

# HOW TO COMPARE AND CONTRAST

## Lesson Objective

In this lesson, you will practice comparing (expressing similarities) and contrasting (expressing differences) in written English. Let's start with a brainstorming activity.

## Warm-Up

### A. Brainstorming

1. Think of two people (friends, family members, celebrities) who have some similarities (e.g., gender and age) and some differences (e.g., personality and nationality).
2. Label the Venn diagram on the next page by placing one name in each circle.
3. Use notes in point form to describe *character traits* of the two people you chose. If both people share a characteristic, put it in the middle where the circles overlap.

### B. Discussion

Discuss these questions with a partner.

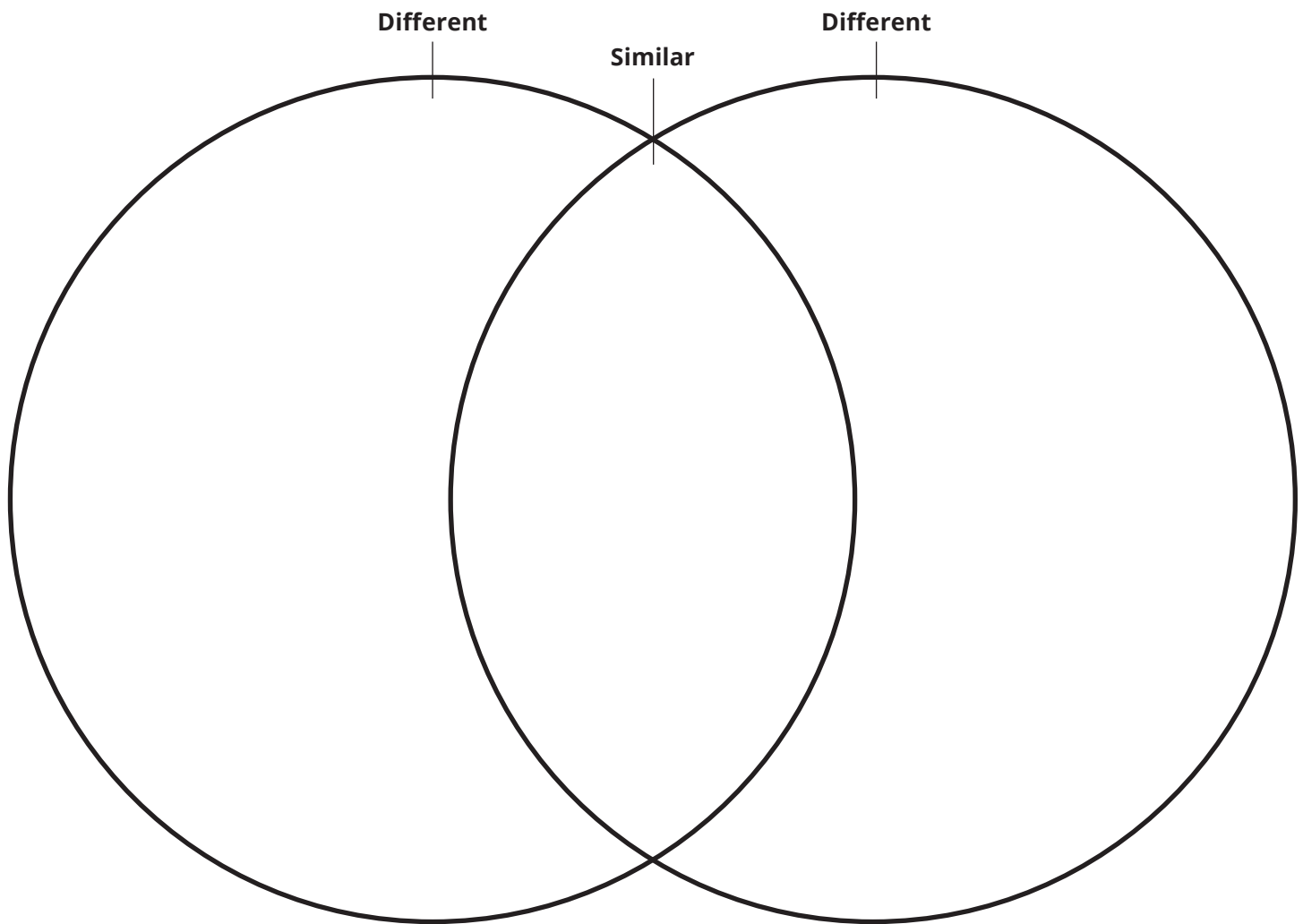
1. Who did you choose to write about, and why?
2. In what ways are these people similar?
3. In what ways are these people different?
4. How are your two people different from the two people your partner chose? Are there any similarities?

### C. Vocabulary Preview

Match these words to their correct definitions.

