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CHAPTER PREVIEW



- What's the Point of Comparison and Contrast?
- Making a Point Using Comparison and Contrast: One Student Writer's Response
- Developing Your Point Using Comparison and Contrast
- Using Comparison and Contrast in Your Academic Courses
- Workshop: Writing a Comparison and Contrast Paragraph Step by Step
- Writing Assignments

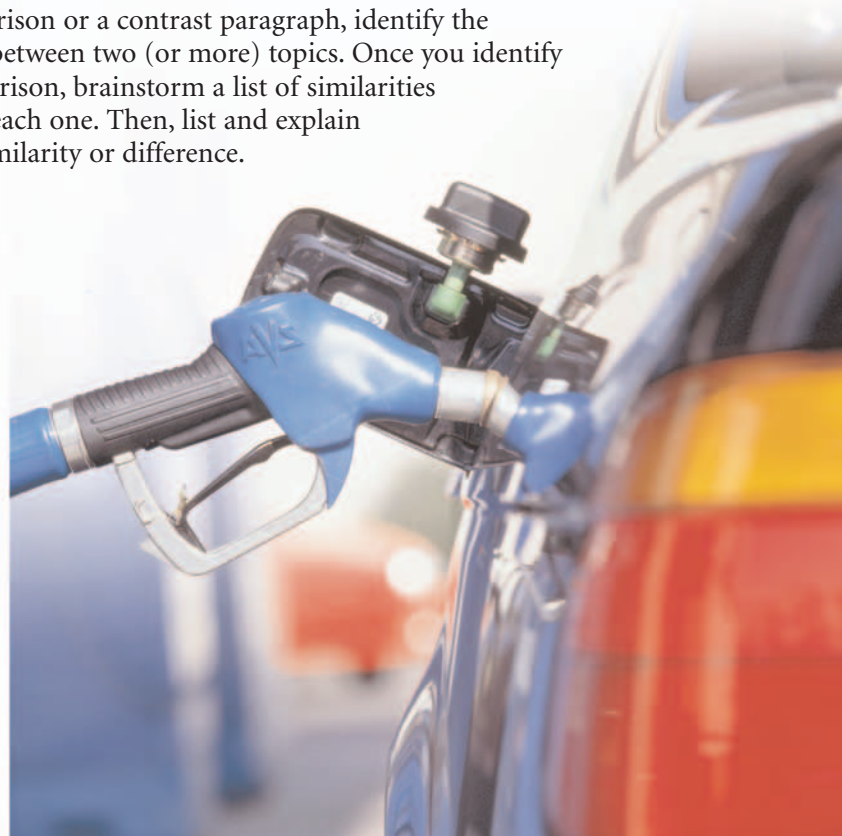
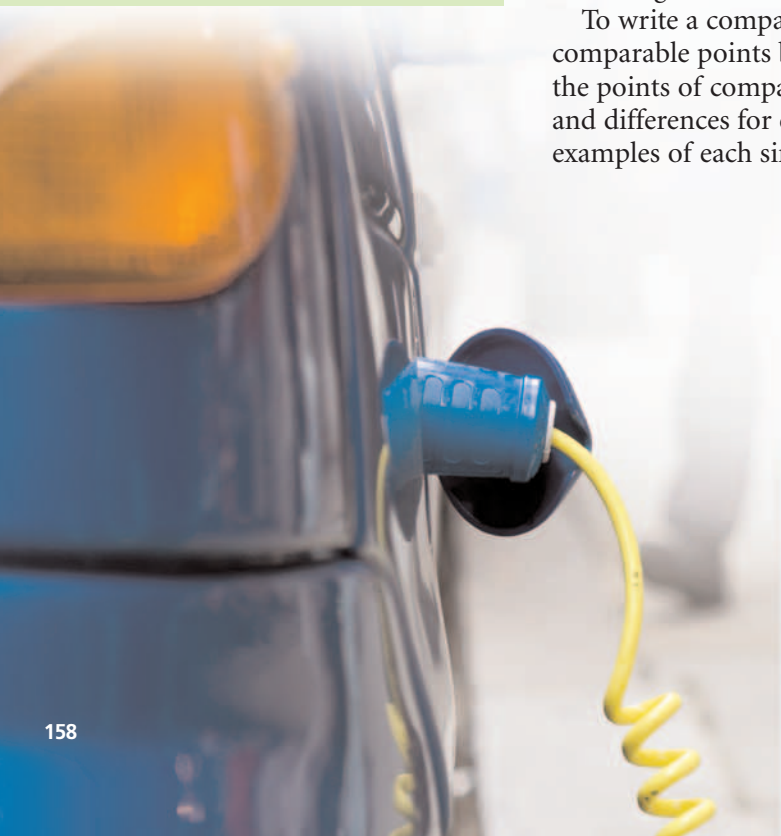
The Comparison and Contrast Paragraph

