



DBB 308 WRITING IN A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

1

COMPARISON/CONTRAST ESSAYS

- ▶ In a **comparison/contrast** essay, you explain the similarities and the differences between two items. Comparison and contrast is a very common pattern in most academic fields. It is also a common type of essay test question. You might encounter questions such as these:
- ▶ Compare the forms of government of Great Britain and the United States.
- ▶ Compare the characters of Uncle Melik and his nephew in William Saroyan's short story "The Pomegranate Trees.«
- ▶ Compare and contrast methods for promoting a new business, product, or service

Organization of Compare/Contrast Essays

► 1. Point by point organization:

One way to organize a comparison/contrast essay is to use point-by-point organization, which is similar to the logical division pattern, for example, that you want to compare two jobs.

- First, make a list of factors that are important to you: salary, benefits, opportunities for advancement, workplace atmosphere, commuting distance from your home, and so on.
- Each factor, or point of comparison, is like a subtopic in a logical division essay.

Point of Comparison	Job X	Job Y	Same or Different?
Salary frequency of raises	\$30/hour annual evaluation	\$25/hour semi- annual evaluation	different
Benefits ¹ vacation health insurance pension plan sick leave	good	good	same
Advancement opportunities	not good	good	different
Workplace atmosphere	high pressure, competitive	friendly, supportive	different
Commuting distance	30 minutes	32 minutes	same

- ▶ In your essay, each point of comparison becomes the topic of a paragraph. You can put the paragraphs in any order you wish-perhaps in the order of their importance to you personally.

MODEL***Point-by-Point
Organization*****I. Introduction**

Thesis statement: One way to decide between two job offers is to compare them on important points.

II. Body

A. Salary

B. Benefits

C. Opportunities for advancement

D. Workplace atmosphere

E. Commuting distance from home

III. Conclusion

► 2. Block Organization:

- The other way to organize a comparison/contrast essay is to arrange all the similarities together in a block and all the differences together in a block.
- You could discuss either the similarities first or the differences first. You often insert a transition paragraph or transition sentence between the two blocks.
- The model essay comparing Japan and the United States uses block organization.

MODEL**Block
Organization****I. Introduction**

Thesis statement: One way to decide between two job offers is to compare them on important points.

II. Body**A. Similarities**

1. Benefits
2. Commute distance from home

B. Differences

1. Salary
2. Opportunities for advancement
3. Workplace atmosphere

III. Conclusion

- ▶ The number of paragraphs in each block depends on the topic. For some topics, you may write about all the similarities in a single paragraph; for other topics, you may need to discuss each similarity in a separate paragraph. The same is true for differences.
- ▶ Of course, some topics may have one paragraph of similarities and several paragraphs of differences, or vice versa.

PRACTICE 1*Outlining
a Comparison/
Contrast Essay*

Complete the outline of the model essay “Japan and the United States: Different but Alike.”

I. Introduction

Thesis statement: On the surface at least, U.S. and Japanese societies seem totally opposite.

II. Body

A. _____

1. Japan is a homogeneous society.

2. _____

B. _____

1. Individualism versus groups

2. _____

3. Rising above the crowd, admired, and rewarded versus

4. _____

a. The United States builds airplanes.

b. _____

In spite of these differences, these two apparently opposite cultures share several important experiences.

C. Both have transplanted cultures.

1. _____

2. _____

D. _____

1. Department stores

2. _____

a. _____

b. Fast foods

(1) _____

(2) McDonald's restaurants

E. _____

1. _____

2. _____

III. Conclusion

Japan and the United States: Different but Alike¹

1 The culture of a place is an integral² part of its society whether that place is a remote Indian village in Brazil or a highly industrialized city in Western Europe. The culture of Japan fascinates people in the United States because, at first glance, it seems so different. Everything that characterizes the United States—newness, racial heterogeneity,³ vast territory, informality, and an ethic of individualism⁴—is absent in Japan. There, one finds an ancient and homogeneous⁵ society, an ethic that emphasizes the importance of groups, and a tradition of formal behavior governing every aspect of daily living, from drinking tea to saying hello. On the surface at least, U.S. and Japanese societies seem totally opposite.

2 One obvious difference is the people. Japan is a homogenous society of one nationality and a few underrepresented minority groups, such as the ethnic Chinese and Koreans. All areas of government and society are controlled by the Japanese majority. In contrast, although the United States is a country with originally European roots, its liberal immigration policies have resulted in its becoming a heterogeneous society of many ethnicities—Europeans, Africans, Asians, and Latinos. All are represented in all areas of U.S. society, including business, education, and politics.

