

## CHAPTER 13

# Comparison and Contrast

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

After reading this chapter and working through its writing assignments, you will be ready to write a comparison or contrast essay that

- compares or contrasts limited aspects of two subjects or two sides of a subject;
- contains in its thesis statement (1) both subjects, (2) the intention to compare or contrast, and (3) a clear point about the comparison or contrast;
- uses either the *one-side-at-a-time* or the *point-by-point* method to develop its comparison or contrast;
- carefully compares or contrasts both subjects within one of these structures according to a valid basis for comparing or contrasting;
- concludes with a summing up of the results gained by comparing or contrasting the two subjects, confirming your viewpoint on these results.

Comparing and contrasting are everyday thought processes. 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, two television shows, two jobs, or two possible solutions to a problem we are having.

**Comparison** or **contrast** writing begins with this ordinary way of thinking about things. It presents items with some common basis for examination and then uses analysis to formulate several points of comparison or contrast. We use examples of similarities or differences to make the comparison or contrast clear to readers.

Comparison essays may inform readers of new material by showing the similarities between familiar ideas, people, or issues and unfamiliar or seemingly dissimilar concepts. Essays that contrast may sometimes persuade as the writer examines the differences between two subjects and makes judgments or decisions about them.

Comparison and contrast structures are used constantly in both academic and career writing tasks. You may compare one software package with another; you may contrast the accuracy of two accounting procedures; or your manager may need you to prepare a report comparing the work patterns of two employees.

In this chapter, you will be asked to write a comparison or contrast essay, using one of two methods of essay development for comparison or contrast writing. Each displays, in different ways, similarities and differences between things or ideas that reflect our natural thinking patterns.

To prepare for this task, first read about the two methods of development you can use in writing this type of essay. Then, read the student essays that follow, and work through the questions that accompany the essays.

## Methods of Development

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Comparing or contrasting two subjects requires you to do three things during the prewriting stage:

- 1 Decide on two ideas, people, or items that have a *valid basis for comparison or contrast*. For example, you could compare or contrast Windows XP with Macintosh OS X. Your basis for comparison or contrast would be *computer operating systems*. In this case, you can readily compare or contrast one system with the other. On the other hand, if you tried to compare or contrast Firefox with Macintosh OS X, there would be no valid basis for comparing or contrasting the two. You could, however, compare or contrast Firefox with Safari because both are Internet browsers with shared characteristics such as e-mail and web navigation.
- 2 Develop a viewpoint about what you are comparing. In other words, decide what point you wish to make, what you have learned as you focus on similarities or differences. For example, if you are listing points to compare a year you spent in university with the year you are now spending in college, you may find that there are good points about both experiences. Gradually, you may emerge with a thesis stating that both forms of education have value but in *different* ways.
- 3 Finally, you should choose one of two methods of development: the *one-side-at-a-time* method or the *point-by-point* method. Each of these methods is illustrated below.

### One Side at a Time

The one-side-at-a-time structure may be used either for the supporting paragraphs or for the entire essay. Whether you choose this method for your body paragraphs or for an essay, the one-side-at-a-time method does what its name states: presents all the points for one side, followed by all the points for the other side.

Look at the following supporting paragraph from “Betting on My Future,” one of the student essays that follows.

Although I knew I could not work full-time and attend college, I did not know what life with a part-time paycheque would be like. A year ago, I ate in restaurants once or twice a week and went to movies and hockey games; fifty dollars never seemed like much to spend for an evening out. Because I worked downtown, I enjoyed dressing well, and I never worried about putting a two-hundred-dollar jacket on my credit card; after all, I could pay off my cards every month and still save enough for a vacation every year. I was proud of myself for

staying out of debt and for being able to live as well as my friends. However, I don't see those friends for a meal now since I eat a brown-bag dinner on my break at the store where I work. I barely cover my rent, bills, and groceries, so I have to work the maximum hours and do without many things. Furthermore, since I have to watch what I spend on groceries, I don't invite people over anymore. Jeans and T-shirts are now my fashion statement; I can't afford dry cleaning these days, and my credit cards are in my safety deposit box at the bank. Because I paid my tuition fees with my savings and vacation money, and because I am still not comfortable with debt, I have avoided provincial student loans. I no longer live the way my friends do, so maybe my pride and my lack of time have a price.

