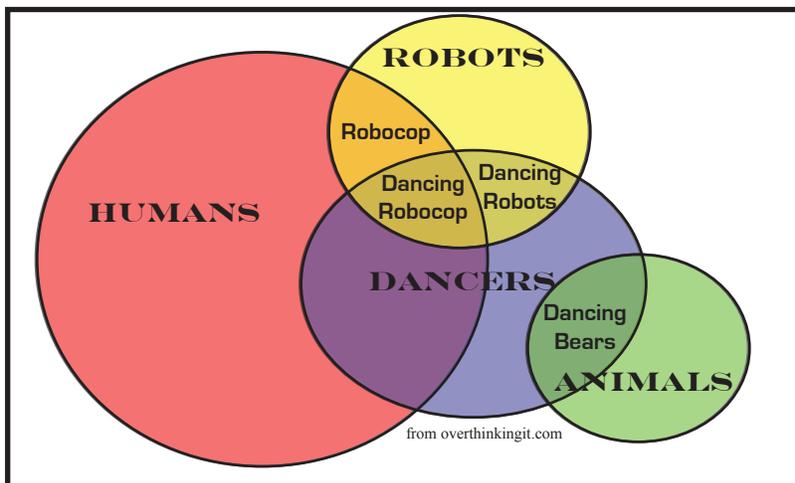


THE COMPARISON/CONTRAST ESSAY



COMPARISON/ CONTRAST:

FOR YOUR INFORMATION:

Comparison and contrast is the process of examining two or more things in order to establish their similarities or differences.

Perhaps the most common assignment in a writing class is the comparison and contrast essay. What could be easier? We've got these two things - movies, books, rock bands, decades, people, fashions, schools, ideas - how are they alike and how are they different?

However, there are some general rules to consider before we begin to write a comparison and contrast essay.

First, is the comparison fair? Is it fair to compare the social nightlife of a small rural town in Oklahoma to the nightlife of Manhattan? Probably not, unless our comparison is going to lead our readers to a surprise: that for reasons they had never thought of before, the nightlife of Davis, Oklahoma, is more fun, more fulfilling than the nightlife of the Big Apple!

The **second** question is one of procedure. We have, let's say, five points of difference between the two things that we want to contrast. Shall we go from side to side, as if our essay were a ping-pong match, or should we dwell on one side before going over to the other side, essentially splitting our essay in half? **It is possible to mix these two approaches** (see student model page 7 of this packet). Your approach will determine the overall structure, pacing, and effect of the essay.

Third, there has to be a good reason to make the comparison. Why should we compare this movie to the novel it is based on? Why should we compare these two short stories, one by a modern southern American Catholic woman and the other by a nineteenth-century French-Canadian man? Will the comparison actually help anyone's understanding of either one? What's the point of the comparison? When we've finished going through the various differences and similarities, is the reader left with the horrible feeling of "so what?" Or have we actually accomplished something important? Have we provided a unique insight into the nature of these two things that the reader would never have discovered otherwise?

Finally, the business of a comparison and contrast essay is frequently (but not always) to demonstrate a preference for one thing over another. The trick is to allow the preference to grow out of the comparison without actually stating the obvious. Let the reader figure out the preference from the language we use in the contrast; let the language do its work.

Important to Note

1. Any relationship between two or more things will involve some degree of SIMILARITY, as well as some degree of DIFFERENCE.
2. Comparisons can be found in any kind of writing: magazine articles, advertising, essays, news articles, letters, editorials, textbooks, scientific writing, reports, political speeches,

pamphlets, instruction manuals, poems, fables, and parables.

3. We make comparisons when we have to choose between two or more things: careers, products, political candidates, goals, courses of action.
4. Comparisons underlie everything we do.
 - Scientists use comparisons in their experiments.
 - Logicians use them to draw conclusions.
 - Politicians use them to formulate policies.
 - Judges use them to render decisions.
 - Ministers and priests teach and admonish us with comparisons.