A comparison examines how two or more things are similar. A contrast looks at how two or more things are different.

Comparing and contrasting ideas is an essential part of critical thinking. When we choose between Subway and McDonald's or Apple and Dell computers, we are weighing the similarities or differences of products and services and making a choice by comparison shopping. What are some basic comparable points for any consumer to consider when shopping? What are some other situations in which we use comparable points as the basis of our thinking or actions?

In everyday life, we compare or contrast the neighborhoods we want to live in and the prices of homes we want to buy, or the honesty and policies of political candidates as we decide for whom we will vote. In working life, we compare or contrast the salaries, benefits, and working conditions among several career opportunities. In college life, we compare and contrast leaders, governments, cultures, literature, technology, writers, or philosophies in a wide range of courses.

To write a comparison or a contrast paragraph, identify the comparable points between two (or more) topics. Once you identify the points of comparison, brainstorm a list of similarities and differences for each one. Then, list and explain examples of each similarity or difference.



What's the Point of Comparison and Contrast?

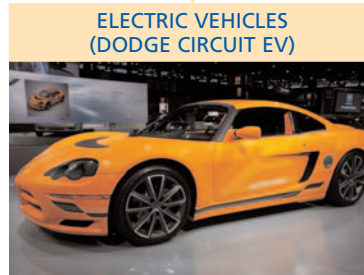
Often ideas become clearer when they are analyzed based on how they relate to one another. The comparison and contrast patterns of organization allow a writer to explore the ways in which ideas are related. The following set of photographs document some similarities and differences between electric and gas vehicles. Study the sets of images. Answer the following questions about each comparable point. Then answer the question “What’s the point?” with a one-sentence statement of the overall main idea.

PHOTOGRAPHIC ORGANIZER: COMPARE AND CONTRAST

SIMILAR TO OR DIFFERENT FROM



*Looks sporty and has
standard features*



*Looks sporty and has
standard features*

What is the **1st**
comparable
point?

SIMILAR TO OR DIFFERENT FROM



Powered by V-8 engine



*Powered by lithium ion
battery*

What is the **2nd**
comparable
point?

SIMILAR TO OR DIFFERENT FROM



Uses gas



*Uses electricity through
rechargeable battery*

What is the **3rd**
comparable
point?

What's the point? *A comparison between electric vehicles and gas vehicles shows pleasing similarities and some major differences.*

Practice 1





My First Thoughts

Brainstorm about the images you just studied. Set a time limit, such as five minutes, and write in your notebook about the images and the details you generated. Write as quickly as you can without stopping. Let the ideas flow freely. Getting your first thoughts about a topic on paper is one excellent way to kick-start your writing process.



Making a Point Using Comparison and Contrast: One Student Writer's Response

The following paragraph offers one writer's point about the similarities and differences between electric and gas vehicles as illustrated by the photographs. Read the comparison and contrast paragraph below and the explanations; complete the activities in **bold type** in the annotations. Then read the writer's journal entry that records decisions made during the writing process. *Answers may vary.*

LOGICAL ORDER:

Words of comparison or contrast signal similarities or differences. Circle two more signal words or phrases for comparison or contrast.