3 Other areas of difference between Japan and the United States involve issues of group interaction and sense of space. Whereas people in the United States pride themselves on individualism and informality, Japanese value groups and formality. People in the United States admire and reward a person who rises above the crowd; in contrast, a Japanese proverb says, “The nail that sticks up gets hammered down.” In addition, while North Americans’ sense of size and scale developed out of the vastness of the continent, Japanese genius lies in the diminutive and miniature.⁶ For example, the United States builds airplanes, while Japan produces transistors.

4 In spite of these differences, these two apparently opposite cultures share several important experiences.

5 Both, for example, have transplanted cultures. Each nation has a “mother” society—China for Japan and Great Britain for the United States—that has influenced the daughter in countless ways: in language, religion, art, literature, social customs, and ways of thinking. Japan, of course, has had more time than the United States to work out its unique interpretation of the older Chinese culture, but both countries reflect their cultural ancestry.

6 Both societies, moreover, have developed the art of business and commerce, of buying and selling, of advertising and mass producing, to the highest levels. Few sights are more reassuring to people from the United States than the tens of thousands of busy stores in Japan, especially the beautiful, well-stocked department stores. To U.S. eyes, they seem just like Macy's or Neiman Marcus at home. In addition, both Japan and the United States are consumer societies. The people of both countries love to shop and are enthusiastic consumers of convenience products and fast foods. Vending machines selling everything from fresh flowers to hot coffee are as popular in Japan as they are in the United States, and fast-food noodle shops are as common in Japan as McDonald's restaurants are in the United States.

7 A final similarity is that both Japanese and people in the United States have always emphasized the importance of work, and both are paying penalties for their commitment to it: increasing stress and weakening family bonds. People in the United States, especially those in business and in the professions, regularly put in twelve or more hours a day at their jobs, just as many Japanese executives do. Also, while the normal Japanese workweek is six days, many people in the United States who want to get ahead voluntarily work on Saturday and/or Sunday in addition to their normal five-day workweek.

8 Japan and the United States: different, yet alike. Although the two societies differ in many areas such as racial heterogeneity versus racial homogeneity, individualism versus group cooperation, and informal versus formal forms of behavior, they share more than one common experience. Furthermore, their differences probably contribute as much as their similarities toward the mutual interest the two countries have in each other. It will be interesting to see where this reciprocal fascination leads in the future.

Comparison and Contrast Signal Words

- ▶ The second key to writing successful comparison/contrast essays is the appropriate use of comparison and contrast signal words.
- ▶ These are words that introduce points of comparison and points of contrast. It is not sufficient simply to describe each item that you are comparing. You must refer back and forth to, for example, Job X and Job Y and use comparison and contrast signal words to show what is the same and 'what is different about them.
- ▶ Of course, you should also use transition signals such as **first**, **second**, **one** . . . , **another** . . . , **the final** . . . , **for example**, and **in conclusion** in addition to these special ones.
- ▶ The following chart lists some of the words and phrases used to discuss similarities.

Comparison Signal Words

Transition Words and Phrases	
similarly likewise	Human workers can detect malfunctions in machinery; similarly/likewise , a robot can be programmed to detect equipment malfunctions.
also	Human workers can detect malfunctions in machinery; a robot can also .
too	Human workers can detect malfunctions in machinery; a robot can too .
Subordinators	
as just as	Robots can detect malfunctions in machinery, as/just as human workers can. <i>Note: Use a comma when as and just as show comparison even when the dependent clause follows the independent clause as in the above example.</i>

Comparison Signal Words (continued)

Coordinators	
and	Robots and human workers can detect malfunctions in machinery.
both . . . and	Both robots and human workers can detect malfunctions in machinery.
not only . . . but also	Not only robots but also human workers can detect malfunctions in machinery.
neither . . . nor	Neither robots nor human workers are infallible. ¹
Others	
like (+ noun) just like (+ noun) similar to (+ noun)	Robots, like/just like/similar to human workers, can detect malfunctions in machinery.
(be) like (be) similar (to) (be) the same as	Robots are like/are similar to/are the same as human workers in their ability to detect malfunctions in machinery.
(be) the same	In their ability to detect malfunctions in machinery, robots and human workers are the same .
(be) alike (be) similar	Robots and human workers are alike/are similar in their ability to detect malfunctions in machinery.
to compare (to/with)	Robots can be compared to/be compared with human workers in their ability to detect malfunctions in machinery.

