

Bonus 6

Comparison and Contrast

See *Webster's New World Student Writing Handbook*, Fifth Edition, Chapter 8, Comparison and Contrast, for details about the characteristics of a good comparison-and-contrast paper, the process for writing a comparison and contrast—including prewriting, writing, and revising—and an additional model comparison-and-contrast paper for the social sciences.

On this Web page, you will find the following samples with their respective analyses:

- Sample Comparison and Contrast for English
- Sample Comparison and Contrast for Science
- Sample Comparison and Contrast for Mathematics
- Sample Comparison and Contrast for the Workplace
- Sample Technical Comparison and Contrast

The comparison-and-contrast sample for the social sciences appears in Chapter 8, Comparison and Contrast.

Sample Comparison and Contrast for English

The following single-paragraph paper was developed for a drama class. The assignment asked students to prepare an introductory paragraph to accompany illustrations of period costumes.

His and Hers Clothing

Over the centuries, as men's clothing has changed, so has women's. When men wore hats for dress, so did women. While men's hats were generally the stereotypical black top hats, women's were plumed, flowered, veiled, broad-brimmed, and bright. When men wore celluloid stand-up collars, women wore high-necked dresses. Even though the men's collars were all alike, women's were decorated with lace, buttons, and jewelry. When men wore gloves, so did the women, not for warmth but as part of the coordinated whole. When men wore high-topped,

high-buttoned shoes, women wore the same with a high heel added. Although most shoes were black, the women's sported pointed toes and stitched or cut patterns. So, while the dress of men and women has made simultaneous changes, the women's fancier details added femininity.

ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLE COMPARISON AND CONTRAST FOR ENGLISH

The preceding comparison-and-contrast paragraph illustrates some of the characteristics discussed in this section:

- The topic sentence, the first in the paragraph, establishes the subject and the comparison.
- The general organization is part by part as the writer talks first about men's hats and then women's, next about men's collars and then women's. (A whole-by-whole organization would have required the writer to talk about men's apparel and then, when he finished that, to talk about women's apparel.)
- The specific order is spatial—from head (*hat*) to foot (*shoes*).
- As the writer compares the simultaneous changes, he also points out some specific differences, always showing the women's apparel as fancier, more decorative.
- The transitions clarify the change, especially with words such as *when* and *while*. Other transitions emphasize the more decorative women's apparel, words such as *even though* and *although*.
- The sentence structure maintains the balance of the comparison. Equal numbers of sentences apply to each subtopic in the paragraph.
- The conclusion ties together the comparison and sets out the contrast.

Sample Comparison and Contrast for Science

As part of a laboratory experiment, students tested the flammability of various substances. Each student reported on a part of the experiment. The student whose paper follows compared the flame resistance of three fabrics common in clothing.

A Comparison of Flame Resistance among Fabrics

In the process of determining flame resistance among three common fabrics, the experimenter carefully measured two controlled variables: the time the fabric was exposed to flame and the distance of the fabric from the flame. As a result, all test measurements were consistent. Under

these controls, three fabrics were tested: polyester, cotton, and wool. Results indicated that the least flame-resistant fabric was polyester. Within 30 seconds' exposure to the flame, the polyester sputtered, melted, and then extinguished itself, leaving a blackened, charred sample. The second least flame-resistant fabric was cotton. It scorched badly when exposed to flame, but it did not burn unless held in the flame for a minimum of 45 seconds. The most flame-resistant fabric was wool. It would not burn unless held steadily in the flame for more than one minute. The results of this test suggest that those people who plan to be near open flame, such as a campfire, would be safest wearing wool.

ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLE COMPARISON AND CONTRAST FOR SCIENCE

Because the science paper is typically very different from an English or social sciences paper, the preceding sample merits attention, especially in terms of the following specifics:

- The topic sentence, which appears first, indicates the basis of the comparison—a laboratory test. Because of the nature of a science paper, it must account for the testing process, even if only briefly, as in this paragraph.
- The general organization follows the whole-by-whole pattern, giving all details for one fabric before moving to the next.
- The internal pattern of organization follows an order of importance, from the least flame-resistant fabric to the most.
- Each comparison includes a one- or two-sentence summary of test results as a basis for comparison.
- Vocabulary and sentence structure are appropriate to the subject and the audience.
- Transitions move the reader smoothly through the organization, especially with words such as *least*, *next*, *more*, and *most*.
- The report maintains the third-person point of view by referring, appropriately, to *this experimenter*.
- The conclusion clarifies the comparison by extending the meaning of the test results to daily living.

Sample Comparison and Contrast for Mathematics

A clothing designer wanted a pattern spaced on a length of fabric in geometric sequence. Math students compared arithmetic and geometric sequences. The following is one response:

Arithmetic and Geometric Sequences

An arithmetic sequence has numbers arranged so that each number in the list has the same difference between it and the one before. For instance, an arithmetic sequence can be 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, and the difference between any number and the previous number is three. Another arithmetic sequence can be 2, 6, 10, 14, 18, and the difference between any two adjoining numbers is four. On the other hand, a geometric sequence has numbers arranged so that each number in the list is multiplied by a constant value to get the next number in the list. For instance, a geometric sequence can be 3, 6, 12, 24, 48, where the constant multiple is two. Another geometric sequence can be 4, 16, 64, 256, 1024, where the constant multiple is four.

ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLE COMPARISON AND CONTRAST FOR MATHEMATICS

In comparing arithmetic and geometric sequences, the writer used the following techniques:

- The first part of the paragraph explains arithmetic sequence and gives two examples.
- The comparison is introduced by the phrase, *on the other hand*.
- The second part of the paragraph explains geometric sequence and gives two more examples, thus showing readers the difference between the two kinds of sequences.

Sample Comparison and Contrast for the Workplace

As part of a study on advertising, students compared advertising campaigns from competitive companies. The following four-paragraph paper compares three mail-order clothing companies.

A Comparison of Leading Clothing Catalogs

Mail-order catalogs generate big business in the clothing industry. As a result of direct-to-the-door competition, catalogs have become subjects of intense study in terms of advertising techniques. Three such catalogs, apparently equally successful in their respective marketing campaigns, embody significant similarities while at the same time illustrating astounding differences.

Each of the three catalogs uses only full-color photographs. No black and white photographs or line drawings appear in any of them. The paper quality, nearly equal in all three, suggests a

“slick” advertisement. All catalogs feature high-fashion items, sportswear, lingerie, and limited footwear. In every case, the item descriptions carry typical advertisers’ buzzwords, obviously selected to give the product the best image without obvious misrepresentation. Finally, all three include some kind of general guarantee of “satisfaction or your money back,” a toll-free number for information or ordering, and an order blank that accommodates charge customers.

On the other hand, each catalog embodies astounding differences. One is size. The catalogs vary from standard 8 ½" × 11" to a mid-size 5" × 7" to a half-size 4" × 5½". While the smallest catalog includes eight more pages than the largest, the total number of items listed is just over half that of the largest catalog. Second, the photographic backgrounds for the models range from shabby to sleek. The mid-sized catalog uses nondescript backgrounds, including wood-paneled walls that reflect glare from lights, windows with poorly hung drapes, and painted walls that, under the intense camera light, show imperfections as shadowy effects. At the other extreme, the smallest catalog uses all career-oriented backgrounds, with models standing beside or in front of executive desks, wooden filing cabinets, computer systems, airline ticket counters, or other CEO-related settings. The models carry briefcases, gold pens, computer disks, legal pads, and calculators. Finally, the models’ facial expressions and body positions vary considerably. The largest catalog uses models whose expressions are cold, impersonal, distant, maybe even arrogant. The mid-sized catalog’s models seem untrained, most assuming an amateur grin, eyes on camera, body pose less than advantageous either for the model or for the clothing. The models in the smallest catalog, however, assume relaxed expressions and poses, almost too relaxed for the business atmosphere in which they are photographed.

