

**The BCC Writing Lab Series presents The Compare-Contrast Essay
What it is and How to Construct One**

A compare/contrast essay looks at two or more things to find meaningful similarities or differences between them. Comparing things explores aspects that are similar, and contrasting discusses differences. By analyzing common parts of different things, readers should get a deeper understanding of them.

Although they have many different names, the two main approaches to a comparison essay are block style and point-by-point style. The block approach explains aspects of one topic in one paragraph, then compares or contrasts the same kinds of things about the other topic in the next paragraph. For instance, you may describe Movie A's setting, dialogue, and music, then describe Movie B's setting, dialogue, and music in relation to Movie A. In the point-by-point style, one point or aspect of both topics is discussed, identifying their differences and similarities in one or two paragraphs, before moving on to explore the next point of comparison. The block organization is easier to follow for short essays, while the point-by-point approach is better suited to longer, more complex papers (Comprone 275; Fawcett 123-124). The conclusion of both styles of comparison sums up the similarities and differences discussed and evaluates them.

With any comparison essay, brainstorming and prewriting are especially helpful to prevent shallow or circular writing. Make a list or diagram to find common parts to compare, then figure out how those common parts are similar and different, and what effects they have on you as an audience member or on the subjects themselves. In the prewriting stage, it may become clear that the topics of comparison are very similar, so focusing on their differences could be necessary to develop the essay. Likewise, if the topics seem completely unlike each other at first glance, discussing their hidden similarities may prove more interesting (Fawcett 284). Making these kinds of decisions before drafting the essay can keep the comparison focused.

As the comparison progresses, a deeper impression of the topics should develop through analysis. Go beyond a mere listing of differences to explain, for example, why the characters see the world differently, or why one argument is more effective than another. Conclude with a brief review of the subjects compared, reminding readers of the reasons the similarities and differences are important.

Some useful **transition words and phrases** include the following:

- **Similarities:** as, also, too, likewise, similarly, in a similar way/vein/fashion, both ... and, neither..... nor, just as...so, like, almost the same; in addition, moreover,

- **Differences:** although, whereas, conversely, in contrast, on (the) one hand . . . on the other hand, however, unlike, but, yet, instead, on the contrary.

Works Cited:

Comprone, Joseph J. Form and Substance: *The Modern Essay*. Dubuque: Brown, 1976.
Fawcett, Susan and Alvin Sandberg, eds. *Evergreen with Readings*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.

SENTENCE PATTERNS -SIMILARITIES

Both carbon dioxide **and** hydrogen are gases.
Magnetite and pyrite are **both** heavy.

Magnetite **is** **like** pyrite **as regards / regarding** hardness.
similar / comparable to pyrite **in (terms of)** fracture.
as hard as pyrite.

Quartz **resembles** calcite **in several / many ways**.

My computer has a large screen. **Similarly / Likewise / Correspondingly**, it has a high capacity hard disc. It **also** has a high capacity hard disc. It has a high capacity hard disc, **too**.

SENTENCE PATTERNS – DIFFERENCES / CONTRASTS

Magnetite **is unlike** pyrite **as regards / regarding** color.
is different from
differs from pyrite **with respect to** color.

Unlike/In contrast to/Compared to /In comparison to iron, aluminum is light.

Iron is **much heavier than** aluminum.
less abundant than silicon.
not as/so soft as aluminum.

This model is more expensive. **On the other hand,**
However, it is faster than my old one.

Pyrite has a metallic luster, **whereas / while** fluorite has a glassy luster.
Magnetite is black, **in contrast to** pyrite, **which is** silver-gold.

Although it is expensive,
Despite / in spite of the high price, it is worth buying.

Pyrite has a metallic luster, **whereas / while** fluorite has a glassy luster.