The first half of the paragraph explains fully one side of the contrast: the comfort of the student's life a year ago. The second half of the paragraph deals entirely with the other side: the financial constraints of the student's life today. The following outline of the paragraph illustrates the one-side-at-a-time method.

#### **Outline (One Side at a Time)**

Life with a full-time paycheque was easier than life today.

1. A year ago
  - a. Restaurants, movies, hockey games
  - b. Using credit cards
  - c. Saving for vacations
  - d. No debts
2. Today
  - a. Take my lunches—have to pay rent and bills
  - b. No credit card spending
  - c. Savings used for tuition, no “cushion”
  - d. Afraid of taking loan and carrying debt

### **Point by Point**

Now, look at the supporting paragraph below, which is taken from the essay “What's For Dinner?”

Another area where the home-cooked meal shines is nutrition. Fast-food options are often full of empty calories and fat. A fast-food burger, if it is a Big Mac, contains 560 calories, of which 270 come from fat; the fat makes up 46 percent of the burger (calorie-count.com). Add fries, and it adds another 610 calories, with 261 of those coming from fat. A quarter-pound burger pan-broiled at home amounts to about 200 calories, and with sides of oven-roasted potatoes and steamed vegetables, will add up to the calorie-count of just the Big Mac alone, and a much lower proportion of fats. A KFC deep-fried, battered chicken breast contains about 500 calories, and more than half of those are fats. A Swiss Chalet chicken breast is a little better at 300 calories, but a chicken breast, with skin, floured, seasoned, and fried at home will add up to only 150 calories, with one-third of those coming from fats. Takeout

burger or chicken meals are rarely balanced, either; generally takeout means no vegetables other than potatoes.

In this case, the paragraph contrasts the nutritional value of the same food cooked two different ways point by point. The following outline of the paragraph illustrates the point-by-point method.

### Outline (Point by Point)

Another area where the home-cooked meal shines is nutrition.

1. Hamburgers
  - a. Big Mac with fries
  - b. Home-cooked burger with oven-roasted potatoes and vegetables
2. Chicken
  - a. KFC or Swiss Chalet chicken breast
  - b. Home-cooked, pan-fried chicken breast

Before you begin writing a comparison or contrast essay, decide whether you are going to use the one-side-at-a-time format or the point-by-point format. Use that format as you create the outline for your essay.

## Student Essays to Consider

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### Betting on My Future

I never thought I was a gambler, but a year ago I took a big chance: I decided to start college at the age of thirty-two. I put my money, my time, and my abilities on the line. When I look at the contrasts between my life a year ago and my life now, I feel like I'm facing uncertainties that would make any gambler nervous. My payoff could be a solid career, but in contrast to my life a year ago, I now face changes in my income, my social life, and my self-confidence.

Although I knew I could not work full-time and attend college, I did not know what living on a part-time paycheque would be like. A year ago, I ate in restaurants once or twice a week and went to movies and hockey games; fifty dollars never seemed like much to spend for an evening out. Because I worked downtown, I enjoyed dressing well, and I never worried about putting a two-hundred-dollar jacket on my credit card; after all, I could pay off my cards every month and still save enough for a vacation every year. I was proud of myself for staying out of debt and for being able to live as well as my friends. However, I don't see those friends for a meal now since I eat a brown-bag dinner on my break at the store where I work. I barely cover my rent, bills, and groceries, so I have to work the maximum hours and do without many things. Furthermore, since I have to watch what I spend on groceries, I don't invite people over anymore. Jeans and T-shirts are now my fashion statement; I can't afford dry cleaning these days, and my credit cards are in my safety deposit box at the bank. Because I paid my tuition fees with my savings and vacation money, and because I am still not comfortable with debt, I have avoided provincial student

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loans. I no longer live the way my friends do, so maybe my pride and my lack of time have a price.

