

The Academic Essay: Comparison-Contrast Analysis

Overview: Show the reader that you are both incredibly knowledgeable about the relationship between two subjects within a given topic, and that you can identify the most important or relevant similarities/differences to a given user or reader.

Mode: Informing, Teaching

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Problem: In a Comparison-Contrast Analysis, the **problem** is indecision. An individual, or society as a whole, is stuck between two options. They may be very good options (analyzing the differences between two vacation destinations) or very bad (waging war when it's justified, versus not). Either way, this **problem** is the result of individuals' inability to identify the most important or relevant similarities and differences between the choices. That's why you're here – to help readers and others overcome this **obstacle**. Make sure the stakes are clearly identified in your essay: What could be lost if people are unable to make a good decision?

Goal: The **goal** in a Comparison-Contrast Analysis is to make informed and wise decisions. Your job as a teacher is to provide the kind of information and analysis that allows the user of the subjects, or a reader of your essay, to make such a decision.

Choice: Since you are comparing and contrasting relevant components of two subjects within a topic, the element of **choice** is clear: the user or reader has to make a **choice**, since choosing both is off the table.

Sacrifice: Since the user/reader can only choose one of the given options, make it clear what he or she will be **sacrificing**, but also gaining. Your job as a teacher is to identify, and explain, the most important similarities or differences to your reader or a user of the subject. The key to finding these details is to consider what must be **sacrificed**: If the reader chooses A, is the sacrifice worth it? If he or she chooses B, how will the **sacrifices** be different? In most real world topics and choices, it's practically impossible to make an exclusive choice that doesn't require some amount of sacrifice. Be sure to identify it and clearly explain the relationship between **choice** and **sacrifice**, as it pertains to your reader or the topic user.

Growth: The **growth** in a Comparison-Contrast Analysis will be that of the reader or the user, and as the teacher, your job is to facilitate that **growth**. In doing so, you show your maturity and ability to grasp a complex subject and lead others through it! To accomplish this, comment (even generally) on how users will **grow** and **change** by making certain **sacrificial choices**. In what specific ways will choosing Option A cause them to improve, benefit, or grow into a better person? How about Option B? This is the essence of a Comparison-Contrast: identifying how one choice affects someone, versus another choice.

Academic Essay Vocabulary: Every topic involves people who care about it. For the purpose of these placemats, planning sheets, and rubrics, those individuals will be called "users." Voters are "users," as are buyers, drivers, parents, students – anyone directly affected by or involved in the topic given by the scholarship essay prompt.

