

Compare & Contrast Essay

Student/Class Goal

Students are often asked to explain or evaluate in their writing and will be asked to write compare and contrast essays for postsecondary courses.

Outcome *(lesson objective)*

Students will explore the similarities and differences between two texts, then write a compare and contrast essay.

Time Frame

Three 1-hour classes, additional writing time as needed

Standard *Convey Ideas in Writing*

NRS EFL 5-6

Prewriting	Benchmarks	Drafting	Benchmarks	Editing and Revising	Benchmarks
Topic, purpose, & audience	5.1, 6.1	Organize writing	5.11, 6.10	Reread & revise	5.17, 6.14
Writing for purpose		Sentences/paragraphs		Proofread	
Writing for various tasks		Descriptive language		Feedback from others	5.19, 6.16
Generate ideas		Sentence structure	6.13	Checklists & rubrics	
Main idea/thesis	5.5, 6.5	Spelling		Publishing	Benchmarks
Research		Punctuation		Technology	5.20, 6.17
Plagiarism		Capitalization		Publication	
Sources		Parts of speech			
Organize ideas	5.9, 6.9				
Organizational pattern					

Materials

Compare and Contrast Essay Teacher Resource
 Sample Compare & Contrast Essays
Compare and Contrast Essay Checklist

Learner Prior Knowledge

Students have previously completed an analysis of theme, characterization and impact for the book and movie *Twilight* (or some other topic of interest). They have had practice with the concepts of compare, contrast, similarities, differences, thesis, transitions, and conclusion.

Instructional Activities

Step 1 – Students will encounter different kinds of writing assignments; one of the most common is the comparison/contrast essay where the focus is on the ways in which certain things or ideas – usually two of them – are similar to (comparison) and/or different from (contrast) one another. When writing such essays students make connections between texts or ideas, engage in critical thinking, and go beyond mere description or summary. When students reflect on similarities and differences, they gain a deeper understanding of the items they are comparing, their relationship to each other, and what is most important about them.

Students have read *Twilight* and have seen the movie. They will compare and contrast the two. Whole-to-whole (block method) is introduced and discussed.

Teacher Note Teacher can use this interactive website on [Organizing a Paper](#) or the *Compare and Contrast Essay* Teacher Resource if computer is not available to explain the compare and contrast essay format.

Using the compare and contrast [map](#), teacher models completing the graphic organizer (choose whole-to-whole). The introduction should contain the thesis statement. Analysis of the book includes themes, characterization, and impact on readers; analysis of the movie includes themes, characterization, and impact on viewers. The conclusion synthesizes the comparison/contrasting of the two.

Step 2 - Review the compare and contrast essay *The Senate and the House of Representatives* or *Vacations*, pointing out the structure. Also show students a Venn diagram as a way for students to organize their thoughts as they begin to write.

Discuss the importance of **thesis** and conclusion. The thesis of your comparison/contrast paper is very important; it can help you create a focused argument and give your reader a road map so she/he doesn't get lost in the sea of points you are about to make.

In comparison and contrast, **transition** words tell a reader that the writer is changing from talking about one item to the other. Transitional words and phrases help make a paper smoother and more coherent by showing the reader the connections between the ideas that are being presented. Your thesis should already have given the reader an idea of the points you'll be making and the organization you'll be using, but you can help her/him out with some extra cues. The following words may be helpful to you in signaling your intentions:

To Compare – also, as, as well as, both, in the same manner, in the same way, like, likewise, most important, same, similar, similarly, the same as, too

To Contrast – although, but, differ, even though, however, in contrast, instead, nevertheless, on the contrary, on the other hand, unless, unlike, while, yet

Step 3 - Introduce the *Compare and Contrast Essay Checklist* for this lesson to the students. Checklists and rubrics can be a timesaver. Once they have an understanding of the particular skills the teacher will be looking for, the students are likely to produce a better work product. For the teacher, this method makes grading of complex work assignments easier and more consistent.

There are three main things to pay attention to as you write a comparison and contrast paper:

1. Purpose & supporting details
2. Organization & structure
3. Transitions & coherence

In addition, be sure to pay attention to the usual requirements for writing, such as spelling, punctuation, and grammar.

Step 4 - Students organize and then write a rough draft of their essays. A possible prompt if the class has been working on transitional skills:

You are about to enter the university. You've visited a lot of open days and you are not quite sure about your ultimate decision. There are two major universities you like most. Compare and contrast everything you've heard and everything you know about these two educational establishments.

Step 5 - Fellow students grade with checklist and original writers make applicable changes before turning in to the teacher, who will also use the rubric to grade final product.

Assessment/Evidence *(based on outcome)*

Essay
Checklist

Teacher Reflection/Lesson Evaluation

This lesson has not yet been field tested.

Next Steps

Students will continue essay writing by trying another type such as cause & effect, expository, evaluative, etc.

Technology Integration

Comparison and Contrast Guide www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/comcontrast

Comparing and Contrasting www.unc.edu/depts/wcweb/handouts/comparison_contrast.html

Compare/Contrast Papers <http://depts.washington.edu/pswrite/compare.html>

Compare Contrast Topics <http://www.goodessaytopics.com/compare-contrast-essay-topics.html>

Purposeful/Transparent

In their postsecondary experience, students will have to write compare and contrast essays.

Contextual

Sample compare and contrast essays are analyzed by students and used as organizational models.

Building Expertise

A compare and contrast essay checklist is provided to guide students while writing their essays in the areas of purpose and supporting details, organization and structure, and transitions and coherence.