MAIN IDEA:

The main idea is the point the author is making about the topic. Underline the two topics being compared and contrasted and underline the author's point about the two topics.

RELEVANT DETAILS:

Relevant details include descriptive details about similarities or differences between comparable points. Draw a box around two more details of similarities or differences.

EFFECTIVE EXPRESSION:

This sentence gives equal weight to both types of vehicles. Double underline another sentence that expresses equal ideas with the use of semicolon.

Electric or Gas Vehicles?

(1) Pollution, global warming, and the price of fuel pose real problems for an auto industry churning out gas vehicles. (2) **However,** electric vehicles offer hope for the future. (3) **A comparison between electric vehicles and gas vehicles shows pleasing similarities and differences.** (4) Most electric vehicles look just like a gas vehicle. (5) For example, the electric-powered Dodge Circuit EV resembles the gas-powered Dodge Challenger. (6) **Both sport the bold look of a muscle car, and both have all the standard features.** (7) **They even perform similarly; both go from 0 to 60 mph in 6 seconds.** (8) **Although** these similarities promise to please, many drivers will really like the differences between electric and gas vehicles. (9) **For example,** the lithium-ion battery of the Circuit EV uses far less energy than the gas guzzling V8 engine used by the Challenger. (10) The Circuit EV can go 150 to 200 miles between charges and costs about \$6 to \$12 a week in electricity; in contrast, the Challenger averages 14 miles per gallon in the city and 22 on the highway. (11) Plus, based on the price of oil, gasoline can cost as much as \$5 a gallon, and those dollars add up with the miles. (12) The final difference is convenience. (13) Many people and much energy must be used to refuel a gas vehicle. (14) Oil has to be refined into gasoline, stored, transported, and pumped. (15) **However,** to recharge an electric vehicle, all one has to do is plug it into a standard household outlet or a socket on a charging station.

The Writer's Journal

PEER EDITING

The student writer of "Electric or Gas Vehicles?" completed the following reflection to record his thinking through the writing process. Read his writer's journal that describes a few key choices he made as he wrote. Then, in the given space, answer his questions about his use of effective expression in his paragraph. Work with a peer or a small group of classmates.

EFFECTIVE EXPRESSION: *I used coordination to state most of my ideas because I wanted to be sure to cover each point equally, like in sentences 6, 7, and 10. Does the repeated use of signal words for comparison and contrast make my paragraph boring or interesting? Why? I also had trouble with some of my word choices. I really support electric vehicles, but I couldn't find the right words to get my support across. For example, I am not really satisfied with the word "pleasing" in sentence 3. Should I leave it out, or could you suggest another word? Is it important to give my opinion, or should I stick with just the facts?*



Developing Your Point Using Comparison and Contrast

A **comparison** makes a point by discussing the *similarities* between two or more topics. A **contrast** makes a point by discussing the *differences* between two or more topics. To support a point through comparison or contrast, a writer identifies the comparable points of the topic, offers relevant and concrete descriptions and examples for each comparable point, and effectively uses coordination and subordination of ideas.

The Point: The Main Idea

When you write a comparison or a contrast piece, you limit your thoughts to a set of topics based on their relationship to each other. Most likely you have an opinion or belief about the two topics and their comparable points. Your opinion is your point or main idea. In a comparison or contrast paragraph, you also reveal your opinion by discussing the topics and their points of similarities or differences in the order of your own choosing. A topic sentence states the overall point of the comparison or the contrast between the two topics.

For example, the following topic sentence contains (1) the comparable topics, (2) the writer's opinion about the topic, and (3) the pattern of organization used to organize details.

