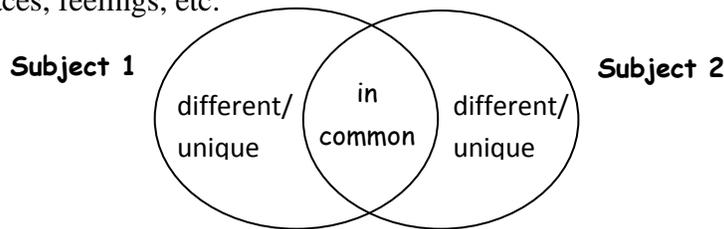


## The Compare and Contrast Essay

*“By assigning such [compare and contrast] essays, your instructors are encouraging you to make connections between texts or ideas, engage in critical thinking, and go beyond mere description or summary to generate interesting analysis: when you reflect on similarities and differences, you gain a deeper understanding of the items you are comparing, their relationship to each other, and what is most important about them.”*

(The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill)

To compare means to identify the likenesses among things. To contrast means to identify the differences. Comparing and contrasting help people evaluate, come to decisions, or make judgments about two or more objects, persons, ideas, places, feelings, etc.



There are two main patterns of organization for comparison and contrast essays: **block** and **point by point** organization. Unless your assignment directs you to a specific pattern, there are no concrete rules governing the choice between Point by Point and the Block method. After selecting the topics, sketch out an informal outline or rough plan using one method and then the other to see which is more effective. Spending time making this choice in the prewriting stage will spare you the frustration of writing a draft using an organizational method that does not work well for the particular topics. You should choose one of the patterns and stick with it through the essay.

### BLOCK METHOD

This pattern calls for body paragraphs in which you write about one subject (for example, Applebee’s) on points a, b, c, etc., then write about the second subject (Chili’s) on points a, b, c, etc. When using the block method, be sure that, when you focus on the second subject, you still refer to the first subject and explain the comparative points so your paper is not simply a detailed list. Remember, it is your job as the writer, not the reader’s, to connect the dots between similarities and differences. A simple outline model is below:

*Introduction*

*Working Thesis: Applebee’s is a better family restaurant chain than Chili’s because it offers healthier menu selections, more affordable pricing, and its staff and atmosphere are casual and fun.*

- Subject 1: Applebee’s*
- a. menu selections*
  - b. affordability*
  - c. staff and atmosphere*

- Subject 2: Chili’s*
- a. menu selections*
  - b. affordability*
  - c. staff and atmosphere*

*Conclusion*



This pattern calls for body paragraphs that compare or contrast the two subjects (Applebee's and Chili's) first on point one, then point two, then point three, and so on. A simple outline model is below:

*Introduction*

*Working Thesis: Applebee's is a better family restaurant chain than Chili's because it offers healthier menu selections, more affordable pricing, and its staff and atmosphere are casual and fun.*

*Point 1: Menu Selections*

*a. Applebee's*

*b. Chili's*

*Point 2: Affordability*

*a. Applebee's*

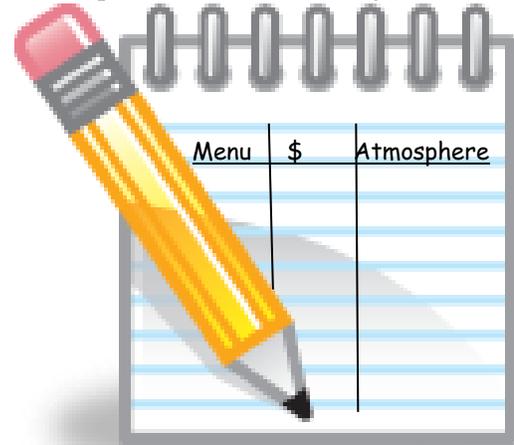
*b. Chili's*

*Point 3: Staff and Atmosphere*

*a. Applebee's*

*b. Chili's*

*Conclusion*



**Guidelines for Comparing and Contrasting:**

- Select appropriate topics. You should avoid selecting two ideas, objects, etc., that are too similar or too different. Also, there is no need to explain the obvious. For example, you would not need to explain that elephants and kittens are different.
- Develop a unifying thesis which clearly states the purpose of the comparison and contrast. Sum up in the thesis what the paper, as a whole, will try to prove or show. You may want to assert the superiority or inferiority, the pros and cons, or the advantages or disadvantages of the subjects. Even if your primary goal is simply to point out the subjects' similarities or differences to inform readers, that goal should be clear. Try to avoid generic thesis statements that might make a reader ask, "So what?" For example, a vague thesis such as "*I will compare and contrast Applebee's and Chili's*" or "*Chili's and Applebee's have some similarities and some differences*" doesn't tell the reader what the point of the comparison is. Instead, try a thesis that demonstrates purpose such as "*Applebee's is a better family restaurant chain than Chili's because it offers healthier menu selections, more affordable pricing, and its staff and atmosphere are casual and fun,*" which clarifies the goal is to establish family-friendliness and provides an idea of the points to be developed. Regardless of the objective, you must be sure to have one and be sure to state it.
- Make key points of contrast or comparison stand out. Give each subject equal treatment, and use as many examples, analogies, and details as possible to describe both subjects.
- Use transitions appropriately. Include enough transitional devices to ensure a smooth flow from one subject to the next and from one point to the next. For example, for similarities, you could use the following transitional terms: likewise, similarly, in addition, also, too. For differences, you could use one of these transitions: on the other hand, however, but, conversely, in contrast.

Handout developed by the CGCC Writing Center.

Source: The Writing Center, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

(<http://writingcenter.unc.edu/resources/handouts-demos/specific-writing-assignments/comparing-and-contrasting>)

- Remember, whether an essay is developed by comparison, by contrast, or by both comparison and contrast, the basic structure of the essay remains the same. The essay will contain an introduction and thesis statement, a body consisting of topic sentences and paragraphs which support the thesis, and a conclusion.