


Write a Compare-Contrast Essay

Start Thinking

 Make a writing folder for your compare-contrast essay. Copy the questions in bold type, and put the paper in your folder. Write your answers as you think about and choose your topic.

- **Who will be my audience?** Will it be family? classmates? a teacher?
- **What will be my purpose?** Will it be to explain how my favorite hobby is like another? to amuse? to inform?
- **How will I publish or share my essay?** Will I publish it in a school magazine? read it aloud to my class? display it with a collage?

Choose Your Subjects

- 1 **Make a list** of three people, places, or things that interest you. For each, list one other person, place, or thing with which you can compare and contrast it.
- 2 **Discuss your ideas** with a partner. Which subject pair does your partner find most interesting? Why?
- 3 **Choose one pair** of subjects to write about. Ask yourself these questions about each pair. Write notes the way Kristen did. Then circle your topic.

- Which one do I know the most about?
- Which one will interest my readers the most?
- Which one will I enjoy writing about and sharing?

team owners and players	I can think of many differences but few similarities.
players and fans	I know about this topic—I'm both a player and a fan.
football fans and baseball fans	I know a lot about baseball but little about football.

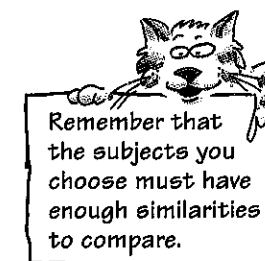


Stuck for an Idea?

Try one of these.

- two animals
- two musicians and their music
- you and a character in a movie or a book
- how teenagers behave alone and in groups

See page 498 for more ideas.



► Explore Your Subjects

- 1 Picture details about your two subjects.
- 2 Make a chart with two columns like the one below. List all the details you can think of that relate to your subjects. Cross out details that you have for one subject but not for the other.



Try doing a little research to find more details. If you can't find enough, choose a different topic.

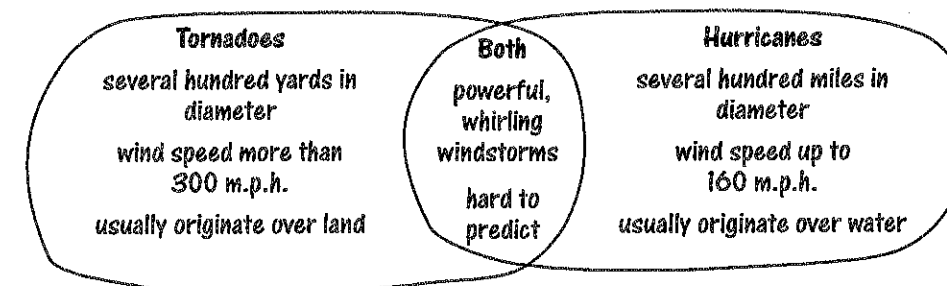
Tornadoes

~~Lifting force a result of updrafts~~
 powerful, whirling windstorm
 several hundred yards in diameter
 wind speed more than 300 m.p.h.
 usually originate over land
 hard to predict

Hurricanes

powerful, whirling windstorm
 several hundred miles in diameter
 wind speed up to 160 m.p.h.
 hard to predict
~~calm spot in center~~
 usually originate over water

- 3 Draw a Venn diagram. Use the diagram below as a model. Write details that tell differences in the outer circles. Write details that tell similarities where the circles overlap.



Stumped for Details?

Think of details in these categories.

- taste, touch, sound, smell, looks
- activities
- causes and effects
- strengths and weaknesses

See page 14 for other ideas for exploring a topic.

Organizing Your Essay

There are three basic ways to organize a compare-contrast essay. Once you have chosen one, stick with that method throughout your essay.

Discuss similarities, then differences. First, write about similarities in one or more paragraphs. Then write about differences in the paragraphs that follow. Here are parts of an essay that is organized this way.

Similarities

Both tornadoes and hurricanes are powerful, whirling windstorms that leave devastation in their wakes. They are both difficult to predict, because their patterns of movement change rapidly. . . .

Differences

Tornadoes and hurricanes, however, have more differences than similarities. Tornadoes usually measure several hundred yards in diameter, whereas hurricanes are several hundred miles in diameter. . . .

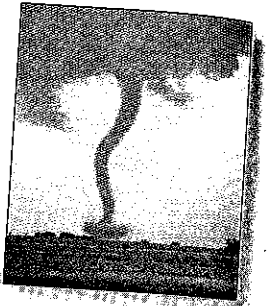
Use feature-by-feature order. Select two or three features your topics share, and compare and/or contrast these. The following paragraph compares and contrasts the wind speed of both tornadoes and hurricanes.

Tornadoes and hurricanes both have strong winds. Powerful, whirling winds can leave devastation in the wake of both storms. The winds of a tornado, however, are almost twice as strong as those of a hurricane. Tornado winds can exceed 300 miles per hour; hurricanes blow at speeds of just 130 to 160 miles per hour.

Focus Skill continued

Use **subject-by-subject order**. To use this method, describe features of one subject first and then features of the other subject. Each subject gets at least one paragraph. The first paragraph below tells about tornadoes. The second is entirely about hurricanes.

