**Essay Format: Comparison/Contrast**

All comparison/contrast papers consist of an introduction, a body, and a conclusion.

The introduction may consist of one or more paragraphs. The introduction must have a thesis statement that commits the paper to the persuasive principle. Otherwise, the paper becomes a pointless list of data. The introduction should establish your subjects (best limited to two), which will be examined for similarities and/or differences. The introduction should establish your basis of comparison. Four or five subtopics are usually sufficient.

The body consists of several paragraphs. It must be organized in either the vertical or horizontal pattern. It should contain various "indicator" words that make similarities/differences obvious or which express transition.

* Similarity is expressed by words such as *likewise, the same as, too, also, similarly, in like manner, comparably.*
* Difference is signaled by words such as *but, yet, however, nevertheless, on the contrary, contrary to, unlike,* and *the opposite of.*
* Transition from one subject to the other can be made clear by words such as *even though, although, in spite,* and *notwithstanding.*

The conclusion should contain a brief summary of your data or a restatement of your thesis sentence. Avoid trite concluding sentences like "In summary, X and Y really are alike/different."

**Standard Structure for Comparison/Contrast**

**Horizontal Pattern**

This pattern works best for longer papers and those with more subtopics. It can be thought of as a seesaw, swinging back and forth between its two subjects. Paragraphing is set up according to the two or three points on which you will examine your subjects for differences and similarities.

Thesis statement: Boston is a more exciting city than San Francisco.

1. Cultural opportunities
   1. Boston
   2. San Francisco
2. Recreational opportunities
   1. Boston
   2. San Francisco
3. Sense of History
   1. Boston
   2. San Francisco
4. Physical Beauty
   1. Boston
   2. San Francisco

Thesis statement: The community college can sometimes offer a number of benefits unknown at the four-year college.

1. Cost
   1. Community college
   2. Four-year college
2. Convenience
   1. Community college
   2. Four-year college
3. Instructors
   1. Community college
   2. Four-year college
4. Training for a Vocation
   1. Community college
   2. Four-year college

Most principles applicable to the vertical pattern hold for the horizontal also. Note the following guidelines:

* Say something about each subject under each subtopic.
* Observe consistent order. ("Boston" and "Community college" always come first.)
* Ensure consistent paragraph arrangement.
* Reminders are not nearly as important in this pattern, since you’ll be dealing with the same two subjects over and over.

**Vertical Pattern**

This pattern tends to work better for short papers. The writer discusses one unit in its entirety before going on to the other. Paragraphing is set up according to each subject (Boston and San Francisco, for instance).

Thesis statement: Boston is a more exciting city than San Francisco.

1. Boston
   1. Cultural opportunities
   2. Recreational opportunities
   3. Sense of history
   4. Physical beauty
2. San Francisco
   1. Cultural opportunities
   2. Recreational opportunities
   3. Sense of history
   4. Physical beauty

Thesis statement: The community college can sometimes offer a number of benefits unknown at the four-year college.

1. Community college
   1. Cost
   2. Convenience
   3. Instructors
   4. Training for a vocation
2. Four-year college
   1. Cost
   2. Convenience
   3. Instructors
   4. Lack of training for a vocation

The danger of using this pattern is that the writer may end with two separate essays instead of one unified comparison/contrast essay. Four guidelines can prevent such an occurrence.

* Each subtopic in Part 1 must also be discussed in Part 2. If you have nothing to say about the cultural opportunities of San Francisco, for example, don’t discuss those of Boston.
* Subtopics should be discussed in the same order in both parts.
* Paragraphing should be similar in both parts. If you write a whole paragraph about the convenience of a community college, write a paragraph about the convenience of a four-year school. In Part 1, if you can cover instructors in one or two sentences, use one or two sentences for instructors in Part 2.
* Subtopics in Part 2 should generally include reminders of the point made about the same subtopic in Part 1. Use indicator words; mention Boston before you discuss San Francisco.