

♦ Comparison and contrast essay

Comparison and contrast **essay** is one of the most common assignments in American high schools and universities. In this type of an essay the students have to compare two (in some essays several) things, problems, events or ideas and evaluate their resemblances and differences. This type of an essay advances and develops your critical thinking as well as your argumentation and understanding of the importance of the events and things that you compare.

There is an example of the headings of some of the compare/contrast assignments.

- Compare and contrast the weather conditions for the growing of the cotton between Texas and California.
- Compare the approach to the Soviet Union of F.D. Roosevelt and H. Truman. What are the similarities/the differences of their policy?
- Compare and contrast the movies “God Farther” and “Once upon a time in America.”
- Sometimes, you may be asked to compare, sometimes you can be requested to contrast, and on several occasions both actions mentioned should be performed.
- Yet, at the same time comparison/contrast can be a part of some essay as well. In this case, you compare and contrast some events or things in order to develop an argument later.

Here are the examples of several topics, where compare/contrast parts should be included.

- Hatred and love, how these topics are treated in Hamlet?
- How two main historians, we have studied define the term: "d`etente"?
- Compare the programs to reduce the level of pollution in New York and Los Angeles. Which one is more effective?
- Comparison/contrast in different projects.

Some students use comparison/contrast techniques in their works, in order to develop argument in later stages of their writing assignments. For example if you assert that the approach to the USSR was more effective during Truman's presidency than during Roosevelt's presidency, then the comparison/contrasting technique will help you to develop your contention.

Comparison/contracting techniques.

One of the most effective ways of comparison/contracting techniques is the drawing of Venn diagram. Drawing this diagram allows you to compare and contrast two or even several things or events. To design a Venn diagram, draw several overlapping circles, each should represent some event or idea that you research. In the space of overlapping, write down the similarities, that two objects have. In the space that does not overlap, list the features that make things/event different.

In order to draw a chart you should understand the features of the things to be compared.

The left side is assigned to one criterion. The names of the items are listed across the top. Each box right now corresponds to one criteria. Write down existing facts in the boxes that help you understand what features you have discovered.

Once all major points of comparison/ contrast have been listed, one should concentrate on the main aim of the contrast/comparison assignment. On this stage of the writing you should have clear idea of the purpose of this **essay**.

Try to answer the following questions: Why was this type of an essay assigned to you? Does this type of assignment have any similarities with the ones, you have completed before? What should be emphasized in this type of an essay?

The following is the list of some questions on several topics that might be helpful in the designing of your comparison/contrast **essay**. Certainly, you should use them as the guide, only. Try to formulate your own questions and arguments after you have studied the listed questions.

First ask several typical questions, such as: Who? How? Where? What? Why? If you research some objects you might try to concentrate on its physical features, such as size, weight and height. You are assigned to compare two historical events.

One should ask the following questions: When did it happen? Who was involved in it? Why did it happen? How did it influence further events? Why is this event important?

If you are assigned to compare two ideas. Two ideas or theories.

What are these ideas? Who comes up with them? Why are they defended? How have they influenced people? How are they used? Which one is more credible?

After you have completed your list of differences and similarities, you should evaluate which is more interesting and important. In order to facilitate this process, you should ask these questions:

What differences and similarities are relevant to my assignment?

In your opinion what is more important similarities or differences?

If you are assigned to compare and contrast two novels, you should cautiously evaluate the importance of different facts and features. Some physical features of the characters would be of less importance for this type of assignment; emphasize on psychological differences and similarities of the characters, the differences of the plots and attempts of the writer to research and investigate some problems or events.

For some essays stress on some particular points of comparison. If you are assigned to compare some novels of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins for example, you should not emphasize that both of these authors are classical English writers. This fact apparently is well-known to your tutor and students. Talking about different analysis approaches to human minds is more interesting and shows your understanding of the novels of these writers.

Thesis.

Thesis is one of the most important parts of your comparison/contrast essay. It is the central feature of your **essay**, the guide of your writing process. Unlike thesis in other types of essays, thesis of compare and contrast essay should be more specific, and should be backed up with highly argumentative analysis. The most common question that should be asked in the designing of this type of the thesis is "why?". You should show the importance of the things and events that you compare.

The plan of your essay.

As we have mentioned earlier, the contrast/compare essay is a specific type of an essay. That is why composing this type of an essay might differ from other ones. The following are several methods of organizing and designing this type of an essay.

Item by item.

First, list all information on the first subject of comparison. Then you should go further, and list all points of another subject of comparison. Then you should do the same with the third subject (and so forth, depending on the number of subjects of comparison).

Certainly, if your paper is not long, one paragraph might comprise several items; however it is better to devote one paragraph to one item of comparison. The danger of such comparison is that your paper might be transformed into a simple list of points of comparison. Do not succumb to this mistake. Remember, your tutor would like you to compare and contrast these subjects, not just providing him with the list of differences and similarities. In other words he expects some analytical work from you. In order to complete this type of an essay one should develop and design analytical thesis and paragraph (one or several of them, depending on the topic of your essay) that can combine your several points together.

This item-to-item comparison is frequently used when you design so called "lens" comparison. In this assignment you are asked to use one thing for a better understanding of another. In this case you should describe in nutshell the main points on the first thing and then move on discussing how the points mentioned are similar/different to another thing.

Point-by-Point.

This method is used to compare each point of the objects, rather than describe one thing at a time. For example, if you are assigned to compare two sport venues, your first paragraph might comprise the comparison of their locations. Your second one can be devoted to the description of the designs of the venues. In the third paragraph you may describe sport events that these venues host.

There is not any universal rule in the designing of compare/contrast essay. Certainly, it should have logical, comprehensive and consistent structure. Remember, that the last point is of particular importance, because your reader will judge your **essay** by it. If, for example, you attempted to prove that the stadium "Universal" is much better than the stadium "Albano" you should wind up by stressing the fact that stadium "Universal" is better, rather than leaving reader with the statement that "Albano" might look better as well. If you think that differences rather than similarities are more important for your **essay**, you should end up with stressing differences, and visa versa.

Steps in writing the essay: Thesis statement.

All papers that highlight controversial issues should comprise a thesis: a statement that serves as the premise in the argument. Once you have come up with the topic, the thesis should reveal your point of view on the subject and the problem. Your point of view should be supported with reliable evidence. In the process of developing the thesis, timing is one of the most crucial factors- so develop your thesis at the very beginning of the essay writing process.

The thesis should guide in the course of writing; certainly you will acquire new information and ideas as you go along but the thesis should serve you as one of the starting points.

To formulate the thesis you should reconsider it several times and make some preliminary readings and participate in the discussion of the problem. It is necessary to ask several questions on the problem and prepare several answers. Concentrate on the central issue, cynosure of the investigated problem. Thesis is your answer to the main question.

Once you have formulated the thesis, convert it into a brief statement. The thesis statement is put into the essay introduction and it should reveal your point of view on the matter, or position you intend to support in your paper. A well-formulated thesis is vital for your assignment - it is the central part of your essay - all other parts of the essays are built on the basis of a strong thesis.

A good thesis should neither be very long nor too short. One of the most widespread mistakes that the students make in organizing their essays is the simplification of the thesis (making statement that is well-known, banal or obvious).

For example:

The topic: "The Basic healthcare for cats". The oversimplification of the thesis: "Basic healthcare for cats is vital for these animals".

The thesis that is too broad:

"Basic health care for cats should comprise several services". (The writer might wind up with the enumeration of the health care services that should be provided, thus making the paper boring to read).

More perfected thesis:

"There is controversy as to whether human medicines are effective in treatment of cats".