Compare and Contrast Essay Teacher Resource

<http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/comcontrast>

Comparison and contrast are used in your writing to organize an individual paragraph as well as to organize entire papers. For instance, you might write a paper that compares a movie and a book about the same topic.

As you begin to organize your writing, it's important to make sure that you balance the information about the items that you're comparing and contrasting. You need to be sure that you give them equal time in what you write. If you cover character, setting, and historical accuracy for the book, for instance, you need to be sure that you cover the same elements for the movie.

There are three strategies to organize comparison and contrast papers:

1. Whole-to-Whole, or Block
2. Similarities-to-Differences
3. Point-by-Point

Whole-to-Whole or Block Strategy

In this structure, you say everything about one item then everything about the other. For instance, say everything about the characters, setting, and plot for the book then everything about the characters, setting, and plot for the movie. Whole-to-Whole comparison and contrast uses a separate section or paragraph for each item you're discussing.

Introduction
Item 1
Item 2
Conclusion

For a paper comparing and contrasting a book to a movie, the section for Item #1 would include everything about the book and the section for Item #2 would cover everything about the movie. The points in each of the sections should be the same and they should be explained in the same order (for instance, you might discuss character, setting, and plot for both, and in that order for both).

Similarities-to-Differences Strategy

In this structure, you explain all the similarities about the items being compared and then you explain all the differences. For instance, you might explain that the characters and plot were similar in both the book and movie in the one section. In the next section, you could explain that the settings were different. The book took place during the summer while the movie took place during the winter.

Introduction
Similarities
Differences
Conclusion

Similarities-to-differences comparison and contrast uses a separate section or paragraph for similarities and differences. In other words, the body of your paper would have two large sections: one for similarities, and another for differences.

Point-by-Point Strategy

In this structure, you explain one point of comparison before moving to the next point. For instance, you would write about the characters in the book and movie in one section; then you would write about the setting in the book and movie in the next section.

Introduction
Point 1
Point 2
Conclusion

Point-by-point comparison and contrast uses a separate section or paragraph for each point. Point #1 for your paper could be information about the characters in the book and the movie. You'd begin a section or paragraph for Point #2. For consistency, begin with the same item in each section of your point-by-point paper. For instance, for each point that you discuss, explain the information about the book first and then about the movie.

Sample Compare and Contrast Essays

The Senate and the House of Representatives

The government of the United States is made up of three branches: the legislative branch, the executive branch and the judicial branch. The legislative branch, called Congress, is responsible for making laws. Congress is made up of two houses: the Senate and the House of Representatives. In this essay, you will learn the differences and similarities between these two houses of Congress.

There are many differences between the Senate and the House of Representatives. The Vice President of the United States is the head of the Senate. He must vote in the Senate if there is a tie. On the other hand, the House of Representatives' leader is called the Speaker of the House. The representatives elect him or her.

Another difference is that the Senate is made up of 100 senators, two from each state. The House of Representatives, however, is made up of 435 representatives. The number of representatives from each state is determined by that state's population. The greater the population in a state, the more representatives that state will have in the House. A third difference is that senators are elected to six-year terms, while representatives are elected to serve two-year terms. Every two years, the nation holds an election for members of Congress. At that time, all members of the House of Representatives and one-third of the Senate are up for re-election.

There are also similarities between the Senate and the House of Representatives. For example, both houses of Congress are made up of men and women. Both senators and representatives are members of Congress who must work together toward the same goal: to create, discuss, debate and vote on bills, some of which eventually become laws. In the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington D.C., senators and representatives often meet with each other and in smaller groups to discuss laws. Before the President can sign a bill into law, it must first be approved by a majority of members in both the House and Senate.

Although Congress is made up of two types of lawmakers, they must work together for the benefit of all Americans.

Vacations

Vacations are one of the favorite things for people to do. There are a couple ways to do this, and they have their pros and cons. Tent-camping and staying at hotels are two of the most common ways of vacationing.

Tent camping has been around for years. This is a good option for those whose budget is limited, although some campgrounds' sites these days rival the charge of hotels. There is also a little bit of an element of danger in tent-camping, although others just see this as part of the adventure.

Hotels are definitely a more comfortable way of vacationing if you have the financial resources. They provide comfortable beds and all the amenities of home. You also have reservations for peace of mind, and don't need to worry about the weather.

The two ways I've discussed are both good in some ways; it largely depends on the amount of money you have to spend. Personally, after a bad tent-camping experience with the weather, I'd recommend hotels because this could be the difference between a good trip and a soggy mess!

Compare and Contrast Essay Checklist

Ask a peer to review your essay using the checklist. Make any necessary changes before submitting.

	yes	no
Purpose & Supporting Details		
The paper compares and contrasts items clearly.		
The paper points to specific examples to illustrate the comparison.		
The paper includes only the information relevant to the comparison.		
Organization & Structure		
The paper breaks the information into the whole-to-whole, similarities-to-differences, or point-by-point structure.		
The paper follows a consistent order when discussing the comparison.		
The paper breaks the information into appropriate sections or paragraphs to the ideas.		
The introduction paragraph contain a powerful thesis statement		
Word choice is precise, sentences are varied, and grammatical errors are rare or absent.		
The conclusion synthesizes -- or brings together -- the comparison and contrast.		
Transitions & Coherence		
The paper moves smoothly from one idea to the next.		
The paper uses comparison and contrast transition words to show relationships between ideas.		
The paper uses a variety of sentence structures and clear topic sentences.		

Comments

Writer's Name _____ Reviewer's Name _____