

## Using the Rhetorical Form Comparing and Contrasting

### What is comparing and contrasting?

- Comparing means to look at **similarities** between two things.
- Contrasting means to look at **differences** between two things.
- Note 1: we are talking about **two things**, not three or four (which would be division and classification).
- Note 2: the TWO things need to come from the **same class of thing** and places **equal emphasis on both things**.

### When should comparing and contrasting be used?

- Use comparing and contrasting to discover something such as which product is a **better value** (Product A or Product B).
- Use comparing and contrasting to **understand a complex topic**. For example, anthropologists study Neanderthals to better understand how *Homo Sapien Sapien* (modern day humans) evolved larger brains and more complex social customs.
- Use comparing and contrasting to better **understand personal preferences**. For example, after watching a popular film, one person may argue that it was an excellent film while another person argues the film was poorly made. Comparing and contrasting allows us to better understand WHY we thought the film was wonderful.

### How do I use comparing and contrasting in writing?

You can use comparing and contrasting in writing by:

1. (clearly identifying the subjects that will be compared and contrasted)
2. explaining the basis of the comparing and contrasting
3. stating the purpose of using this method and setting parameters for the catalog of similarities and differences.

### A student writer's example:

Recently I saw a bumper sticker that read, "It used to be wine, women, and song, now it's beer, the old lady, and TV." Much truth may be found in this comparison of single and married lifestyles. When my husband and I used to date, for example, we'd go out for dinner and drinks and then maybe see a play or concert. Our discussions were intelligent, often ranging over global politics, science, literature, and other lofty topics. He would open doors for me, buy me flowers, and make sure I was comfortable and happy. Now, three years later, after marriage and a child, the baby bottle has replaced the wine bottle, the smell of diapers wipes out the scent of roses, and our nights on the town are infrequent, cherished events. But that's all right. A little bit of the excitement and mystery may be gone, but these intangible qualities have given way to a sturdy, dependable trust in each other and a quiet confidence about our future together.

This handout is a quick reference chart about when and how to use comparing and contrasting. Some details have been taken directly from *The Prose Reader*, edited by Flachmann and Flachmann, 10th edition.

*This handout was created by Crystal Brownell*

## How do I organize a comparing and contrast essay?

Generally speaking, two methods are used to organize a comparing and contrasting essay. Sometimes the methods are both used at the same time. One method is not better than the other; it's a matter of what you wish to highlight in the essay and which method is easier and more practical for your purpose.

- Block Method helps the reader focus on the two items themselves.
- Point-by-Point Method helps the reader focus on specifications about the two things.

## Spotlight Writing Skills: Using Transitions

**In order to not confuse your reader when switching between topics, be sure to use lots of transitions. Transitions can be keyword (such as Car A and Car B above) or also transitional phrases and words such as "in contrast, similarly, differently" etc. Consult the chart below for some transition words if you feel stuck.**

### Contrast Transition Words –Connecting two things by focusing on their differences.

- after
- although
- and yet
- at the same time
- but
- however
- in contrast
- nevertheless
- nonetheless
- notwithstanding
- on the contrary
- on the other hand
- otherwise
- though
- yet

### Similarity Transition Words –Connecting two things by suggesting that they are in some way alike.

- by the same token
- in like manner
- in similar fashion
- here
- in the same way
- likewise
- Wherever

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