

COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

Comparison and contrast are two thought processes we constantly perform in everyday life. When we compare two things, we show how they are similar: when we contrast two things, we show how they are different. We may compare or contrast two brand-name products (for example, Sony versus Zenith TV), or two television shows, or two careers, or two teachers, or two jobs, or two friends, or two courses of action we can take within a given situation. The purpose of comparing or contrasting is to understand each of the two things more clearly and, at times, to make judgments about them.

A Vote for McDonald's

For my birthday this month, my wife has offered to treat me to dinner at the restaurant of my choice. I think she expects me to ask for a meal at the Chalet, the classiest, most expensive restaurant in town. However, I'm going to eat my birthday dinner at McDonald's. When I compare the two restaurants, the advantages of eating at McDonald's are clear.

For one thing, going to the Chalet is more difficult than going to McDonald's. The Chalet has a jacket-and-tie rule, which means I have to dig a sport coat and tie out of the back of my closet, make sure they're semiclean, and try to steam out the wrinkles somehow. The Chalet also requires advance reservations, since it is downtown. I have to leave an hour early to give myself time to find a parking space within six blocks of the restaurants. The Chalet cancels reservations if a party is more than ten minutes late. Going to McDonald's, on the other hand, is easy. I can feel comfortable wearing jeans or a warm-up suit. I don't have to do any advance planning. I can leave my house whenever I'm ready and pull into a doorside parking space within fifteen minutes.

The Chalet is a dimly lit, formal place. While I'm struggling to see what's on my plate, I worry that I'll knock one of the fragile glass vases off the table. The waiters at the Chalet can be uncomfortably formal, too. As I awkwardly pronounce the French words on the menu, I get the feeling that I don't quite live up to their standards. Even though the food at the Chalet is gourmet, I prefer simpler meals. I don't like unfamiliar food swimming in dead-white sauce or covered with pie pastry. Eating at the Chalet is, to me, less enjoyable than eating at McDonald's. McDonald's is a pleasant place where I feel at ease. It is well-lighted, and the bright-colored décor is informal. The employees

serve with a smile, and the food is easy to pronounce and identify. I know what I'm going to get when I order a certain type of sandwich.

The most important difference between the Chalet and McDonald's, though, is the price difference. Dinner for two at the Chalet, even one without appetizers or desserts, would easily cost forty dollars. And the forty dollars doesn't include the cost of parking the car and tipping the waiter, which can come to an additional ten dollars. Once, I forgot to bring enough money. At McDonald's, a filling meal for two will cost around six dollars. With the extra forty-four dollars, my wife and I can eat at McDonald's seven more times, or go to the movies five times, or buy play-off tickets to a football game.

So, for my birthday celebration, or any other time, I prefer to eat at McDonald's. It is convenient, friendly, and cheap. And with the money my wife saves by taking me to McDonald's, she can buy me what I really want for my birthday—a new Sears power saw.

METHODS OF DEVELOPMENT

There are two methods possible in a comparison or contrast essay. Details can be presented in a one-side-at-a-time format or in a point-by-point format. Each format is illustrated below.

One Side at a Time

Look at the following supporting paragraph from "A Vote for McDonald's":

For one thing, going to the Chalet is more difficult than going to McDonald's. The Chalet has a jacket-and-tie rule, which means I have to dig a sport coat and tie out of the back of my closet, make sure they're semiclean, and try to steam out the wrinkles somehow. The Chalet also requires advance reservations. Since it is downtown, I have to leave an hour early to give myself time to find a parking space within six blocks of the restaurants. The Chalet cancels reservations if a party is more than ten minutes late. Going to McDonald's, on the other hand, is easy. I can feel comfortable wearing jeans or a warm-up suit. I don't have to do any advance planning. I can leave my house whenever I'm ready and pull into a doo-side parking space within fifteen minutes.

The first half of the paragraph explains fully one side of the contrast; the second half of the paragraph deals entirely with the other side. When you use this method, be sure to follow the

same order of points of contrast (or comparison) for each side. An outline of the paragraph shows how the points for each side are developed in a consistent sequence.

Outline (One Side at a Time)

Going to the Chalet is more difficult than going to McDonald's.

1. Chalet
 - A. Dress code
 - B. Advance reservations
 - C. Leave an hour early
 - D. Find parking space
2. McDonald's
 - A. Dress code
 - B. Advance reservations
 - C. Leave an hour early
 - D. Find parking space

Point by Point

Now look at the supporting paragraph below from "Studying: Then and Now":

Taking notes is one thing I've learned to do better since high school days. I used to lose interest in what I was doing and begin doodling, drawing Martians, or seeing what my signature would look like if I married the cute guy in the second row. Now, however, I try not to let my mind wander, and I pull my thoughts back into focus when they begin to go fussy. In high school, my notes often looked like something written in Arabic. In college, I've to use a semiprint writing style that makes my notes understandable. When I would look over my high school notes. I couldn't understand them. There would be a word like "Reconstruction," then a big blank, then the word "important." Weeks later, I had no idea what Reconstruction was or why it was important. I've since learned to write down connecting ideas, even if I have to take the time to do it after class.

The paragraph contrasts the two methods of note-taking point by point. The outline below illustrates the method.

Outline (Point by Point)

Taking notes is one thing I've learned to do better since high school days.

1. Level of attention in class
 - a. High school
 - b. College

2. Handwriting
 - a. High school
 - b. College

3. Completeness of notes
 - a. High school
 - b. College

When you begin a comparison or contrast paper, you should decide right away whether you are going to use the one-side-at-a-time format or the point-by-point format. An outline is an essential step in writing and planning a clearly organized paper.

Suggestions for writing a comparison or contrast paper:

Two courses	Two pets	Two games
Two teachers	Two vacations	Two hobbies
Two jobs	Two sports	Two leisure activities
Two bosses	Two singers	Two stores
Two family members	Two dates	Two public singers
Two friends	Two popular magazines	