

Responding to Comparison/Contrast through Writing: A Comparison/Contrast Essay

Two-sentence summary: If time and topic allow, a comparison/contrast essay is a great format for helping students think deeply about two ideas or concepts with multiple similarities and differences. This type of essay has four-parts -1) an introduction to topics, 2) a focus on similarities, 3) a focus on differences, and 4) a conclusion--, and students should be given both an opportunity to compose a rough draft and an opportunity to revise and edit before composing a clean and final copy.

Background knowledge needed: Students expected to write something lengthy, like an essay, need a lot of support before they begin the writing process. First, students should see an example essay on a different topic, and they should discuss the organization techniques used in the example (purposes of paragraphs, use of transition words, effectiveness of the introduction and conclusion). Second, students should be given time to brainstorm their topics, to plan their essay on a graphic organizer, and to discuss their brainstorm with others before writing a rough draft. Third, students should be given time to share and discuss their rough drafts meaningfully before they compose a finished essay.

A "map" for this type of essay	A Good Comparison/Contrast Essay:
Part 1: An introduction to the two topics being written about.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uses subjects that have enough in common to be compared and or contrasted. • Serves a purpose-either to help readers make a decision or understand the subjects being compared and/or contrasted. • Presents several important, parallel points of comparison/contrast. • Arranges points in a logical organization.
Part 2 (or 3): A focus on the two topics' most interesting similarities.	
Part 3 (or 2): A focus on the two topics' most interesting differences.	
Part 4: A conclusion to the essay.	

Comparing/Contrasting: During pre-write, encourage students to avoid the simple and obvious comparisons (one is a man, the other is a woman, etc) and to search for interesting similarities and differences. Often students will find comparable concepts that are "kind of similar, but kind of different," and they should be encouraged to decide if it's more similar or more different.

Differentiating Instruction Ideas: Thought #1: There's nothing wrong with creating a whole class brainstorm that can be seen by all students, then asking students to write their own individual essays. Thought #2: This type of essay is certainly very formulaic. Some students need this type of formula to be able to complete the assignment, but you may have students who don't. Encourage your students who feel stifled by the formula to keep the formula's requirements but to create as many paragraphs as they need.

A thought on the writing task: Teachers, write your own comparison/contrast essay on a topic that's personally interesting. Be willing to share it with your students when introducing this format of writing.

A Sample Compare/Contrast Essay

discuss this author's techniques with a friend

Edison & Franklin

Today I am going to compare two great inventors from our past: Thomas Edison and Benjamin Franklin. You would be hard-pressed to find any elementary-aged student who didn't recognize these two names, but in case you don't, here is a fast introduction. Thomas Edison lived from 1847 to 1931; he is most famous for inventing the light bulb. Benjamin Franklin lived from 1706 to 1790, and he is credited with discovering electricity.

Both men were inventors, and both were born in the United States. As children, both Franklin and Edison had limited schooling, which didn't seem to affect how smart they became later on. Both inventors are said to have self-taught themselves mostly through their love of reading. They are each credited with dozens of inventions that are still used today. Franklin and Edison were both interested in electricity, and I think they would have had a lot to talk about if they had ever met face-to-face.

They were different too though. They lived in very different times. While Benjamin Franklin discovered electricity, it was still such a new thing that he didn't do much with it afterwards. Instead, he put his inventing energy into other cool things like swim-fins and bifocals and musical instruments. Edison was mostly about electricity all the time. His inventions and discoveries all required electrical currents: light bulbs, microphones, phonographs, fluoroscopes, etc. They had different religions too. Edison's religious beliefs have been said to be that of the "Free Thinkers," which means he believed science and logic should be taken into account when explaining religion. Franklin's parents wanted him to be a very religious person, but when he discovered deism, he began to move away from organized religion.

I have tried to show you how Thomas Edison and Benjamin Franklin were similar and different in this essay. Oh, another difference! While Benjamin Franklin ended up on the hundred dollar bill, Edison never did, but he ended up with a lot more of those bills in his pocket!

- How could this writer's introduction have shown more personality?
- Which paragraph seems more thought out? Paragraph #2 or paragraph #3?
- How could the ending been stronger?

Where might *transitions* like these have helped this essay?
like, similar to, also, unlike, similarly, in the same way, likewise, again, compared to,
in contrast, in like manner, contrasted with, on the contrary, however, although, yet,
even though, still, but, nevertheless, conversely, at the same time, regardless,
despite, while, on the one hand