Friends and hobbies used to fill my time. I saw my friends nearly every day after work; we went to movies and bought good seats for the major hockey games. On weekends, we partied, went skiing, and shopped for clothes and the latest sporting equipment. Three nights a week, I worked out at a fitness club, and I was quite proud of the shape I was in. My job as a data processing clerk had a regular schedule without much pressure and no paperwork to take home. A year ago, I never had to keep track of time; now, I juggle every minute to manage classes, assignments, job, and trying to keep it all organized. Every day, as soon as my last class is over, I run for the bus to get to work by 5:00 p.m. I can't stay around to chat and make friends with other students, and, except for Sundays, I can't stay at school to work in the computer labs or the library. I spend spare time between classes trying to read my textbooks, keep up with assignments, or print out work. During evenings, I work until 9:00 p.m., and after the trip home, I try to do an hour or two of homework before I fall asleep. Sometimes, I wonder which is my biggest challenge: budgeting money or time.

Looking back from today, I realize my biggest problem was boredom. I liked the company I worked for; I enjoyed the people I worked with, and being downtown was always exciting. Data processing seemed like a "job," not a career. I simply moved from one project to the next and waited for the next raise to come along. There was no push to do better and nearly no chance for promotion. No major worries meant no challenges. Now, though, I face a series of challenges every day. The technical courses are intense, and it takes effort and concentration to do well at new subjects like digital graphics. After being out of school for fifteen years, an even bigger challenge is writing; every essay assignment feels like a battle. Because of my age and my investment in college, I pressure myself to do well. My biggest challenge may come in two years, though, from competition I will face for a new career; a lot of that competition will be younger than I am.

If I look at my life today, contrasted with one year ago, I know that I miss my friends and my comfortable life. Still, although I may be exhausted, a little anxious about my future, and concerned about doing well in my courses, I feel I'm taking a "solid bet": on myself. And I never have time to be bored.

### What's For Dinner?

Swiss Chalet, McDonald's, and Tim Hortons tempt hungry Canadians every day with billboards and TV commercials. Hot succulent chicken, fries and a roll, wholesome sandwiches with a doughnut on the side, or the Darth Vader of food, the Big Mac: they are all ready, right now, nearby. How can home cooking compete? Well, on the basis of taste and ease or preparation, nutritional value, and cost, the home-made meal wins every time.

Sometimes people are hungry and just do not feel like cooking. A burger, fried chicken, or pizza seem like tasty ideas—at first bite. Let those cool down for a few minutes, though, and the sliver-thin burger leaves a fatty scum in the mouth and the chicken batter tastes like fried socks. There are better-

tasting alternatives that are quick and easy to prepare. In half an hour, even inexperienced cooks can sauté a chicken breast, chop, or burger, bake a potato, and make a salad. The meat will be juicy inside and crispy outside; the baked potato will be hot and ready for toppings, and the salad will taste cool and fresh. Each can be seasoned and cooked exactly to taste, not according to a corporate formula. If the palate craves Italian flavour, takeout pizza is not the only option; the crust is usually chewier than the box it came in. Anyone can buy a good crust at the supermarket and dress it up or down to taste with different cheeses, seasonings, and toppings in exactly the desired quantities. A comforting bowl of pasta is as easy as boiling water, then opening a jar of gourmet sauce or just applying oil, garlic, and parmesan cheese. Add raw vegetables and dip, and dinner is complete. Cooking a simple meal is easy and always tastes better than predictable takeout options.

Another area where the home-cooked meal shines is nutrition. Fast-food options are often full of empty calories and fat. A fast-food burger, if it is a Big Mac, contains 560 calories, of which 270 come from fat; the fat makes up 46 percent of the burger (calorie-count.com). Add fries, and it adds another 610 calories, with 261 of those coming from fat. A quarter-pound burger pan-broiled at home amounts to about 200 calories, and with sides of oven-roasted potatoes and steamed vegetables, will add up to the calorie-count of just the Big Mac alone, and a much lower proportion of fats. A KFC deep-fried, battered chicken breast contains about 500 calories, and more than half of those are fats. A Swiss Chalet chicken breast is a little better at 300 calories, but a chicken breast, with skin, floured, seasoned, and fried at home will add up to only 150 calories, with one-third of those coming from fats. Takeout burger or chicken meals are rarely balanced, either; generally takeout means no vegetables other than potatoes.

