



Writing: Comparison and Contrast

Very often, a writing assignment will require you to **compare and contrast** two things, places, or people. In your history class, you might be asked to compare and contrast the Greek and Roman empires; in your biology class, you might be required to compare and contrast DNA and RNA. Comparing and contrasting is a process we all do every day. This table shows some purposes for comparing and contrasting, along with examples of each purpose.

Purpose	Examples
To determine the superiority of one thing over another	Decide which car to buy by comparing features. Persuade others to vote for a political candidate by contrasting her plans with her opponent's plans.
To explain something that is unknown by comparing it to something that is known	Explain what a barometer is by comparing it to a thermometer, but explain that it measures atmospheric pressure instead of temperature. Describe how an electric car works by contrasting its function with that of a gasoline-powered car.
To show that two apparently similar things are in fact quite different or to show that two apparently dissimilar things are quite similar	Discover that two very different cultures have some important things in common. Show how an author's new book or a musical group's new album is surprisingly different from the last one.
To show how something or someone has changed	Contrast how a favorite holiday was celebrated when you were a child with how that holiday is celebrated now. Compare and contrast Haiti before and after the earthquake in 2010.

However, there is one thing to keep in mind: With comparison and contrast, the purpose is not just to point out similarities and differences but also to persuade, explain, or inform. Think about comparison and contrast as a method of development—not as a purpose for writing.