

Comparison/Contrast Essays

A comparison and contrast essay is an important way of showing that you understand things that are either similar or different (or both). Comparison and contrast can also be used to describe things, define things, and analyze things or to make an argument. When writing a comparison and contrast essay, keep these points in mind:

- First, is the comparison fair?
- How am I going to do it?
- Why do we have to make a comparison?

MANY TIMES a writer must take a side, but instead of telling the reader, let the reader figure out the preference from the language used in the contrast: "let the language do its work."

There are also a few different ways of writing a comparison/contrast essay, for example:

1) Compare, then contrast (or vice versa).

Writers using a comparison/contrast structure might begin by discussing the ways in which mangoes are similar to papayas then they move to a description of the ways in which the two ideas are different. This method is probably the one used most commonly. One example could be:

- introduction
- Mangos and papayas are similar
- Mangos and papayas are different
- Conclusion

2) Taking the ideas one by one

Writers might compare and contrast ideas by treating the idea thoroughly before taking up the second one. This method is probably the one most students try first, but many evolve past it into something more flexible.

- introduction
- mangoes
- papayas
- conclusion

A structure like this one seems more focused on ideas being compared and contrasted than on the comparison and contrast itself. The similarities and differences between the ideas do not begin to emerge until the writer gets to the second idea.

Write only about the comparable and contrastable elements of each idea.

3) Writers might compare and contrast ideas by taking more important scientific elements and looking at their similarities and differences. This method requires real control over your subject.

- Introduction
- The characteristics of the trees (height, length, origins, seasons)
- The ways they are used (food, medicine, art)
- How they are sold or marketed
- Conclusion

(Note: focus only on those elements of ideas that are clearly comparable or contrasting!)