The comparable topics are “Giada De Laurentiis” and “Rachael Ray, celebrity chefs.” The pattern of organization is established with words “even though” and “differ.” The writer's opinion is stated with the clause “styles differ greatly.”

PATTERN OF ORGANIZATION: TRANSITION
WORDS THAT SIGNAL CONTRAST

Even though Giada De Laurentiis and Rachael Ray are both
celebrity chefs, their styles differ greatly.

TOPIC

WRITER'S OPINION

Practice 2

TOPIC SENTENCES

Practice creating topic sentences. The first two items present a topic, an opinion, and comparison and contrast signal word(s). Combine the ideas to create a topic sentence for a comparison or a contrast. Then, complete the practice by making your own topic sentences.

Answers may vary.

1. TOPIC: *the communication styles of men and women*

OPINION: *significant*

COMPARISON OR CONTRAST SIGNAL WORDS: *differ three ways*

TOPIC SENTENCE: *The communication styles of men and women differ in three*

significant ways.

Logical Order

Once you have identified the comparable points between your topics and have focused on a main idea, you are ready to generate and organize additional details. To make a point using comparison or contrast, a writer moves from a general idea (the comparison or contrast of two or more topics) to a major support (a comparable point about the topics) to minor supports (details or examples of the comparable point about the topics). To signal the movement among these levels of ideas, a writer uses transitions to signal similarities or differences and examples. Strong transitions establish coherence, a clear and understandable flow of ideas.

Words That Signal Comparison

alike	equally	in the same way	likewise	similarity
as	in a similar fashion	just as	resemble	similarly
as well as	in a similar way	just like	same	
equal	in like manner	like	similar	

Words That Signal Contrast

although	conversely	differently	more	on the other hand
as opposed to	despite	even though	most	still
at the same time	difference	in contrast	nevertheless	to the contrary
but	different	in spite of	on the contrary	unlike
by contrast	different from	instead	on the one hand	yet

LOGICAL ORDER

Based on the logical order of ideas, fill in the blanks with the appropriate comparison or contrast signal words. Compare and discuss your answers with a peer or in a small group of your classmates.

If you could build your ideal mate, he or she would probably look, act, and think very much like you. By being attracted to people like yourself, you validate yourself. You tell yourself that you're worthy of being liked. Although there are exceptions, the similarity factor probably means that you will be attracted to your own mirror image. You will be attracted to people who are similar to you in nationality, race, ability, physical traits, intelligence, attitudes, and so on. If you were to ask a group of friends, "To whom are you most attracted?" they would probably name the most attractive people they know. But if you were to watch these friends, you would find that they have relationships with people who are about equal in attractiveness.