Read the following **SAMPLE Comparison/Contrast Essay** and try to understand how the author organized his information:



Shopping in America
by Charles M. Bezzler

Since the 1950s, American shoppers have been spending their money in suburban malls instead of downtown business districts. This is even true of shoppers who have to go out of their way to shop in the malls; they will bypass downtown stores (which they might have gotten to by a convenient bus) to drive to the brightly bedecked and weather-free meccas of shopper-heaven. The result, some people claim, is the demise of the central urban commercial district of Downtown, which will lead inevitably toward more widespread urban blight. But why are Americans are so easily lured to shop in malls in the first place?

First, Americans don't like weather. They like to be indoors whenever possible, even on nice days, and they're willing to pay a premium to be protected from the elements. If they can find someone who can afford it, they will even put their sports stadiums under a gigantic bowl. They love to stay indoors for a day of shopping, perhaps never seeing the sun from the time they first enter until they leave, hours later, relieved of money, oxygen, and much money.

Second, Americans love convenience and, except during the crush of major holidays, malls offer plenty of convenient parking. A happy, enormous island of commerce in a sea of asphalt, the mall offers plenty of docking points — usually next to major commercial outlets — for cars that circle in search of the closest slot and an easy entrance.

Third, the mall offers an extraordinary variety of products under its one gigantic roof. Specialty stores and boutiques offer items that people don't realize they need until they're put under the spell of brightly lighted, beautifully furnished window after window of beguiling wares. Malls are built to respond to Americans' insatiable desire for stuff; either that, or a generation of Americans has been genetically engineered to respond to the sellers of stuff. Either way, it works.

And finally, the mall feels safe: it is lighted, warm, dry, busy. Senior citizens are invited to do their walking exercises there in the early hours; physically challenged people easily meander the smooth floors of curbless, stairless businesses in motorized carts; children are amused by clowns and fed at convenient cafeterias in the Food Court.

America's Downtown, on the other hand, is often in sad repair. Parking is difficult, if not dangerous, and until you get through the door, it's all outdoors. To get from store to store, you must expose yourself to heat, cold, rain, snow. There are sometimes solicitors to fleece you of change before you even get into a store. If there is a plan here, it is not evident to most shoppers. Where is the information kiosk with a cordial, well-informed attendant to direct you to the nearest clothier, jeweler, fast-food outlet, or bathroom? Is there a bathroom?

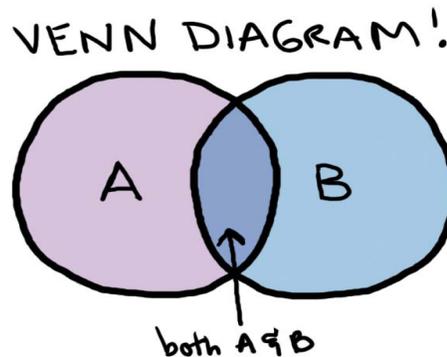
What is left in the American Downtown to recommend it to shoppers? Practically nothing. Nothing, that is, unless you regard as important the notion that the businesses you give your money to should be owned by people, families, in your own community. Yes, there may be chain-stores; it seems there has always been a W. T. Grants, a J. C. Penneys, a Whackers. But the people who owned the franchise and worked behind the cash register were people you might meet in your own neighborhood. When you walk into the Downtown hardware store, you often feel wood, not vinyl linoleum, beneath your feet. And some old guy, who seemed old when he sold your father the hammer you use today, will sell you nails in a paper bag, weighing them out by the handful until you get the exact number you need, not the arbitrary number that comes in a hermetically sealed plastic box.

Next door, in the department store, there will be two women who know you by name and who can't wait to help you find what you need or will let you ruminate among the shelves if you want. In the drug store across the street, the pharmacist knows your aches and pains and what you've been taking for them the last five years and what upsets your stomach and knows to call your doctor when the prescription doesn't make sense. If there is a soda fountain there — naah, that's asking too much.

The truth is that the American mall grows where it does because someone with enormously deep pockets decides to plunk it down where there used to be woods or a golf course. He surrounds it with hundreds of acres of parking and waits for people to come spend their money, as he knows they will because people will do what mass advertising tells them to do. Downtown, on the other hand, grew where it did because there was an organic need for it. It was a community's response to a community's needs — neighbors responding to neighbors — and it flourished as the community flourished. If the mall can replace this sense of community, then so be it; it deserves our affection as well as our dollars. If it can't, then we have gained convenient parking and freedom from the weather at an awful price.

