline (in contrast to; unlike; whereas) emphasise the distinction being made between cats and dogs. For a more detailed list of transitions, see the Transition Signals handout in the Writing Centre.