

COMPARING AND CONTRASTING

Comparing and contrasting papers are simple in concept. “Comparing” means explaining how two items are similar; “contrasting” means explaining how two items are different. So, a comparing and contrasting paper explains how two items are similar and different.

If your topic is simple, the thesis statement can name the items being compared: *The Atkins Diet and the South Beach Diet have similar philosophies on proteins and carbohydrates, although the Atkins Diet is more rigid.* If your topic is so complex that naming all the items being compared would get unwieldy, then don’t name them: *The Republican and Democratic parties are vastly different in their political philosophies.* Whatever your approach, be sure you follow the principle of parallelism so that you use the same grammatical construction as you name the items being compared. For example, it would not be parallel to say “*Republicans and the Democratic Party are vastly different in their political philosophies.*” The two political parties are not referred to in equivalent manners.

Because discussing two topics—or people, or ideas, or objects—at the same time can get confusing, organization in a comparison/contrast paper is fairly rigid. There are two basic choices: [block organization](#) and [alternating organization](#).

BLOCK PLAN

In the block plan, each item being compared and contrasted gets one whole block of the paper to itself, as the following sample outline demonstrates.

1. Introduction
2. Atkins Diet
 - a. More protein
 - b. Fewer carbohydrates
3. South Beach Diet
 - a. More lean protein
 - b. Fewer highly processed carbohydrates
4. Conclusion

So, in this paper, there is a whole block of information about the Atkins Diet and then a whole block of information about the South Beach Diet. Make sure that you give both topics consistent treatment. Points discussed for one topic should also be discussed for the other and in the same order. Spend equal space on both so that both topics get equal time.

ALTERNATING PLAN

In the alternating plan, the paper alternates between the items being compared and contrasted, going back and forth between them, as the following sample outline demonstrates.

1. Introduction
2. Protein
 - a. Atkins Diet



- b. South Beach Diet
- 3. Carbohydrates
 - a. Atkins Diet
 - b. South Beach Diet
- 4. Conclusion

As with the block plan, make sure that you give both topics consistent treatment. Points discussed for one topic should also be discussed for the other and in the same order. Spend equal space on both so that both topics get equal time.

When writing any comparing and contrasting paper, especially when using the alternating plan, transitions are important to signal to the reader that you are moving from one topic to the other.

TRANSITIONS TO COMPARE IDEAS

When writing any comparison/contrast paper, especially when using the alternating plan, transitions are important to signal to the reader that you are moving from one topic to the other.

Transitions to Compare Ideas

In the same way	Similarly
Likewise	Resembling
Alike	Like

Transitions to Contrast Ideas

But	Although	Dissimilar
Still	On the other hand	Unlike
However	In contrast	Differ(s) from
Nevertheless	Otherwise	Difference
On the contrary	Conversely	Different
After all	While this may be true	Though
Even though	Granted	Despite
Notwithstanding	Yet	

Note: As you write a comparison/contrast paper, the purpose of the paper is rarely just to compare and contrast. There is some higher purpose. Perhaps X is better than Y, or X is as useful as Y, or perhaps X is different from Y but they are both useful to society. Make sure that point is clear and does not get overshadowed by the comparison/contrast treatment.