POINTS TO PONDER:

1. Can you find the thesis statement for this essay?
2. What, if anything, holds the paragraphs together? Draw interconnected circles between the structural elements that connect ideas. Would you have broken the paragraphs differently?
3. Did the contrast go back and forth between mall and Downtown or did it develop one before it went on to the other? Is that an effective strategy for this essay?
4. Does the conclusion grow out of the body of the essay, or does it feel sort of “tacked on”? Where, exactly, does the conclusion call for a response that the essay hasn't earned?
5. Is the contrast between the mall and the Downtown adequate? Overdone? Fair?
6. Is it clear where the writer's preferences lie? Are his preferences too obvious and is he fair to the “other side”? Does the author actually state a preference or are you allowed to infer it from the language? What does the essay say, exactly, that allows for this inference?



EXERCISES: Read the comparison paragraphs below. Name the method of organization (point-by-point or block). Then study the Venn Diagram and answer the questions on the next page.

#1 Point-by-point or Block Organization

While sailing and boating may seem very similar; sailing definitely requires much more highly developed skills.

Boaters need only know how to turn an ignition key in order to get going. Of course, this sailor must know how to read a gas gauge, too, or risk not getting back to shore. The only real skill in this sport is in steering. The boater can go in any direction with a turn of the wheel. Just about the only way he can appear to be skilled is to speed away while departing, leaving a huge, flashy wake the rocks nearby boats and annoys their occupants.

On the other hand, the sailor must spend time carefully putting his sails up and making sure that all lines are cleated down properly as he gets going. He must then know nature's signs and signals in order to assure a safe return to shore. When he's underway, he is limited in his direction by the wind. If he wants to change direction, he must change the position of his sails. Finally, he can really show his prowess by precisely timing his return to the dock and "striking the spinnaker" at just the right moment. With his colorful, billowing sail, a returning sailor is quite an impressive sight.

#2 Point-by-point or Block Organization

While sailing and boating may seem very similar; sailing definitely requires much more highly developed skills.

Boaters need only know how to turn an ignition key in order to get going. The sailor, on the other hand, must spend time carefully putting up his sails and making sure that all lines are cleated down properly as he gets going.

While the boater can risk not getting back to shore simply by not watching his gas gauge, the sailor must know nature's signs and signals to assure a safe return. For example, the direction of the wind will determine what sails to use and which direction to turn the sails. One wrong move and he might find himself headed for the high seas. With just a turn of the wheel the boater can go in any direction, regardless of the wind.

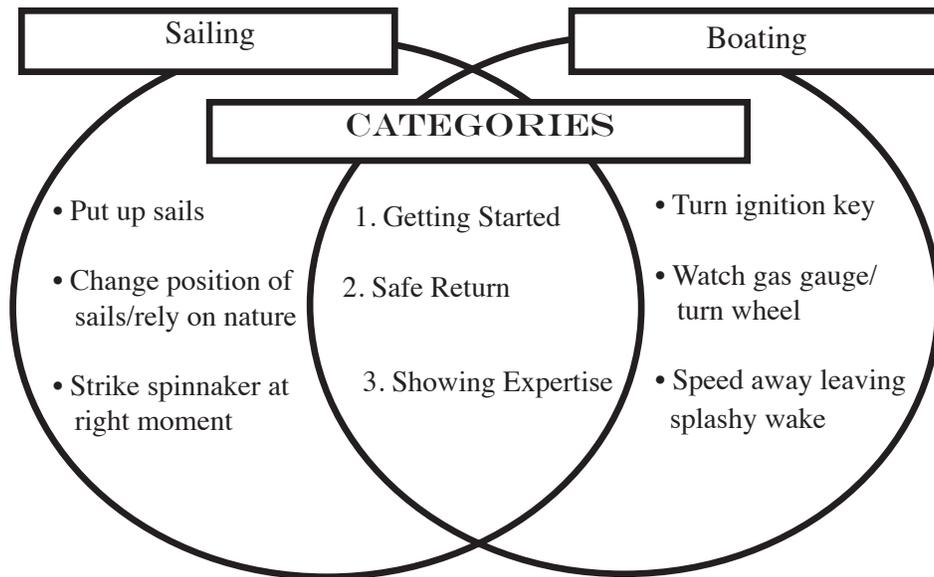
Finally, just about the only way the boater can appear to be skilled is to speed away while departing, leaving a huge, flashy wake that rocks nearby boats and annoys their occupants. The sailor, on the other hand, can show his prowess by precisely timing his return to the dock and "striking the spinnaker" at just the right moment. With his colorful, billowing sail, the returning sailor is quite an impressive sight.