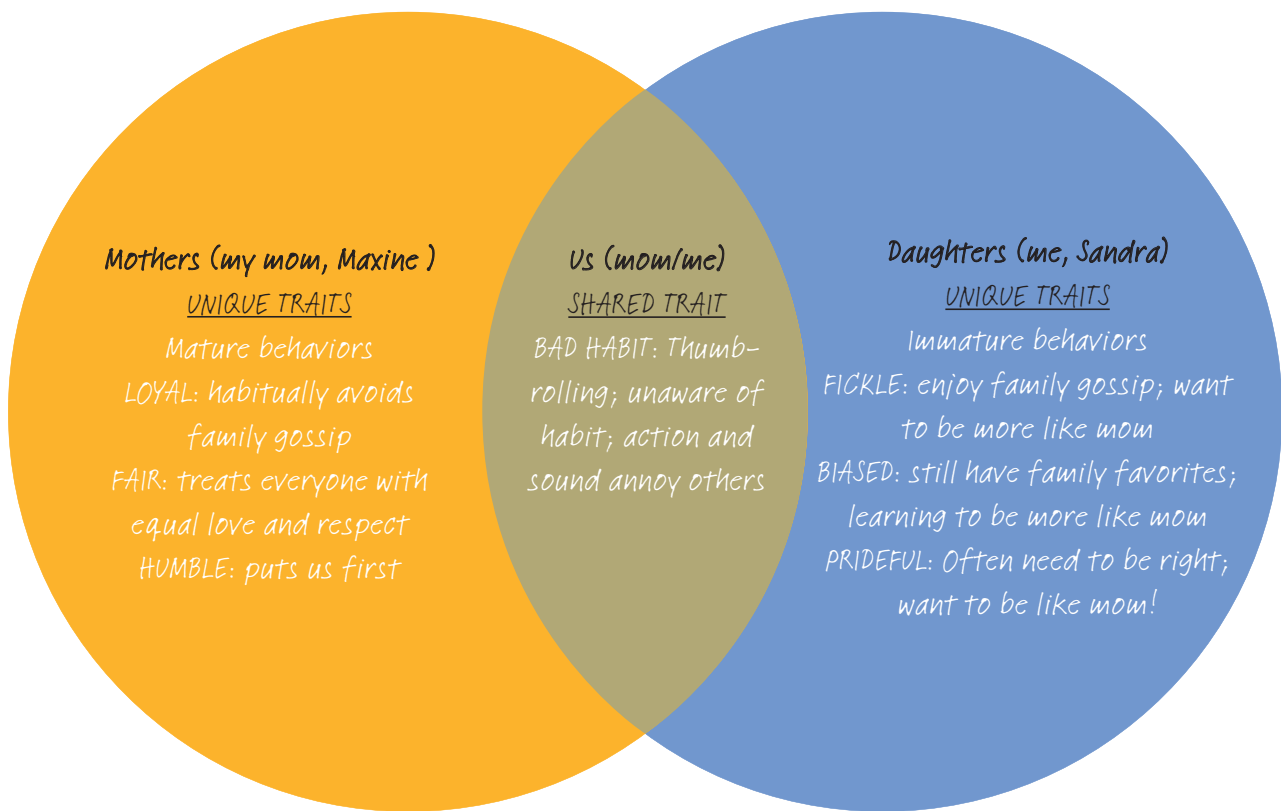
--adapted from DeVito, Joseph A. *The Interpersonal Communication Book*, 11th ed., 2007. p. 236.

Practice 3

Relevant Details

As a writer narrows a topic into a focused main idea, the thinking process brings to mind many details that answer the questions *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how*. A writer evaluates the relevance of each detail and uses only those that clarify or support the main idea. In a comparison or contrast paragraph, some relevant major details include those that identify comparable topics or points. Relevant minor details offer examples and explanations of the similarities or differences between comparable points. Relevant details include descriptions, explanations, and examples of similarities or differences between two or more topics. Details are logically ordered to best support the point.

Comparable Topics in a Venn Diagram



During the prewriting phase, a writer naturally generates irrelevant details. In fact, an effective writer often produces far more details than can be used to make a specific point. Irrelevant details do not explain or support the focused point of the paragraph. A careful writer uses the revision process to double check details for relevance and to eliminate irrelevant ones.

Practice 4

RELEVANT DETAILS

The following paragraph explains and illustrates the ideas generated using the Venn diagram. Circle the main idea. Underline the words that signal similarities or differences and double underline three supporting points of similarities discussed in the paragraph. Cross out two details that are not relevant to the main point. *Answers may vary.*

