

Compare and Contrast Essays

The first point to understand in preparing a comparative essay is the distinction between the words **compare** and **contrast**. Decide what your essay is trying to do based on these definitions:

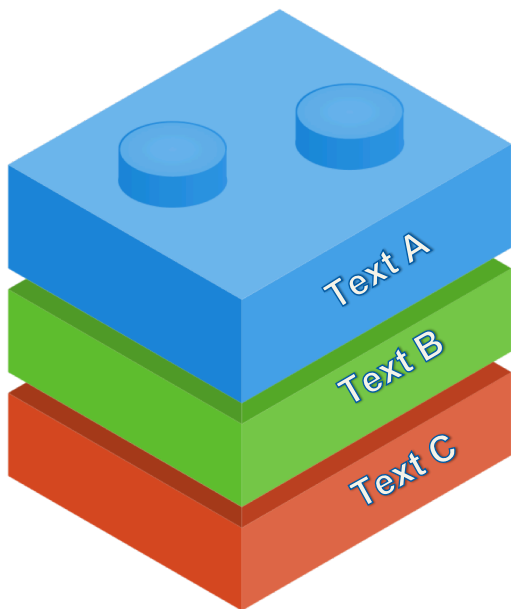
To compare means to analyze two or more topics or ideas while focusing on both their similarities and differences.

To contrast means to analyze two or more topics or ideas while emphasizing only the differences.

Structure

When organizing the content of a comparative essay, you have two options:

Pattern 1: The Block Method



Used with shorter papers, this method first presents all of the information related to Text A and then presents parallel information for Text B, and so on.

The drawback to this method is that the sections related to different texts can begin to seem like separate essays if the writer does not ensure that the same elements are discussed for all texts and does not refer back to earlier texts in the sections on later texts.

Pattern 2: The Point-by-Point Method

- Text A – Point of Comparison 1
- Text B – Point of Comparison 1
- Text C – Point of Comparison 1
- Text A – Point of Comparison 2
- Text B – Point of Comparison 2
- Text C – Point of Comparison 2
- Text A – Point of Comparison 3
- Text B – Point of Comparison 3
- Text C – Point of Comparison 3

Used in longer, more complex papers with more points of comparison, this method presents only one element related to Text A before shifting the discussion to how that same element operates in Text B, and so on. The discussion eventually returns to Text A when focusing on the next element all of the texts share in common.

The difficulty in this method is the constant need to transition back and forth between different texts, which, if not handled carefully, can make the paper seem like it is jumping around randomly. For this reason, it is usually best to stick to a specific sequence.

Example 1:

Thesis Statement – “**The imaginary world of Neverland in J.M. Barrie’s *Peter Pan* is a static environment where no one ever changes and where children may remain young and care-free indefinitely, while the complex social and political demands of Narnia in C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* compel the children of that story to ‘grow up’.**”

Block Method Structure:

Text A - *Peter Pan*

- Paragraph 1 – Point of Comparison 1: Moral Complexity: “**Tiger Lily is nobly good; Captain Hook is irredeemably bad.**”
- Paragraph 2 – Point of Comparison 2: Responsibility: “**Peter is a scamp who avoids responsibility.**”
- Paragraph 3 – Point of Comparison 3: Confronting Death: “**Only Hook dies, and his death is comical.**”

Text B – *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*

- Paragraph 4 – Point of Comparison 1: Moral Complexity: “**Mr. Tumnus betrays Lucy, but then makes amends.**”
- Paragraph 5 – Point of Comparison 2: Responsibility: “**Edmund is self-serving until he sees that his actions hurt people.**”
- Paragraph 6 – Point of Comparison 3: Confronting Death: “**When Aslan dies, the children must lead.**”

Point-by-Point Method Structure:

Point of Comparison 1: Moral Complexity

- Paragraph 1 – Text A: “**Tiger Lily is nobly good; Captain Hook is irredeemably bad.**”
- Paragraph 2 – Text B: “**Unlike the moral simplicity of *Peter Pan*, Mr. Tumnus betrays Lucy, but then makes amends.**”

Point of Comparison 2: Responsibility

- Paragraph 3 – Text A: “**Peter is a scamp who avoids responsibility.**”
- Paragraph 4 – Text B: “**By contrast, Edmund is self-serving until he sees that his actions hurt people.**”

Point of Comparison 3: Confronting Death

- Paragraph 5 – Text A: “**Only Hook dies, and his death is comical.**”
- Paragraph 6 – Text B: “**As opposed to *Pan*’s lighthearted treatment of death, when Aslan dies, the children must lead.**”

Note: The use of transitions between paragraphs enhances the paper’s flow.

Example 2:

Thesis Statement – “**Though many people fear its potential harm to the environment, nuclear power is actually a safer and more eco-friendly energy option than oil.**”

Block Method Structure:

Part A: Nuclear Power

- Point 1: Nuclear power requires little material for its production.
- Point 2: Nuclear power produces no greenhouse gases.
- Point 3: Nuclear power has low risk of environmental pollution.

Part B: Oil

- Point 1: Compared to nuclear power, energy derived from oil requires abundant material.
- Point 2: Unlike nuclear power, the burning of oil produces greenhouse gases.
- Point 3: Despite some risk with nuclear power, the risk of oil spills and train derailments is high.

Point-by-Point Method Structure:

- Point 1: Nuclear power requires little material for its production.
- Point 1: Compared to nuclear power, energy derived from oil requires abundant material.
- Point 2: Nuclear power produces no greenhouse gases.
- Point 2: Unlike nuclear power, the burning of oil produces greenhouse gases.
- Point 3: Nuclear power has low risk of environmental pollution.
- Point 3: Despite some risk with nuclear power, the risk of oil spills and train derailments is high.