

Comparison/Contrast Essay

Purpose: To compare two, and only two, subjects that have some differences, but are essentially the same. Comparing soccer to golf is useless because of the vast differences. However, comparing soccer to rugby would make a more effective presentation because of their similarities. The goal is to explore the differences of the two subjects while illuminating the qualities of both.

Organization: There are two types of organization: point-by-point or block. Teachers may indicate a preference; otherwise, either method is acceptable. The outlines below will show the methods of development for the body paragraphs.

Block Outline (4 paragraphs)

- I. Introduction
- II. Subject A
 - A. Feature 1
 - B. Feature 2
 - C. Feature 3 (etc.)
- III. Subject B
 - A. Feature 1
 - B. Feature 2
 - C. Feature 3
- IV. Conclusion

Point-by-Point Outline (5 or more)

- I. Introduction
- II. Feature 1
 - A. Subject A
 - B. Subject B
- III. Feature 2
 - A. Subject A
 - B. Subject B
- IV. Feature 3
 - A. Subject A
 - B. Subject B (more paragraphs may be added as necessary)
- V. Conclusion

Strategies:

1. Determine your purpose:
 - a. To inform: your object here is to explain similarities and differences to your reader, perhaps because your reader knows one of the items you describe but not the other. (Use soccer as a basis to describe rugby.)
 - b. To persuade: In the process of your discussion you will explain why one of the items is preferable to the other.
 - c. To analyze: In your discussion of the two topics, you will draw conclusions about each one and show relationships between them which will provide your reader with new insights about the topics.
2. Determine organizational pattern.

Below is an example of block organization. Notice how the qualities of Lee are given and then the qualities of Grant are given in the same order.

It was a great tableau not merely because of what these two men did but also because of what they were. No two Americans could have been in greater contrast. (Again the staging was perfect.) Lee was legend incarnate—tall, gray,

one of the handsomest and most imposing men who ever lived, dressed today in the best uniform, with a sword belted at his waist.

Grant was—well, he was U. S. Grant, rather scrubby and undersized, wearing his working clothes, with mud-spattered boots and trousers and a private's rumpled blue coat with his lieutenant general's stars tacked to the shoulders. He wore no sword. The men who were with them noticed the contrast and remembered it. Grant himself seems to have felt it; years afterward, when he wrote his memoirs, he mentioned it and went to some lengths to explain why he did not go to this meeting togged out in dress uniform. (In effect, his explanation was that he was just too busy.)

-from *This Hallowed Ground*, by Bruce Catton

Below is an example of point-by-point development of body paragraphs.

Presently it is a popular occupation among the computer fraternity to compare their mechanism to the human brain. The conclusions are not disheartening—marvelous as the machines are, the brain seems still a good deal more marvelous. Like the mills of the gods, it rinds slow compared to the machines, but it grinds exceeding fine—it is original, imaginative, resourceful, free in will and choice.

The machine operates at a speed approaching that of light, 186,000 miles per second, whereas the brain operates at the speed at which impulses move along nerve fiber, perhaps a million times slower—but the machine operates linearly; that is, it sends an impulse of “thought” along one path, so that if that path proves to be a dead end the “thought” must back up to the last fork in the road and try again, and if the “thought” is derailed, the whole process must be begun again. The brain operates in some mysterious multipath fashion whereby a thought apparently splits and moves along several different paths simultaneously so that no matter what happens to any one of its branches there are others groping along.

Whereas even a transistorized computer has a fairly modest number of components, the brain, it seems, has literally billions of neurons, or memory-and-operation cells. To rival an average human brain, a computer built by present techniques would have to be about as big as an ocean liner, or a skyscraper. And even then it would lack the capacity for originality and free will. To initiate free choice in a machine, the operator would have to insert into its program random numbers, which would make the machine “free” but uncoordinated—an idiot.

-from *Stonehenge Decoded*, by Gerald S. Hawkins