1. What are 3 ways both boaters and sailors can show their skills?

2. What are 3 ways a boater can show his skills that are the same ways a sailor shows his skills?

3. What are 3 ways a boater can show his skills that are different from the ways a sailor shows his skills?

4. Which requires more highly developed skills, sailing or boating?



NOTES ON COMPARISON

COMPARISONS are useful when you want to describe, explain, or persuade. They are especially helpful whenever you want to discuss two subjects with marked similarities or differences. If you get good control of the techniques of comparison, you'll find that they can be a real lifesaver in test situations and in pressure-writing situations where you have to "get a handle" on your subject in a hurry.

CAUTION: Don't choose to compare or contrast two things that are so similar or so different that you don't have to convince or instruct your reader. For example, you wouldn't want to say that a horse and an apple are different. Anyone who doesn't already know that is in big trouble!

GETTING STARTED

WRITING THE ROUGH DRAFT:

Will you write your paper using the point-by-point method of organization, OR the block method? You must decide.

Will you emphasize the differences in the two personal narratives, or the similarities? You must decide this, as well.

Introduction

The introduction must have a motivator (attention-getter) and a thesis statement. The thesis will set up the comparison you will be making. For example:

"While sailing and boating may seem very similar; sailing definitely requires much more highly developed skills."

OR

"Some people consider the democratic party and the libertarian party to be vastly different in their political philosophies. However, they are similar in three important ways."

Body

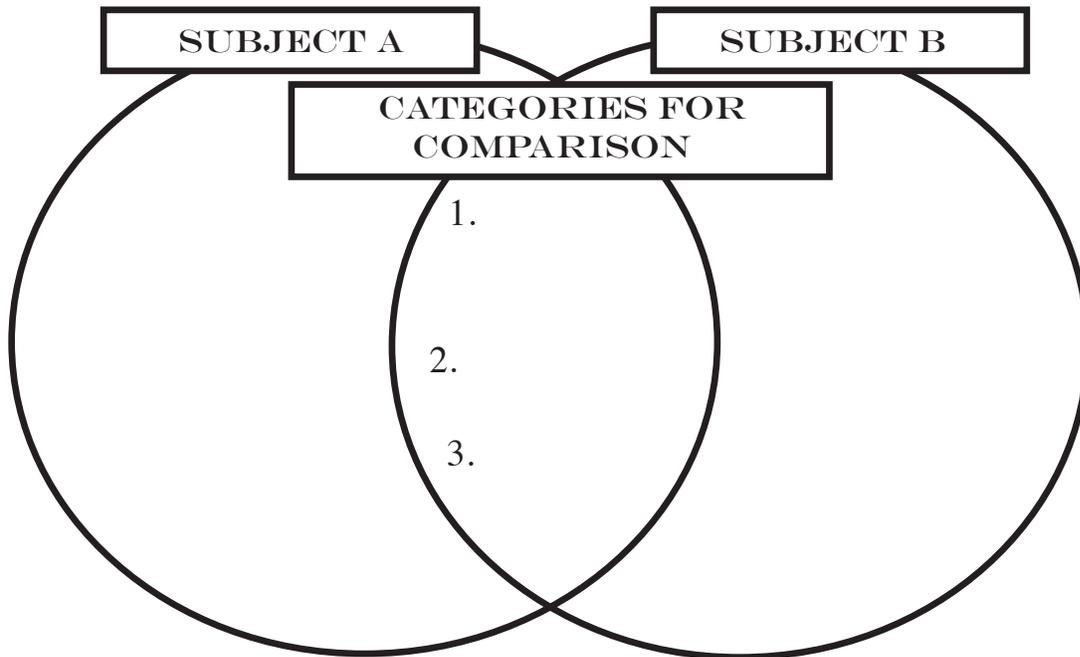
The body of your paper will be organized in either the point-by-point method or the block method. Be sure to provide supporting detail for all three categories for which you are comparing the two subjects. Remember that the essay must have a parallel structure; if you are going to talk about the motor in a late model automobile, you must talk about the motor in the newer model, for example.