- |                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| _____ 1. overlap            | a) to share the same space at some point                         |
| _____ 2. point form         | b) a connection that both things or people share                 |
| _____ 3. relevant           | c) a change from one thing to another                            |
| _____ 4. strike a balance   | d) a short written format, not full sentences                    |
| _____ 5. transition         | e) to find a way to show or represent both sides                 |
| _____ 6. resemble           | f) to not be nearly as good or high in quality as something else |
| _____ 7. whereas            | g) to look similar to  |
| _____ 8. scrutiny           | h) in contrast (a conjunction)                                   |
| _____ 9. pale in comparison | i) important, mattering to someone                               |
| _____ 10. correlation       | j) a careful or detailed investigation                           |

## Venn Diagram



## Comparing and Contrasting in English

You will compare and contrast when you:

- write a compare-contrast essay
- respond to a compare-contrast text
- review products
- review books and movies
- compare theories or ideas
- describe personal experiences
- describe characteristics
- explain pros and cons

There are two main reasons for comparing and contrasting in written English.

### A. To Describe or Define

Comparing and contrasting can be used to describe certain qualities of two people, places, or things. For example, in a literary essay you may compare and contrast two characters. When deciding what to compare, think about the following questions.

- What's interesting?
- What's relevant?

### B. To Evaluate

Comparing and contrasting helps you make a choice or decision between two different options. For example, you could compare and contrast a book and movie to decide which one was better. You could also compare and contrast two vacation destinations to decide on a better option.

#### Did You Know?

The expression *there is no comparison* means that it's not worth comparing two things. In other words, *A* is so much better than *B* that *B* is not worth mentioning.

A: How was the cruise? Was it better than your last trip?

B: There is no comparison. We will never use any other cruise line.

#### Task 1

Imagine that you are going to compare two characters from your favorite movie. Think of three points about them to compare and contrast.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

#### Task 2

Think of two vacation spots that you could evaluate. What aspects would you compare and contrast in order to decide which place is the best destination? Make sure that your points are interesting and relevant.

##### My Vacation Choices

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_

##### Points to Compare

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_

## Compare and Contrast Thesis

### A. Writing a Thesis Statement

In every essay it is important to include a thesis statement in your introduction. Your thesis tells your reader your basic argument. In a compare-contrast essay, writing a thesis statement is quite simple. You can use one of the methods to the right:

Make sure that your choice is obvious in your thesis. Later you will learn about evaluating the similarities and differences.

#### Methods

1. strike a balance between the similarities and differences
2. focus mainly on the similarities
3. focus mainly on the differences

#### Example Thesis

The plot differences in *The Hunger Games* book and movie are minor; however, it is the different points of view that really set the book and movie apart.

### B. Compare-Contrast Adjectives

Here are some adjectives used for describing differences and similarities.

#### Major

- pronounced
- striking
- clear
- notable
- evident
- significant

#### Minor

- subtle
- insignificant
- minimal
- not obvious

### Task 3

Fill in the blanks to create thesis statements for compare-contrast essays. Use the topics you wrote about in Task 1 and 2 or choose other possible topics.

1. The similarities between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(adjective)
2. The differences between \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ are \_\_\_\_\_ .  
(adjective)
3. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have many similarities, but \_\_\_\_\_ .
4. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ have a few \_\_\_\_\_ differences; however, \_\_\_\_\_ .

## Compare and Contrast Patterns

There are a few different patterns you can choose from when writing compare and contrast essays. It is a good idea to choose one before starting an outline and writing an introduction.

### Example

Imagine that you are going to write an essay comparing New York City and Los Angeles. You are going to evaluate these cities to decide which is a better destination for a honeymoon. Here are three possible ways to organize this compare-contrast essay.

### A. Block Pattern A

#### COMPARE THEN CONTRAST

Start with **all of the similarities** of New York and L.A. These go in paragraph 2 (after your introduction).

Write **all of the differences** between New York and L.A. These go in paragraph 3.

Decide which is the best destination for the newlyweds, and explain why. This is your final paragraph.

### B. Block Pattern B

#### COMPARE AND CONTRAST IN CONCLUSION

**Describe New York** as a travel destination in paragraph 2.

**Describe L.A.** as a travel destination in paragraph 3.

Compare and contrast New York and L.A., in paragraph 4, and decide the best destination for the newlyweds.

### C. Point-By-Point Pattern

#### COMPARE AND CONTRAST BY ITEM

In this type of essay, you compare and contrast one point at a time.

For example, compare and contrast **weather** for both places in paragraph 2.

Compare and contrast **cost** in paragraph 3.

Compare and contrast **sites to see** in paragraph 4.

Identify the best destination based on a summary of these items in paragraph 5.

## Compare and Contrast Patterns cont.

### Task 4

In the introduction of a compare and contrast essay, identify your organizational pattern for your reader. This is a road map statement. You will not write, *I'm going to write an essay in block pattern style A*. What could you write?

Write a road map sentence to go with patterns B and C on the previous page. Road map A has been completed for you as a model.

**Note:**

Your road map statement may or may not be combined with your thesis. In your introduction, you must tell the reader your main point(s) and include a brief road map so that your teacher knows what to expect.

### Road Map Sentences

A. *By examining all of the similarities of New York and L.A., and then reviewing the differences,*  
*it will be possible to see why honeymooning in the east is a better option for newlyweds.*

B. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

C. \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Showing Relationships

You probably already know a few different transition words to use for comparing and contrasting. Here is a reference page with examples to help you add variety to your writing. Look at the examples to see how these words and phrases are used in different sentence positions.

