



# Center for Writing and Speaking

## A NO. 3 IN THE CENTER FOR WRITING AND SPEAKING HANDOUT SERIES

### Writing Compare/Contrast Papers

*Comparing and contrasting assignments are common in the academic world. Below, some tips, and a definition to help you write a great paper that analyzes similarities and differences between two or more concepts, works, or events.*

#### 1. **Prewriting.**

Visually note similarities/differences by creating charts and/or highlighting. For example,

- Two pieces by the same author. Can you find an evolution of ideas over the course of her career?
- Two approaches to the same subject. Why are the approaches different? Do the two authors differ in culture, age, or gender?

#### 2. **Thesis.**

Identify reasons for similar or different ideas in order to develop a significant thesis. Avoid the following:

- "Text A and text B have many similarities but also have many differences." This elementary sentence merely recognizes the existence of similarities and differences.
- "Text A states X while text B states Y." This elementary sentence merely states what is similar or different.

Instead, concentrate on answering the "so what?"

- What do you learn by drawing the comparison/contrast?
- Mention the specific reasons why similarities and differences exist.

#### 3. **Organization.**

- Use outlining to sort your points of comparison or contrast.
- Briefly summarize the texts themselves, emphasizing the grounds for comparison. Sometimes it helps to point out obvious similarities as a justification for writing about differences.

Following the introduction and brief summary, choose one of two available routes of organization:

- 1) Text-by-text (block method): discuss all of text A, then all of B. Text-by-text organization is often easy to control, but be careful that by separating your discussions of the two texts, you don't essentially write two adjoining, but separate, papers.
- 2) Point-by-point (alternating method): alternate between significant points about text A and analogous points about text B. Point-by-point organization is often more interesting and reader-friendly. But be careful when using this format that you don't bounce back and forth too often. Avoid this tendency

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during your outlining by grouping similar points together and addressing them in clusters in reference to one text at a time.

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