Conclusion

End with a re-worded thesis and a clincher.

PATTERNS FOR WRITING:

Begin with the Venn Diagram:



Then, Choose an outline:

BLOCK METHOD

Introduction (thesis, set up comparison)
SUBJECT A
 Characteristics 1
 Characteristics 2
 Characteristics 3
SUBJECT B
 Characteristics 1
 Characteristics 2
 Characteristics 3
Conclusion (brief summary)

POINT-BY-POINT

Introduction (thesis, set up comparison)
CHARACTERISTIC 1
 Subject A
 Subject B
CHARACTERISTIC 2
 Subject A
 Subject B
CHARACTERISTIC 3
 Subject A
 Subject B
Conclusion (brief summary)

McDonald's and Fox's Diner

McDonald's and Fox's Diner are two of the restaurants in Lake City, Tennessee. But even though they both sell hamburgers in the same town, they don't have anything else in common. They cater to different types of customers. There is a noticeable difference in service speed, and every facet of doing business is handled differently. Even the atmosphere of these two places is in contrast.

These two restaurants do not compete for the same customers. McDonald's is located just off the interstate, so many of their patrons are not local residents. Fox's is further away from the interstate. Aside from the over-the-road truck drivers who know the area, most of the Diner's customers are local residents. In addition to targeting different customers from Fox's Diner, McDonald's also places more emphasis on speed. McDonald's makes job specialization an integral part of their operation. They crank meals out on an assembly line. They use computers to take orders, automatic timers to assist in cooking, and radio headsets to communicate. Even the color scheme used by McDonald's promotes speed. Studies show that loud colors like red and yellow increase customer turnover. With the exception of handling money, tasks are shared by the staff at the diner and there isn't anything high-tech about the operation.

Fox's Diner is a world away from the bland, impersonal McDonald's just a few miles north. It sits on the right side of a two-lane highway leading into town. The Diner serves both as a truck stop and as the restaurant for a small motel next door. The parking lot looks vacant until about five in the morning because it is large enough to accommodate a dozen tractor trailers. Years of use have left potholes and a patchwork of asphalt that resembles a moth-eaten quilt.

The diner itself is a doublewide trailer set high on a five foot, cinderblock foundation. An aluminum awning extends outward about six feet along the front of the building. Underneath the awning, yellow fluorescent lights, which theoretically do not attract bugs, glow at night. They are mounted over a row of metal framed, screened-in windows. An entrance was built about fourteen years ago outside the original entrance to reduce heating and air-conditioning costs, as well as keep the interior floor clean. Concrete steps covered with brown patio turf lead to the front door. Walking inside is like traveling twenty years back in time.

Trans Ams, Lucky Strikes, and eight-track tape players are some of the things that come to mind when walking in. The white tile floor is always clean; however, it has yellowed with age and feels rough under your shoes because it has never been waxed. A counter runs half the length of the diner. Over the years, the counter has been worn smooth by countless elbows. Four booths are at one end of the diner. The benches are covered in green and brown plastic, and they surround yellow formica tables. A jukebox also sits there, usually playing an old song by George Jones or Willie Nelson. A blue haze of smoke hangs around the lights.

A room has been added to the far end of the diner. It holds a cigarette machine and an old Donkey Kong Junior video game that hasn't been played in so long that the words "game over" are permanently etched into the picture tube. There are also two pinball machines that see slightly more use than the video game. Four machines labeled "for entertainment only" are where the money is made. They are video poker machines, and they draw truck drivers, housewives, and

anyone else easily addicted to gambling. People come in with rolls of quarters and grab a stool. They get that dull look in their eyes. Some smoke like a freight train while others light up and the cigarette never touches their lips again. It just rests between their fingers and burns down to the filter. The winners don't get excited. They just walk to the register and collect their money. But they are few and far between.

