

Writing Guide: **Comparison-Contrast Essay**

To **compare** is to examine **similarities**. To **contrast** is to examine **differences**.

In a **comparison-contrast essay**, a writer usually **compares and contrasts two subjects or topics in order to prove a point**.

This point is either stated or implied in a **thesis statement**, which is **a one-sentence statement of the main idea of an essay**.

Example 1: Essay That Emphasizes Similarities

Let's say you want to write an essay that compares and contrasts the poetry of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson. Ask yourself these questions: *How is the poetry of these two similar? How is it different? Which are more significant, the similarities or the differences?*

Let's say you decide that the similarities are more significant. You might want to fashion a thesis statement that looks something like this: ***The poems of Walt Whitman and Emily Dickinson share some obvious differences, but it is the similarities that reveal the most about a new, distinctly American intellectual spirit.***

The structure of the essay would look something like this:

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| Introduction: | One paragraph that introduces the subject and ends with the thesis. |
| Differences: | One or more paragraphs that examine differences. Probably one paragraph for each difference. |
| Similarities: | One or more paragraphs that examine similarities and analyze “new, distinctly American intellectual spirit.” Probably one paragraph for each similarity and one paragraph for “spirit.” |
| Conclusion: | One paragraph that sums things up. |

Example 2: Essay That Emphasizes Differences

Let's say you want to write an essay that compares and contrasts McDonald's and Taco Bell. You've thought hard about the two restaurants and have decided that you want to convince the reader that Taco Bell is superior to McDonald's. Your thesis statement might look like this: ***Taco Bell is a much better fast-food restaurant than McDonald's.***

The structure of the essay would look something like this:



- Introduction:** One paragraph that introduces the subject and ends with the thesis.
- Similarities:** Probably one paragraph that examines similarities: after all, they're both fast-food restaurants.
- Differences:** Paragraphs that examine differences and prove the superiority of Taco Bell. One paragraph for each difference.
- Conclusion:** One paragraph that sums things up.