Tornadoes are powerful, whirling windstorms. They usually measure several hundred yards in diameter, and their winds can exceed 300 miles per hour. Most tornadoes travel a distance of 20 miles and last less than an hour. . . .



Hurricanes are also powerful, whirling windstorms. They measure several hundred miles in diameter. They blow at speeds of 130 to 160 miles per hour, and often travel hundreds of miles. They last for several hours or even days. . . .



Present your details in the same order for both subjects.

Think and Discuss Look at Kristen's final copy on page 485.

- Which type of organization did Kristen use?
- Why might she have chosen to organize her essay this way?

► **Plan Your Essay**

- 1 Decide what form of organization will best present the details of your essay.
- 2 Create an outline that arranges your details in that way.

📖 See page H34 for information about outlining.



Paragraphing Tip

Group sentences that tell about one main idea, such as similarities, differences, or one particular feature, in one paragraph. Begin a new paragraph for a new main idea.

Introductions and Conclusions

Write a strong introduction. Your introduction should do more than state the subjects you will compare and contrast. Use it to grab your reader's attention. Try drawing your readers in by beginning with a question, a brief story, or a surprising fact.

Weak Introduction

There are many different kinds of music. Two of my favorite kinds are folk and classical music. They have many similarities and differences.

Strong Introduction with Question

Do you have any favorite kinds of music? I love folk songs, but I also love classical music. Although you might think they are very different types of music, they share many startling similarities.

Write a powerful conclusion. A good conclusion should sum up the ideas in your essay and communicate a sense of completeness.

Weak Conclusion

Professional soccer players and professional basketball players have a lot in common, but they also have many differences. As you can see, I think soccer is the better sport.

Strong Conclusion

Although they play different games, professional soccer players and professional basketball players are very similar. Both spend long hours training, both shoulder responsibilities as role models, and both work hard to excel.

Think and Discuss

- What makes the strong examples above effective?
- Look over the introduction of Kristen's final copy. With a partner, rewrite her introduction to begin with a question.

▶ Draft Your Introduction

- 1 Write three introductions that begin your essay in different ways. Make sure each one indicates what you intend to compare and contrast.

I love fascinating details and observations. Try putting some in your introduction.



- 2 Choose the best introduction, keeping in mind your purpose and audience.

Focus Skill

Topic Sentences



Use transitional words and phrases (such as *similarly*, *in addition*, *on the other hand*, and *in contrast*) to help show likenesses and differences.

The sentence that expresses a paragraph's main idea is called its topic sentence. All the details given in a paragraph should relate to the topic sentence. Although it often comes first, the topic sentence can be placed wherever it fits best in a paragraph.

Here are paragraphs with topic sentences suited to each type of essay organization.

Similarities, Then Differences

Painting and photography have more similarities than you might think. They are both visual art forms. They both use color, light, and shadow to achieve a special effect. Painters and photographers often use people and everyday objects as subject matter.

One big difference between painting and photography is the equipment and tools each requires. The painter uses paints, brushes, and canvas, but the photographer uses a camera and film.

Feature-by-Feature Order

Both a vegetarian diet and a diet that includes meat offer ways to get protein. Vegetarians get protein from cheese and milk, eggs, nuts, and beans; meat eaters obviously get at least some of their protein from meat.

Subject-by-Subject Order

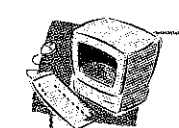
Radios have many benefits. They can be taken almost everywhere. Radios are available in many colors and sizes. Finally, with a flick of the dial you can listen to whatever kind of music suits your mood.

Think and Discuss

- What makes the topic sentences above effective?

Draft Your Essay

- 1 Write the topic sentence for each paragraph in the body of your essay.
- 2 Add details to fill out each paragraph.
- 3 Write a strong conclusion that sums up your essay.



Tech Tip

Set your computer so that it automatically indents the first line of each paragraph.



Evaluating Your Compare-Contrast Essay



▶ Reread your essay. Use this rubric to help you decide how to improve it. Copy the sentences that best describe your essay.

Loud and Clear!

- I chose two subjects that have something in common.
- My introduction states my subjects and hooks my reader.
- I compare or contrast corresponding details for each subject.
- I use one method of organization throughout my essay.
- My paragraphs are clear, with effective topic sentences.
- I use transitional words and phrases to help show likenesses and differences.
- I end my essay with a strong conclusion.
- There are very few mistakes in spelling, grammar, or punctuation.*

Sounding Stronger

- I chose two subjects that have something in common.
- My introduction could be more interesting.
- I don't always compare or contrast corresponding details.
- I slip from one method of organization to another.
- One or more paragraphs need a topic sentence.
- I need more transitional words and phrases to connect my ideas.
- My conclusion could be stronger.
- Mistakes make parts of my essay hard to follow.*

Turn Up Volume

- I chose two subjects that have nothing in common.
- My introduction is boring. I don't name my two subjects.
- I describe many details of one subject without describing corresponding details about the other subject.
- There is no real pattern of organization.
- The topic of each paragraph is unclear.
- There are no transitional words and phrases to connect ideas.
- My essay just stops. There is no conclusion.
- There are a lot of mistakes.*

See www.eduplace.com/kids/hme/ to interact with this rubric.