

Writing Handout E-9:

Comparison (Contrast) Essay Guidelines

A comparison-contrast essay examines two or more objects. The comparison shows how they are alike; the contrast shows how they differ. The following steps provide a guide for a successful essay.

1. Be sure the subjects are similar

Your subjects must belong to the same general group (cars, for example) for a logical comparison.

2. Present a clear thesis

Thesis should name subjects being compared and contrasted; indicate whether the essay is focusing on similarities (compare), differences (contrast) or both; and state the main point of comparison or contrast.

3. Select the points to be discussed

Decide which aspects to compare and/or contrast.

4. Select the organizational pattern

There are two basic patterns: block and point by point. Suppose you are comparing two restaurants for price, food, and atmosphere.

Block

Restaurant #1 (price, food, atmosphere)

Restaurant #2 (price, food, atmosphere)

Point by point

Price (restaurant #1 and #2)

Food (restaurant #1 and #2)

Atmosphere (restaurant #1 and #2)

5. Use clear transitions

Transitions make it clear to the reader the points being compared and contrasted (if necessary, ask a ASC instructor for transitions handout).

6. Draw a conclusion

After you have made your comparisons, make a statement of your conclusions about the comparison and/or contrast.

Note to students: The following essay is a sample to illustrate format. Course instructors have copies. Duplication or near duplication would be regarded as plagiarism.

Comparison (Contrast) Sample – point-by-point comparison

Title:

Do not underline, italicize, or boldface your own title. Note the use of the colon between the title and subtitle.

Introduction: The introduction clearly states the similar subjects (bears) that are going to be compared and contrasted.

Body paragraphs: The first three paragraphs in this point-by-point format compare the similarities of the two bears: solitary nature, size, and sleeping patterns.

Body paragraphs: The writer uses transition words (bold) to introduce each new comparison in the three body paragraphs.

Body paragraph: In the last body paragraph, the writer again uses transition words to introduce the contrasts between the two bears.

Conclusion: After comparing and contrasting the two bears, the writer states

a conclusion.

Big Bruins: Brown and White

One is the largest of its kind and the largest of all land dwelling meat-eaters. The other's diet is more than ninety-nine percent meat, and it is larger than all but one of its kind. Both are naturally peaceful, but if provoked, neither would lose a fight with any other land carnivore, including the great cats. The Alaskan brown bear and the polar bear share similarities and demonstrate differences.

One comparison between the bears is that the males (boars) are usually solitary animals. Except for a month during the mating season, mature boars live alone. Females (sows) raise cubs (one to four) by themselves and occasionally must protect their young against the males. The lone boar Alaskan brown bear usually “stakes out” a territory of twelve to fifteen square miles while the male polar bear may travel hundreds of miles on ice floes. Rarely, polar bears migrate in herd fashion. They are the only bears to exhibit this behavior.

Size is **another** point of comparison. An adult polar bear may reach eight feet in length and weigh more than 1,300 pounds. His Alaskan counterpart can be over nine feet and weigh more than 1,500 pounds. Sightings of Alaskan browns that weigh more than a ton are rare but have been documented. Their size does not inhibit their mobility as both can run at a speed of 25 mph.

One comparison will help to clarify a popular misconception. Neither bear hibernates. The polar bear is very active during the long, dark, winter in the Arctic. Brown bears, like all other bears, sleep for many hours during the winter but they do rise, move around, and eat any readily available food.

Apart from the obvious difference in color, the bears' dietary preferences present the greatest contrast between them. The Alaskan brown bears are omnivores; they eat virtually anything. They delight in ground squirrels, mice, and other small mammals but are adept at killing and consuming any land animal in their range. Browns also possess excellent fishing skills. When live prey is in short supply, they can subsist on nearly any vegetation or even carrion. Polar bears are nearly one hundred percent carnivorous. Only extreme hunger or injury compels them to eat anything other than meat. They are crafty hunters and have been spotted covering their black noses as they stealthily approach a wary seal in their all white (snow) environment. Unlike most Alaskan brown bears, polar bears show no fear of men.

Alaskan brown bears and polar bears are among the most magnificent land animals on our planet. An understanding of them begins with observing and acknowledging their basic **similarities and differences.**

- Dave Bardsley