Bonds of Habits Tie Us Together

(1) I never realized how similar parents and their children can be. (2) My mother, Maxine, has a habit of rolling her thumbs. (3) She sits with her hands clasped, fingers laced, and thumbs rolling. (4) The action creates a soft rhythmic swish as the pad of one thumb brushes the top of her other thumb. (5) I don't know why, but the sight and sound of mother's thumb-rolling drives me to distraction. (6) Sometimes, I can hardly concentrate on my thoughts. (7) She remains completely unaware of the habit or how much it bothers me. (8) ~~The one time I mentioned the behavior, she was embarrassed, and she tried for a while to break herself of the habit.~~ (9) Although I vowed never to develop any such quirk, I recently caught myself in the middle of my own mother-like thumb roll. (10) As my husband described his golf swing, his eyes kept darting to my hands in the same way my own eyes react to Mom's thumb roll. (11) Suddenly he fell silent mid-sentence. (12) We heard a sound just like the one made by mother's thumb roll. (13) Just like my mother, I sat with my hands clasped, fingers laced, and thumbs rolling. (14) My husband asked, "Maxine," (he called me by mother's name instead of my name!) "Maxine, are you aware that you are a thumb-roller? (15) And that, for some reason, it gets on my nerves?" (16) ~~My habit of leaving lids loose on containers also drives my husband nuts.~~ (17) Now I know just how maddeningly similar parents and their children can be.

Effective Expression: Use of Coordination and Subordination

Effective expression reflects a writer's thoughtful match of ideas to words and structure. Two types of sentence structures enable effective expression of comparison or contrast: coordination and subordination.

Coordination expresses an **equal** relationship between **similarities** with words such as: *and, likewise, similarly, also*. Coordination expresses an **equal** relationship between **differences** with words such as *but, yet, or, however, in contrast*.

A **compound sentence** is an example of **coordination**.

Example

An athlete trains the body for competitions; *likewise*, a student trains the mind for final exams.

For more information on coordination and subordination, see pages 000.

Subordination expresses an **unequal** relationship between **similarities** with words such as: *as, just as, just like, like*.

Subordination expresses an **unequal** relationship between **differences** with words such as *although, even though, while*.

A **complex sentence** is an example of **subordination**.

Example

Just as an athlete trains the body for competitions, a student trains the mind for final exams.

Practice 5

USING COORDINATION AND SUBORDINATION

Label each of the following sentences as a compound or a complex sentence. Identify the pattern of organization expressed by each sentence as comparison, contrast, or both.

1. Although the pessimist and the optimist face many of the same challenges in life, they differ greatly in their actions, words, and thoughts.

SENTENCE TYPE: *complex*

PATTERN OF ORGANIZATION: *contrast and comparison*

2. Just as the pessimist faces rejection and disappointments, the optimist endures those same hardships common to all humans.

SENTENCE TYPE: *complex*

PATTERN OF ORGANIZATION: *comparison*

3. The pessimist focuses on problems and remains passive; in contrast, the optimist focuses on solutions and takes action.

SENTENCE TYPE: *compound*

PATTERN OF ORGANIZATION: *contrast*



Using Comparison and Contrast in Your Academic Courses

College writing assignments are often based on information gathered through class lectures, textbook reading assignments, and research. For example, essay exams often test students on material given in class or assigned in readings. Note-taking is an excellent pretest and prewriting activity. When you take or revise notes, set up a graphic organizer into which you can plug information from your class notes or reading assignments. A popular note-taking graphic divides an 11-inch by 8.5-inch page into three sections: a 8-inch by 3-inch left margin for key terms; a 8-inch by 5-inch right margin for notes; and a 3-inch by 8.5-inch wide bottom margin for a summary. This format allows you to write, reflect, and write for understanding as you study.

Key Terms	Notes
Summary	

USING COMPARISON AND CONTRAST IN AN ART APPRECIATION COURSE: TAKING NOTES

Study the following set of notes taken during a lecture in a college art appreciation class. In the bottom margin, write a short paragraph that states and supports the main idea of the notes.

Tragic hero	<i>Virtuous, admirable, rich, powerful, and male, but flawed; inner conflict and guilt; accepts responsibility for suffering; loses all.</i>
Example	<i>5th Century BCE: In Oedipus the King, Oedipus loses power, wealth, family, and independence due to his limited wisdom and great pride.</i>
Melodramatic hero	<i>A symbol of good, male or female, a stereotype of courage and honesty, etc. No flaws; no inner conflict or guilt; fights against and defeats evil; all ends well.</i>
Example	<i>Pauline, the heroine of Perils of Pauline, is a "damsel in distress" who escapes many life-threatening, thrilling perils (dangers) due to her courage and ingenuity.</i>

Summary: What are the differences between a tragic hero and a melodramatic hero?