The McDonald's in Lake City could be one of a million other franchises across the continent. Like many others, it is located just off the interstate. And like all the others, it has the same famous sign on two seventy-five foot, brown, steel poles that are in clear view for miles before encountering the interstate exit. The parking lot is well-thought-out and easy to navigate. There are no potholes here that could swallow a sedan. The asphalt gets an annual coat of sealant and large white arrows direct the flow of traffic. Concrete curving borders the pavement to prevent anyone from parking on the grass or the mulch where durable evergreens have been planted.

Like thousands of other McDonald's across the country, this one has a playground to attract people with kids. It is surrounded by a wrought-iron fence to keep kidnapers out and children penned in. A two-story, plastic structure stands in the middle of the playground resembling some sort of alien architecture. It is made out of the same 50 percent consumer, recycled plastic that the roof tiles, trays, and happy meal toys are made of. This is "green marketing," designed to appeal to environmentally conscious customers.

This McDonald's is as stereotypical on the interior as it is on the exterior. Instead of a jukebox, they have a television that is always tuned to the Country Music Channel. This gives the customers something to watch as well as listen to, so they aren't put into the awkward position of having to speak to one another. The Country Music Channel always features a new star, such as Ricky Lynn Gregg or Rick Travino. They sound like they are trying to have a hick accent. They don't sound like Johnny Cash or Willie Nelson; they sound like dime-store cowboys. They are like formica countertops that attempt to look like wood.

But McDonald's can't be condemned for being successful. They have done a lot of things right. Since they're a franchise, everyone follows the same business plan. This lets the customer know exactly what to expect whenever he pulls into McDonald's. That is an advantage independent restaurants will have to live with.

But Americans do not support small businesses the same way they once did. The famous arches that identify McDonald's are a catalyst that people respond to like dumb animals in a laboratory experiment. Instead, we should give the little guy a chance whenever possible. Even though we cannot always support small business, we should try if the product is comparable and the price is competitive. A car or personal computer made by a small business wouldn't be a good investment. But a house built by an independent contractor would certainly compare favorably to a particle board house built by Clayton Homes. And Fox's Diner makes a better hamburger than the soybean sandwich McDonald's markets.

Students Name: _____

**Scoring Guide/Rubric
Comparison/Contrast Essay**

Writing Trait	Criteria	Score			
		F 1-2	A 3	M 4	E 5-6
Ideas & Content	1. Topic lends itself to a comparison or contrast.				
	2. Adequate and interesting details support each point being compared.				
	3. Clear focus is maintained throughout the paper.				
	4. The purpose for the comparison is clearly provided.				
Organization	5. Provides an effective introduction to the comparison.				
	6. Ideas are organized using paragraphs.				
	7. The end brings an effective closure to the essay.				
	8. Provides a logical and sequential organization of ideas.				
Voice	9. Writer conveys a sense of commitment to the topic.				
	10. Tone shows awareness of audience and topic.				
	11. Includes liveliness, sincerity, or humor when appropriate.				
Word Choice	12. Words effectively and accurately convey intended message.				
	13. Uses a variety of words that are functional and appropriate to the topic, purpose, and audience.				
	14. Attempts colorful language to make writing more interesting.				
	15. Avoid clichés and slang.				
Sentence Fluency	16. Some repeated patterns of sentence structure.				
	17. Shows strong control over simple sentences.				
	18. Fragments, if present, are usually effective.				
Conventions	19. Has solid control over subject/verb agreement.				
	20. Generally correct end of sentence and internal punctuation.				
	21. Generally correct capitalization; only minor errors if any.				
	22. Consistent verb tense and use of irregular verb forms.				
	23. Spelling is usually correct; especially on common words.				
	24. Basically sound paragraph break that reinforce the organizational structure.				
	25. Moderate need for editing.				

FINAL SCORE: _____ /6

(Calculating the Score: Total the score and divide that total by the number of criterion items listed on the Scoring Guide. This number over 6 equals the score for the paper. It can be no higher than 6/6.)