

COMPARISON-CONTRAST ESSAYS

When you are assigned to compare and contrast different theories, or viewpoints, or events, or individuals, or processes, your entire paper should be devoted to describing and analyzing what your various subjects have in common (their similarities) and what sets them apart (their differences).

Your essay should discuss ways in which your subjects are similar-but-different, since similarities can exist for different reasons, or at different times, or to different degrees.

example: Both types of storms are feared because they are so destructive, but tornados affect only the places where they touch down while hurricanes cause destruction over a very wide area.

Your essay should discuss ways in which your subjects are different-but-the same, since differences can exist for different reasons, or at different times, or to different degrees.

example: The path of a hurricane can be tracked with some degree of accuracy, but it is almost impossible for meteorologists to predict where a tornado's funnel cloud will touch down.

Step 1: gather evidence

- Take notes in columns, designating one column for each subject, like this:

<u>Hurricanes</u>	<u>Tornados</u>
form in tropics over oceans	winds counterclockwise
season June to November	travels 20-40 mph
produce high tides, flooding	mostly occurs in Midwest
winds 70-200 mph	season hot summer weather

- Or, make a chart of shared qualities or characteristics, like this:

	<u>Hurricanes</u>	<u>Tornados</u>
causes		
speed of travel		
direction		
wind strength		
special features		

- Or, color-code similar features and different features, using markers or highlighters.

Step 2: make a point

Write a thesis statement that sums up the significance of the comparison-contrast you are going to support in the body of your paper.

Step 3: pick a recommended pattern

Essays that have lengthy separate descriptions of each subject are rarely successful. These essays don't actually get around to actively comparing and contrasting until the conclusion: too little too late.

Successful comparison-contrast essays usually rely on one of two tried-and-true patterns that enable the writer to compare and contrast throughout the entire essay. See below:

**ORGANIZE BY
GROUPING**

Introductory ¶ funneling to your thesis

Brief ¶ defining terms or providing relevant background information

Discuss subjects' similarities—the obvious similarities and the subtle or partial ones
(write as many ¶s as needed)

Discuss subjects' differences—the obvious differences and the subtle or partial ones
(write as many ¶s as needed)

Conclusion: evaluation/assessment of similarities and differences

**ORGANIZE
POINT-BY-POINT**

Introductory ¶ funneling to your thesis

Brief ¶ defining terms or providing relevant background information

Point A: mini comparison-contrast (one or more ¶s comparing and contrasting your 1st point)

Point B: mini comparison-contrast (one or more ¶s comparing and contrasting a 2nd point)

Point C: mini comparison-contrast (one or more ¶s of comparing and contrasting a 3rd point))

Etc.

Conclusion: evaluation/assessment of similarities and differences