Several differences exist. The tragic hero, like Oedipus, is virtuous and powerful. Flawed, he struggles with his lack of wisdom and great pride, yet accepts his part in the suffering. In the end, he loses all. In contrast, the melodramatic hero is a symbol or stereotype of courage, honesty, and goodness. This innocent hero or heroine, like Pauline in the Perils of Pauline, happily defeats evil through courage and ingenuity.

Practice 6



Workshop: Writing a Comparison and Contrast Paragraph Step by Step



Choose Your Topic

The following activities are designed to help you choose a topic.

1. Create a bank of topics. Use the headings given below to brainstorm, or list as many similarities or differences about sets of topics as you possibly can. Don't criticize your thoughts. Add more topics, similarities, or differences as they occur to you. Revisit topic banks created during your study of previous chapters and identify comparable topics. Compare your bank of topics with those of your classmates.

- Family Members
- Natural Disasters
- Neighborhoods
- Movies

2. Generate ideas with a freewrite. Choose one of the topics from your topic bank and think about the points of similarities or differences. Write about the similarities or differences for ten minutes without stopping.

OR

Select a set of photographs that illustrates the similarities or differences between two topics. Write a caption, brainstorm comparable points, and freewrite about the photograph(s). Remember to ask, "What are the similarities or differences represented by these images?" and "What's the point?"

Focus Your Point

Read a prewrite you have generated for a comparison or contrast paragraph. Identify your audience and purpose. Annotate the text: Underline or insert words that suggest your values, opinions, or attitudes about the topics and their points of similarity or difference. State in a sentence or two the importance of each similarity or difference between the comparable topics. Generate one or more concrete examples for each comparable point. Finally, state the point of the comparison or contrast paragraph in one sentence.

AUDIENCE:

PURPOSE:

LIST OF CONCRETE EXAMPLES:

.....

WHAT'S THE POINT?

.....

.....

Generate and Organize Relevant Details

Using ideas you have recorded so far and the concept chart below, generate and organize details that support your point.

Concept Chart: Comparison/Contrast			
COMPARABLE TOPICS:	TOPIC A	LIKE OR UNLIKE	TOPIC B
1st attribute, point, basis of comparison		Like or unlike	
2nd attribute, point, basis of comparison		Like or unlike	
3rd attribute, point, basis of comparison		Like or unlike	

What's the point?

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....



Workshop



Write a Draft of Your Paragraph

Using the ideas you generated during the prewriting phase, compose a draft of your comparison or contrast paragraph. Return to the prewriting process at any time to generate additional details as needed. Use your own paper.



Revise Your Draft

Once you have created a draft of your comparison or contrast paragraph, read the draft and answer the questions in the “Questions for Revising a Comparison and Contrast” box that follows. Indicate your answers by annotating your paper. If you answer “yes” to a question, underline, check, or circle examples. If you answer “no” to a question, write the additional details in the margins and draw lines to indicate their placement. Revise your paragraph based on your reflection.



Workshop

Questions for Revising a Comparison and Contrast Paragraph:

- Have I chosen appropriately comparable topics? Have I clearly labeled each comparable point as a similarity or a difference?
- Have I made my point? Can I state my point in one sentence?
- Are my ideas logically and clearly ordered? Have I used strong transitions of comparison or contrast?
- Have I used concrete details to make my point?
- Have I included only the details that are relevant to my topic sentence?
- Have I used the following to make my ideas clear and interesting to my readers: vivid verbs and images, parallel language, controlled sentence structure, coordination, or subordination?