In short, then, the mail-order clothing business has reached massive proportions, so much so that catalogs compete in sensitive, subtle ways for the home buyer’s business. One who understands the psychology of advertising can sort through the various messages the three catalogs send to their customers.

ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLE COMPARISON AND CONTRAST FOR THE WORKPLACE

This theme-length comparison-and-contrast business paper illustrates several options we have not yet seen. Note the following specifics:

- The opening paragraph sets the scene and concludes with the thesis sentence. The reader is prepared to read about both similarities and differences in the three catalogs.
- The general organization of the comparison-and-contrast theme follows the similarities-differences pattern. All similarities are set out in the first body paragraph while all differences appear in the second.
- The specific order within the general pattern follows an order of importance. Both body paragraphs move from the most obvious to the least obvious.

- Abundant transitions help the reader move from the broad category of similarities to the broad category of differences. The transitions also help the reader sort through the differences among the three catalogs. (For actual class purposes, you would cite the catalogs by name, providing a clearer reference for the reader.)
- Vocabulary and sentence structure are appropriate to the subject and the audience.
- The paper maintains unity throughout, each paragraph dealing only with details supporting its topic sentence.
- Specific details allow the reader to see both similarities and differences, including details about color, background, clothing types, models' attitudes, and general descriptions.
- The conclusion, set out in a separate paragraph as theme organization would have it, returns the reader's attention to the popularity and business impact of the subject. At the same time, the conclusion admits that the *astounding differences* require a skilled analyst to determine the total message.

Sample Technical Comparison and Contrast

In a clothing class, students wrote papers to compare or contrast two sewing techniques. The single-paragraph paper below compares two kinds of seams.

The Differences between Two Common Clothing Seams

Two common seams appear in both men's and women's clothing: the plain seam and the flat-felled seam. The two kinds of seams require different sewing methods and result in different appearances and strengths. The plain seam requires the seamstress merely to place two pieces of fabric, right sides together, and run a single row of stitches $\frac{5}{8}$ " from the raw edges. The flat-felled seam, on the other hand, requires the seamstress to place the pieces of fabric, this time wrong sides together, and stitch a plain seam. At this point, however, she is far from finished. Next, she must press open the seam allowances and trim one seam allowance to $\frac{1}{8}$ ". After turning under the raw edge of the remaining seam allowance, she presses it over the trimmed edge. Finally, she topstitches the pressed seam to the garment close to the folded edge. When these two kinds of seams are finished, they present very different appearances. The plain seam shows only a single line where the fabric joins, but no stitching shows. The two raw edges are hidden inside the garment. On the other hand, the flat-felled seam shows two rows of stitching on the right side of the fabric and no raw seam edges appear inside or out. It adds a classic detail that enhances sportswear. Finally, the seams can be compared by their

strength. A plain seam with its single row of stitching is necessarily weaker than two rows of stitching. The added width of fabric between the two rows of stitching on the flat-felled seam further enforces the seam strength. And the flat-felled seam cures fraying edges, another strengthening feature. In short, the plain seam, because it is easy to sew, is more frequently used; but the flat-felled seam, although it requires greater sewing skill, adds strength and classic detail to the garment.

ANALYSIS OF THE SAMPLE TECHNICAL COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

The preceding comparison-and-contrast paragraph effectively contrasts two kinds of seams. Think about the following specifics as you evaluate the sample yourself:

- The topic sentence names the subject and the three major differences.
- The part-by-part organization permits the writer to discuss the sewing method, the appearance, and the strength of each kind of seam.
- The chronological order allows the reader to follow the organization from sewing to finished product.
- In every case, to follow the pattern of organization, the writer discusses first the plain seam and then the flat-felled seam.
- Transitions move the reader from step to step and from detail to detail.
- Vocabulary and sentence structure fit the subject and the audience.
- The conclusion makes a final statement in support of the flat-felled seam.