**What is a Comparison / Contrast Essay?**

A comparison shows how two subjects are similar; a contrast shows how two subjects are different. People compare and contrast in both writing and life. In writing, you must first decide whether you will compare, contrast or both. Follow these steps when writing a comparison / contrast essay.

**1. Identify similarities and differences.**

If you have two items to compare or contrast, figure out how they are similar and how they are different.

* You will need to find at least **three (3) points** for comparison / contrast.
* Write detailed characteristics for each point.

**2. State your purpose in the thesis sentence.**

Identify the **two subjects** that you will compare and state whether you will focus on similarities, differences, or both. The thesis may also indicate which points you will compare / contrast.

**3. Choose a pattern to organize your essay.**

The two major patterns for organizing a comparison/contrast essay are:

**Subject by Subject (Whole-to-whole)**. Your write first about one of your subjects, covering it completely, and then you write about the other, covering it completely. Each subject is addressed in a separate paragraph. The points of comparison or contrast will be the same for each subject and will be presented in the same order.

The following is an example of subject by subject organization:

Introduction

I. Subject #1

A. Point #1

B. Point #2

C. Point #3

II. Subject #2

A. Point #1

B. Point #2

C. Point #3

Conclusion

**Point by Point**. Each point is addressed in a separate paragraph. You discuss both of your subjects together for each point of comparison and contrast. Maintain consistency by discussing the same subject first for each point.

The following is an example of point by point organization:

Introduction

I. Point #1

A. Subject #1

B. Subject #2

II. Point #2

A. Subject #1

B. Subject #2

III. Point #3

A. Subject #1

B. Subject #2

Conclusion

**4. Use appropriate transitions.**

Transitions are important in comparison/contrast writing, especially with the point by point organization, to avoid confusion. Without transitions, the points you are comparing/contrasting may blur into one another. Also, a variety of transitions prevent monotony.

For comparison:

Use words such as like, the same as or similar

For contrast:

Use words such as although, unlike, differ

To evaluate the effectiveness of a comparison/contrast essay, ask the following: Is the essay balanced? The most common error in a comparison / contrast essay is spending too much time on one subject and too little on the other. Make sure the essay equally and thoroughly covers both subjects.