



Palm Beach Atlantic University  
Center for Writing Excellence

## Compare and Contrast Essays

A **comparison** describes the ways in which two or more people, places, things, or ideas are similar. **Contrast** describes the ways in which they differ. Compare and contrast essays require one to find both similarities and differences between two or more topics that are related.

*How to write a compare and contrast essay:*

1. **List** every similarity between the topics you can think of, and then list every difference. Once you have your lists, look at your items and pick a few points under which those similarities and differences could fit.
2. Write a **thesis** that is supported by all the similarities and differences within each point. Remember that this has to be arguable and focused.
3. **Organize** and outline your essay. Compare and contrast essays typically follow one of two organizational methods:

*Subject-by-subject (block pattern):* Write about your two topics separately. Start with the first topic you are comparing and contrasting, and describe how your main points function in that topic. Then, in the second half of your paper, do the same with your second topic. For example, in comparing and contrasting the cities Atlanta and Seattle:

- I. Atlanta
  - a. Climate
  - b. Public transportation
  - c. Tourist attractions
- II. Seattle
  - a. Climate
  - b. Public transportations
  - c. Tourist attractions

*Point-by-point (alternating pattern):* Write about each point one at a time, comparing and contrasting first one topic and then the second one. Make sure you alternate in a consistent order (talk about Atlanta, then Seattle, then back to Atlanta, etc.) For example, if you were to compare and contrast the novels *Pride and Prejudice* and *North and South*:

- I. Time period:
  - a. *Pride and Prejudice*: Regency
  - b. *North and South*: Victorian

- II. Setting:
    - a. *Pride and Prejudice*: English countryside
    - b. *North and South*: Manchester
  - III. Heroines:
    - a. *Pride and Prejudice*: Elizabeth Bennett
    - b. *North and South*: Margaret Hale
4. **Write** your essay! Remember to follow all other essay guidelines in supporting your thesis with proper (cited) evidence as you would with any other essay.