



Tips for Writing a Compare-Contrast Paper

A 'compare and contrast' assignment asks you to examine multiple texts and the theories/ideas presented by the authors of those texts. Here are five elements required to write an effective paper responsive to this assignment:

1) Frame of Reference. This is the context within which you place texts you plan to compare and contrast; it is the umbrella under which you have grouped them. The frame of reference may consist of an idea, theme, question, problem, or theory. The texts you select will determine the frame of reference - not your own opinions. So, for example, if you want to compare how two writers critique social norms of masculinity, you will need to quote the writers/texts that discuss this idea and not spin out unsupported theories of your own.

2) Grounds for Comparison. This is the rationale behind your choice of the texts/authors. Why these particular texts/authors? What is it about these texts that makes for a strong, convincing compare-contrast?

3) Thesis. The grounds for comparison anticipate your thesis. Your thesis needs to convey your main argument, which necessarily follows from your frame of reference. The thesis depends on how the texts/authors actually relate to one another. Do they extend, corroborate, complicate, or further illuminate one another? In the most common compare-and-contrast paper—one focusing on both similarities and differences—you can indicate the precise relationship between A and B by using key words such as "whereas," "while," or "although" in your thesis. Here is a sample thesis statement illustrating these principles:

Whereas Lorber perceives patriarchy as just one aspect of sustaining the invisible social process of hegemonic gendered practices, Johnson sees patriarchy as the central force or power in constructing social oppression.

4) Organizational Scheme. Your introduction will include your frame of reference, grounds for comparison, and thesis. The assignment sheet explains the organizational scheme you need to use for this paper, which is called a point-by-point discussion/analysis. In point-by-point, you alternate points about text/author A with comparable points about text/author B.

5) Linking of A and B. All argumentative papers require you to link each point in the argument back to the thesis. Without such links, your reader will be unable to see how new sections logically and systematically advance your argument. In a compare-and-contrast, you also need to make links between A and B in the body of your essay if you want your paper to hold together. To make these links, use transitional expressions of comparison and contrast (similarly, moreover, likewise, on the contrary, conversely, on the other hand) and other vocabulary that is common to the texts.