Proofread Your Draft

Once you have revised your paragraph, proofread to ensure precise usage and grammar, such as editing for proper use of a comma after introductory elements.

Grammar in Action: Commas after Introductory Elements

Commas are used after introductory elements: a word, phrase, or dependent clause that comes before an independent clause.

A dependent clause—an incomplete thought containing a subject and a verb—is signaled by a subordinating conjunction (*although, because, while...*) or a relative pronoun (*who, which, that...*).

An independent clause is a complete thought containing a subject and a verb.

- **Introductory word used with independent clause**

Similarly, Sandra twiddles her thumbs.

- **Introductory phrase used with independent clause**

In contrast, comedy's main purpose is to entertain.

- **Introductory dependent clause used with independent clause**

Although Bob and Tom are both baby boomers, they differ greatly in values and lifestyles.



Workshop

Practice 7

COMMAS AND INTRODUCTORY ELEMENTS

Edit the following sentences for proper use of a comma after an introductory element. Identify the type of introductory element used in each sentence.

Hint: To identify a dependent clause, look for subordinating conjunctions and relative pronouns immediately in front of a subject and verb. To identify an independent clause, underline subjects once and verbs twice; then check to be sure a subordinating conjunction or relative pronoun does not come first.

d. clause 1. Unlike those who are habitually late, Consuelo has received three merit raises for prompt, efficient work.

phrase 2. Like a fire hydrant opened full force, Deborah poured out her grief.

word 3. However, the traveling nurse program offers better pay and greater mobility.

phrase 4. The oldest child enjoyed the full attention of her parents; in contrast, the youngest child always had to share her parents' attention with her siblings.

Review

MY WRITER'S JOURNAL

Work with a classmate to give and receive feedback about your comparison and contrast paragraphs. Use the following form to record your thinking about your writing process for your comparison and contrast paragraph. Use the writer's journal on page 161 as a model for your own journal. Discuss the decisions you made as you wrote, and describe what you have learned by writing. Also, ask for advice about how to improve your paragraph.

MAIN IDEA:

.....

LOGICAL ORDER:

.....

RELEVANT DETAILS:

.....

EFFECTIVE EXPRESSION:

.....

.....

Writing Assignments

Considering Audience and Purpose

Study the set of photographs that show the similarities and differences between electric and gas vehicles. Write a letter to your United States Senator or to the editor of your local newspaper. In your letter call for support for either the electric or the gas vehicle. Explain the points of comparison that prove one better than the other.

Writing for Everyday Life

Assume that you have just experienced a life-altering event, such as a near-death experience, a graduation, a marriage, the birth of a child, a severe loss, or the breaking of a bad habit. You have been asked to talk about “Change” to a specific audience such as the Rotary Club, a civic group. Identify your audience and write a short speech in which you discuss three before-and-after comparable points. Allow your tone through word choice to reflect either sadness and regret or pride and encouragement.

Writing for College Life

Assume you are in a biology class and you read the following textbook question on the study guide for the final exam: “In what ways did the human skeleton change as upright posture and bipedalism evolved? Describe the changes by comparing the human skeleton and the skeleton of a quadruped such as a baboon.” – Campbell, Mitchell, and Reece. *Biology: Concepts and Connections*, 5th ed. 2005 Longman. p. 620.

Test what you already know about the subject by writing a paragraph. Identify the comparable points of similarities and/or differences between the two topics. Look up words in your dictionary as needed.

Writing for Working Life

Assume that you are applying for a management position at a local business or mid-sized company. You had the following positions and experiences, which are listed on your résumé: Treasurer, Student Government Association; Certified in various computer programs and software; Member of Toastmasters, a public-speaking organization. Write a paragraph in which you compare the skills you’ve developed with the skills needed at the job for which you are applying.



WANT A BETTER GRADE?
 For more practice with comparison and contrast, go to www.mywritinglab.com
 > Using Patterns of Organization to Develop Paragraphs > The Comparison and Contrast Paragraph.