### A. Words and Phrases for Comparing

- just as
- likewise
- also
- similarly
- x resembles y in that
- x is similar to y because
- just like
- in a related way
- by the same token
- in a similar fashion
- at the same rate
- in the same manner/way

#### Examples

1. Just as Wendy fell in love unexpectedly, her sister found the man of her dreams in a surprising way.
2. The Beatles are popular in Japan in the same way as they are in the UK and America.
3. The book has a sad ending. Likewise, people were sobbing at the end of the movie.
4. My mother wanted what was best for me. Similarly, my father always made sure I went to the best schools.
5. Australia resembles New Zealand in that they both have tropical coastlines.

### B. Words and Phrases for Contrasting

- unlike
- but
- in a different way
- in contrast
- whereas
- while
- as opposed to
- no relation between
- there's no comparison
- in comparison
- differ from
- more than
- less than
- on the contrary
- however
- although
- despite
- conversely
- nevertheless

#### Examples

1. However, Toronto can be very smoggy in the summertime.
2. On the contrary, the book went into too much detail.
3. The preschool offers free lunches. In comparison, the early years center offers an affordable meal plan.
4. Unlike the outdoor rink, the indoor rink gets cleared every hour.
5. Everything is within walking distance here, whereas we had to take public transit at our old place.

## Task 5

Read through the examples in Parts A and B. Circle all of the words and phrases that are used for comparing and contrasting.

## 3

## Compare and Contrast Model Text

### Task 7

Read the model text. Identify the thesis and road map statement, and underline the words and expressions used to compare, contrast, and evaluate.

#### APPLES TO ORANGES

They say an apple a day keeps the doctor away. What about an orange? Both apples and oranges have nutritional benefits, but only one comes out on top. By comparing and contrasting the vitamins, minerals, and sugar content in these two fruits, it is possible to determine which one should be consumed on a daily basis.

Most people know that oranges are a great source of Vitamin C. Vitamin C is important for our immune systems. A single orange has 110% of your required daily intake. That's about eight times more Vitamin C than a medium-sized apple. But Vitamin C isn't the only vitamin we need. Both apples and oranges contain Vitamin B-6. This vitamin is important for brain development. Oranges offer slightly more B-6 than apples.

Apples and oranges also contain important minerals. They both contain about the same amount of potassium. This is necessary for maintaining blood pressure. Calcium is another important mineral. A single orange contains about 6% of the calcium you

need in a day, whereas apples contain almost none. Apples, on the other hand, are high in quercetin. This is a cancer-fighting antioxidant that oranges lack.

Apples and oranges both contain natural sugars. A medium-sized orange has about 12 grams of sugar, while an apple has about 19 grams. On the other hand, more people drink orange juice than eat oranges. Drinking juice doesn't require the effort of peeling. Orange juice, like apple juice, is very high in sugar. It takes two-four oranges to make a single cup of orange juice. Unlike apple juice, many people consume orange juice every day. Juice that is high in sugar can cause people to gain weight.

Apples are a healthy snack and are easy to grab on the go. Oranges, though they require peeling, are also very good for you. Side by side, in fact, oranges offer more nutritional benefits than apples. If you eat an orange a day, you'll get 100% of your required Vitamin C as well as other important minerals. Choosing orange juice out of convenience, however, is not a wise choice. Stick with an orange a day to keep the doctor away.

## Comprehension Check-In

Work with a partner and answer the following questions based on the lesson so far.

1. Why is a Venn diagram useful for a compare-contrast essay?
2. What are the two main reasons for comparing and contrasting in written English?
3. What does *there is no comparison* mean?
4. What do the words *conversely*, *nevertheless*, and *however* have in common?
5. What are three different ways of organizing compare and contrast essays?
6. What is a road map statement?
7. What does a writer do in the conclusion of a compare and contrast essay?

## Writing Challenge

Choose a topic for a compare and contrast essay. After you choose two people, places, or things, make sure to come up with a narrowed-down thesis with a road map for your reader. Brainstorm, outline, and write a first draft of a compare-contrast essay. Review the model essay on page 9 for guidance.

### Suggested Topics:

- Two languages
- Two parents
- A book and a movie
- Two friends
- Two vacation destinations

### Example Thesis and Road Map:

English and French are both difficult languages to learn. By analyzing the similarities and differences between these two languages, we can determine why English is the more difficult second language for a Spanish native speaker.

## A Checklist

### AFTER WRITING YOUR ESSAY

- ☐ Did I brainstorm the similarities and differences?
- ☐ Did I come up with an interesting (not obvious) topic?
- ☐ Did I include a thesis and road map in my introduction?
- ☐ Did I choose a pattern for organizing my essay?
- ☐ Did I use transitional words and phrases for comparing and contrasting?
- ☐ Did I strike a balance between differences and similarities?
- ☐ Did I provide an evaluation?

Share your first draft with a partner. Give each other suggestions for revisions based on the checklist. Then write a second draft and show it to your teacher.