

# Comparison/Contrast Essays

## Chapter 7.

# Comparison/Contrast Essays

Please note that all the data and most part of the discussions provided in the following PPT slides are drawn from Oshima and Hogue (2006) *Writing Academic English* (4<sup>th</sup> ed.).

# Preview of Chapter 7

- In this chapter, we will discuss ...
  - what ‘comparison/contrast’ essays look like;
  - how we organize this type of essays:
    - It will be shown that this type of essays can be written with ‘point-by-point’ organization or ‘block’ organization.
- In so doing, we will also talk about ...
  - major transition signals that are frequently used to compare more than one issue, or to discuss contrast between them.

# Preview of Chapter 7 (cont'd)

- Major function of comparison/contrast essays
  - In a ‘comparison/contrast’ essay, you explain the similarities and the differences between two items.
  - Comparison and contrast is a very common pattern in most academic fields.

# Preview of Chapter 7 (cont'd)

- Examples of comparison/contrast essay question
  - A comparison/contrast essay is also a common type of essay test question, which include the following:
    - **Political science:** Compare the forms of government of Great Britain and the United States.
    - **American literature:** Compare the characters of Huck and Jim in Mark Twain's *Adventures of Huckleberry Fin*.
    - **Business:** Compare and contrast methods for promoting a new business, product, or service.

# Organization of Comparison/Contrast Essays

- Model essay: Comparison/Contrast Essay (pp.112–113)
  - Read the model essay on the differences, as well as the similarities, between Japan and the United States.
  - Then, try to answer the following writing technique questions (from p.113):
    - In which paragraph(s) are the similarities discussed? In which paragraph(s) are the differences discussed?
    - What is the function of paragraph 4?

# Organization of Comparison/Contrast Essays (cont'd)

- Two major ways for organizing comparison/contrast essays
  - The *first* key to writing a successful comparison/contrast essay is to organize it carefully.
  - There are two major ways we can organize this type of essay:
    - (i) **point-by-point organization**; and (ii) **block organization**.

# Organization of Comparison/Contrast Essays (cont'd)

- Point-by-point organization
  - One way to organize a comparison/contrast essay is to use ‘point-by-point’ organization, which is similar to the ‘logical division’ pattern discussed in Chapter 4.
  - Suppose that you want to compare two jobs; you might want to take the following steps.
    - First, make a list of factors that are important to you: i.e., salary, benefits, opportunities for advancement, workplace atmosphere, commuting distance from your home and so on.
    - Then, each factor, or point of comparison, is just like a ‘subtopic’ in a logical division essay.

# Organization of Comparison/Contrast Essays (cont'd)

- Instance of point-by-point organization
  - The list of factors for comparing two jobs, say X and Y, may be summarized as in the table on p.114.

# Organization of Comparison/Contrast Essays (cont'd)

- Writing an outline using the point-by-point organization
  - In your essay, each ‘point of comparison’ becomes the ‘topic of a paragraph’.
  - You can put the paragraph in any order you wish—perhaps in the order of their importance to you personally.
- Model: Point-by-Point Organization (p.114)

## I. Introduction

- **Thesis statement:** ‘One way to decide between two job offers is to compare them on important points.’

## II. Body

- A. Salary
- B. Benefits
- C. Opportunities for advancement
- D. Workplace atmosphere
- E. Commuting distance from home

## III. Conclusion

# Organization of Comparison/Contrast Essays (cont'd)

- Block organization
  - The other way to organize a comparison/contrast essay is to arrange all the similarities together ‘in a block’ and all the differences together ‘in a block’.
  - You could discuss either the similarities first, or the differences first.
  - You often insert a transition paragraph or transition sentence between the two blocks.
  - The model essay comparing Japan and the United States on pp.112–113 in fact uses this type of organization.

# Organization of Comparison/Contrast Essays (cont'd)

- Model: Block Organization (p.115)

## I. Introduction

- **Thesis statement:** One way to decide between two job offers is to compare them on important points.

## II. Body

### A. Similarities

1. Benefits
2. Commute distance from home

### B. Differences

1. Salary
2. Opportunities for advancement
3. Workplace atmosphere

## III. Conclusion

# Organization of Comparison/Contrast Essays (cont'd)

- More on block organization
  - The number of paragraphs in each block depends on the topic.
    - For some topics, you may write about all the similarities in a single paragraph.
    - For other topics, you may need to discuss each similarity in a separate paragraph.
    - The same is true for differences.
  - Of course, some topics may have one paragraph of similarities and several paragraphs of differences, or vice versa.
- Practice 1. Outlining a Comparison/Contrast Essay (p.115–16)—In-class exercise

# Comparison and Contrast Signal Words

- Comparison and contrast signals for a successful comparison/contrast essays
  - The *second* key to writing successful comparison/contrast essay is the appropriate use of ‘comparison and contrast signal words’.
  - These are words that introduce points of comparison and points of contrast.
  - It is not sufficient simply to describe each item that you are comparing.
  - Instead, you must refer back and forth to, for example, Job X and Job Y and use comparison and contrast signal words to show what is the same and what is different about them.
  - Of course, you should also use other transition signals such as *first*, *second*, *one ... another ...*, *the final ...*, *for example*, and *in conclusion*, in addition to these special ones.

# Comparison and Contrast Signal Words (cont'd)

- Practice 2. Using Comparison Signal Words, A (p.117)—In-class exercise

# Comparison and Contrast Signal Words (cont'd)

- Two groups of contrast signal words
  - Contrast signal words fall into two main groups according to their meaning.
  - The words in the first group show a relationship that is called ‘concession’.
  - The words in the second group show an ‘opposite relationship’.

# Comparison and Contrast Signal Words (cont'd)

- The first group of contrast signal words: **Concession**  
(unexpected result)
  - Concession signal words indicate that the information in one clause is not the result you expect from the information given in the other clause.
    - (1) **Although** I studied all night, I failed the exam.  
**Unexpected result**
  - Here, ‘my failing the exam’ is not the result you might expect from the information in the first clause: i.e., *I studied all night.*

# Comparison and Contrast Signal Words (cont'd)

- The second group of contrast signal words: **Direct opposition**
  - The second group of contrast signal words shows that two things are direct opposites.
  - With direct opposites, the signal word can introduce either piece of information.
    - (2) a. I am short, **whereas** my brother is tall.
    - b. My brother is tall, **whereas** I am short.
  - See the examples of the second group on the next slide.

# Comparison and Contrast Signal Words (cont'd)

- Practice 3. Using Contrast Signal Words, A (p.121)—In-class exercise

# Review

- The following are the important points covered in this chapter.
  - Comparison/contrast is a common pattern for writing about similarities and differences; it is used in all academic fields.
  - There are two common ways to organize a comparison/contrast essay.
    - In **point-by-point** organization,
      - you discuss each similarity and each difference in some other order—usually order of their importance—without grouping them into blocks.
      - you may discuss a similarity and then a difference, and then a similarity and then a difference.
    - In **block** organization, you first discuss all the similarities in a block and then all the differences in another block (Of course, you may begin with the block of differences).
  - Use comparison and contrast signal words to help your reader understand your points of comparison and contrast.