PRACTICE 2**Using
Comparison
Signal Words**

A. Add comparison signal words to connect the following comparisons. The items contain both sentences and short phrases. You should write one complete new sentence for each item and use different comparison signal words in each. The first one has been done for you as an example.

1. The United States has a democratic form of government. Great Britain has a democratic form of government.

The United States has a democratic form of government, just as Great Britain does.

2. The United States operates under a two-party system. Great Britain operates under a two-party system.

3. The British Parliament has two separate houses, the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The United States Congress has two separate houses, the Senate and the House of Representatives.

Topic Suggestions

Two cities

Two siblings

Two friends

Two restaurants

Two cars

Two sports

Two sports stars

Two diets

Two types of teachers or bosses

Two classes

Two airlines

Two movies

- Contrast signal words fall into two main groups according to their meaning.
- The words in the first group show a relationship that is called *concession*.
- The words in the second group show an opposition relationship.
- **Contrast Signal Words: Concession (Unexpected Result)**

Concession signal words indicate that the information in one clause is not the result you expect from the information given in the other clause.

UNEXPECTED RESULT

Although I studied all night, I failed the exam.

My failing the exam is not the result you might expect from the information in the first clause: *I studied all night.*

Transition Words and Phrases

however
nevertheless
nonetheless
still

Millions of people go on diets every year; **however/nevertheless/nonetheless/still**, very few succeed in losing weight.

Subordinators

although
even though
though

Although/Even though/Though most dieters initially lose a few pounds, most gain them back again within a few weeks.

Coordinators

but
yet

Doctors say that "fad" diets do not work, **but/yet** many people still try them.

Others

despite (+ noun)
in spite of (+ noun)

Despite/In spite of 10 years of dieting, I am still fat.

- ▶ **Contrast Signal Words: Direct Opposition**

The second group of contrast signal words shows that two things are direct opposites. With direct opposites, the signal word can introduce either piece of information.

- ▶ I am short, whereas my brother is tall. OR My brother is tall, whereas I am short.

Transition Words and Phrases

however
in contrast
in (by) comparison
on the other hand

Rock music is primarily the music of white performers; **however/ in contrast/in comparison/by comparison/on the other hand**, jazz is performed by both white and black musicians.

on the contrary

Jazz is not just one style of music; **on the contrary**, jazz has many styles such as Chicago jazz, Dixieland, ragtime, swing, bebop, and cool jazz, to name just a few.

Note: On the contrary contrasts a truth and an untruth.

Subordinators

while
whereas

New Orleans-style jazz features brass marching-band instruments, **while/whereas** ragtime is played on a piano.

*Note: Use a comma with *while* and *whereas* even when the dependent clause follows the independent clause.*

Coordinators

but

Jazz music was born in the southern part of the United States, **but** it now enjoys a worldwide audience.

Others

differ (from)

Present-day rock music **differs from** early rock music in several ways.

compared (to/with)

Present-day rock music has a harder sound **compared to/compared with** early rock.

(be) different (from)
(be) dissimilar to

The punk, rap, grunge, and techno styles of today are very **different from/ dissimilar to/unlike** the rock music performed by Elvis Presley 50 years ago, but they have the same roots.

(be) unlike

Unlike rock, a music style started by white musicians, rhythm-and-blues styles were influenced primarily by black musicians.

PRACTICE 3**Using Contrast
Signal Words**

A. Add contrast signal words to connect the following items. The items contain both complete sentences and short phrases. You should write one complete new sentence for each item, and use a different contrast signal in each. The first one has been done for you as an example.

1. The government of the United States/the government of Great Britain/
dissimilar in several aspects

*The governments of the United States and Great Britain are dissimilar in
several aspects.*

2. The chief executive in Great Britain is called the prime minister. The chief
executive in the United States is called the president.

3. In the United States, the president fulfills the functions of both political
leader and head of state. These two functions are separate in Great Britain.

4. In other words, Great Britain has both a monarch and a prime minister. The
United States has only a president.

Review

- ▶ These are the important points covered in this chapter.
 1. **Comparison/contrast** is a common pattern for writing about similarities and differences. It is used in all academic fields.
 2. There are two common ways to organize a comparison/contrast essay.
 - In **point-by-point organization**, you discuss each similarity and each difference in some other order-usually order of their importance without grouping them into blocks. In this type of organization, you may discuss a similarity and then a difference, and then a similarity and then a difference.
 - In **block organization**, you first discuss all the similarities in a block and then all the differences in another block. (You may, of course, begin with the block of differences.)
 3. Use **comparison and contrast signal words** to help your reader understand your points of comparison and contrast.