

07 Assignment 03: The Compare-Contrast Essay

Overview

The Compare-Contrast essay seeks to explain and analyze the similarities and differences between two or more subjects, discussing what the subjects have in common and how they differ. It also seeks, however, to explain the essential *connection* between the two subjects, justifying their comparison. The subjects being compared have some sort of fundamental connection, which makes their comparison *relevant* and *important*.

To convey a sense of importance and relevance, compare-contrast essays often examine two or more different approaches to a given problem or two different examples of a specific phenomenon.

A compare-contrast essay discussing the careers and accomplishments of two different presidents, like Bush and Obama, or Washington and Lincoln, would present its audience with a great deal of essential connection between the subjects. Both people being examined were *presidents*, presumably with similar duties and powers; examining how they did their jobs and what they accomplished would be a valid and necessary comparison.

A more complicated task might be to compare the contrasting approaches of tax increases vs. spending cuts as a means to balance an organization (or government's) budget. Both subjects for comparison are approaches to solving a budget shortfall—that is their essential connection, which justifies looking at them side-by-side. Examining two different pieces of proposed legislation, like the recent healthcare overhaul vs. the plans put forth for reform in the 1990s, are also logical and relevant comparisons.

Subjects that are far apart conceptually are far more difficult to compare productively. A compare-contrast paper, for example, comparing two social-interest organizations—The Boy Scouts of America and the League of Women Voters—would be rather difficult to justify. While both organizations are clubs (in the broadest sense), they otherwise share very little in terms of mission, audience, and social function.

For this activity, you will compose a Compare-Contrast essay on one of the topics below. The essay, in addition to clearly analyzing the similarities and differences between the subjects, must also make a justifiable comparison; the subjects you choose to compare must share some sort of essential connection that makes comparing them an important and relevant task.

Basic Assignment Requirements

The Compare-Contrast essay must meet the following **formatting** requirements:

- Must be in MLA Manuscript Format
 - Have 1 inch top, bottom, right and left margins;
 - Times New Roman 12 font;
 - Running header with last name and page number;
 - MLA compliant title block on first page;
 - All content double spaced.

The Compare-Contrast essay must meet the following **content and mechanical** requirements:

- Must be at least 1250 words long;
- Must offer a clear and consistent analysis of the topic that outlines the basic similarities and differences of the things under discussion;
- Must be organized logically with clear topic sentences that make cogent claims of similarity and difference;
- Must provide adequate levels of detail and description to support the analysis;
- Contain a clear introduction, body, and conclusion that establishes the importance of the topic to the audience;
- Must contain none of the following major mechanical errors:
 - Run-on sentences
 - Fragments
 - Tense shifts
 - Possession errors
 - Capitalization errors
 - Subject-verb agreement errors
- Must conform to Standard English Grammar requirements for proofreading, usage, and spelling.

Assignment Prompts and Variations

Compare-Contrast Option 1

Write an essay comparing and contrasting two web sites that are popular with college-age users. As you select your topic, remember to choose subjects that share an essential connection of some sort. This connection might be in audience, concept, or basic functionality. You might choose two entertainment sites, like TMZ.com and E! Online, two social networks, like Facebook and MySpace, or two news sites, like FoxNews.com and CNN.com. Provide a thorough analysis of the similarities and differences between these two sites.

Compare-Contrast Option 2

Write an essay in which you compare and contrast your educational experience in two courses at Coppin State University. You may choose to analyze the courses' content, their structure and organization, the instructor and his or her teaching style, and the overall outcomes of the course for you, such as what you learned or took away from the experience of the class.

Compare-Contrast Option 3

Choose two people, real or fictional, that you feel have a significant impact on the lives of Coppin State University students, and write an essay considering how these two people are similar and different. You may wish to examine their personal qualities, their accomplishments, the obstacles they have overcome, and the overall level of impact they have on the Coppin community.

Comparison-Contrast Option 4 Prompt

Compose an essay in which you discuss the similarities and differences between two health problems or conditions that people living in Baltimore City might have. As you construct your essay, you may consider the causes of each condition, the symptoms suffered by those who have it, the resulting effects on the patient's lives, and treatment options / availability.

Invention and Generating Ideas

The methods of generating ideas discussed in chapter 5.1, *The Writing Process: Generating Ideas*, will be helpful in discovering similarities and differences in your two subjects. This chapter also provides some specific advice for generating ideas for compare-contrast essays.

Organizing a Writing Plan

There are two primary means of organizing compare-contrast essays, the "block" and the "point-to-point" scheme. Chapter 5.2, *The Writing Process: Organizing a Writing Plan*, offers a detailed discussion on each of these methods of organization.