Finally, home cooking is always less expensive than takeout. Most ingredients for an ordinary dinner add up to about five dollars at the supermarket. In contrast, a quarter chicken takeout dinner for one costs at least eight or nine dollars. A chicken breast bought at the supermarket is at most two dollars, a potato thirty cents, and vegetables a dollar or two—the whole meal cooked at home costs about half of the takeout bill. Burgers and fries are cheaper forms of fast food, in general. But a quarter pound of ground beef is perhaps eighty cents at most; add the potato and vegetables, and the home-made burger meal tops out at about \$2.50, compared to most burger-and-fries (no veggies) combos, which will be at least \$4.00 or more. Even a fully loaded pizza made at home is better value than the delivery model. The supermarket crust, jar of sauce, mozzarella, and even pepperoni may total six or seven dollars, but in most places, a medium or large pizza will be over ten dollars, and there will be a delivery charge. Where economy is concerned, do-it-yourself meals are clear winners.

Stopping at a drive-through window or picking up the phone are tempting when hunger strikes. But the food never tastes as good as it looks in the menu pictures, and it's nearly never nutritionally balanced. And if the savings that result from cooking at home are not enough, consider the ritual of making a meal exactly to taste as a soothing end to a busy day.

## ■ Questions

### About Unity

1. Which paragraph in “Betting on My Future” contains its topic sentence within the paragraph rather than at its beginning?
2. Which sentence in paragraph 4 of “Betting on My Future” should be omitted in the interest of paragraph unity?
3. In which paragraph in “What’s For Dinner?” is the topic sentence at the end rather than at the beginning, where it generally belongs in student essays?

### About Support

4. In paragraph 3 of “Betting on My Future,” what three examples does the writer give to support his claim that he must budget every minute of his time?
5. Which sentence in paragraph 4 of “Betting on My Future” should be followed by supporting details?
6. Which sentence in paragraph 3 of “What’s For Dinner?” should be followed by supporting details?

### About Coherence

7. In paragraph 2 of “Betting on My Future,” what “change of direction” signal does the author use to indicate he has finished discussing his life last year and is now going to discuss his life this year?
8. Write the words in the last section of paragraph 4 of “Betting on My Future” that indicate the writer has used emphatic order in organizing his supporting points.

### About the Introduction and Conclusion

9. Which best describes the opening paragraph of “What’s For Dinner”?
  - a. Broad, general statement narrowing to a thesis
  - b. Explanation of the importance of the topic
  - c. Beginning with an opposite
  - d. Question
10. The conclusion of “Betting on My Future” falls into which category?
  - a. Some observations and a prediction
  - b. Summary and final thought
  - c. Question or series of questions

## Developing a Comparison or Contrast Essay

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### Purpose and Audience

The main purpose of a comparison or contrast essay is to make a point by showing your audience that two distinct items are either similar or different. Whether you choose to compare or contrast two items depends on the specific point you

want to convey to your audience. Suppose, for instance, the main point of your essay is that home-made hamburgers are superior to boxed burgers. To convince your audience of your claim, you might *contrast* the two items, pointing out those differences—price, taste, and nutrition—that make the home-made burger better. If, however, your main point is that Kingston’s tap water is just as good as bottled water, you could *compare* the two, pointing out the similarities that support your point. Kingston’s tap water and bottled water, for example, might be equally clean, fresh, and mineral-rich; a small amount of research would give you the facts you need. In both examples above, comparing or contrasting is used to convince readers of a larger main point.

Be sure to keep your audience in mind when planning your essay. If you are writing about Macs and PCs for computer studies or technology students, for example, you could assume your audience is familiar with the two systems and with specialized terminology. On the other hand, if your audience is made up of health care or broadcast students, you could not make such assumptions, and it would be up to you to provide background information and to define specialized terms. Thinking about your audience will help you determine the tone of your essay as well. Once again, if you are writing for an audience of programmers, it is appropriate to write in an objective, technical tone. However, if you are writing for a more general audience, you should assume a friendly, less formal tone.

### Point of View in Comparison or Contrast Essays

Comparing or contrasting two ideas or things requires intensive work in the pre-writing stage in order to create a solid and clear pattern that exposes and explains similarities and/or differences. In the first few semesters at college or university, the first priority for students to focus on is discovering and setting up an effective comparison/contrast structure. Decisions relating to first- and third-person point of view or voice can depend on an instructor’s preference at this stage; initially, the main issue with this pattern of development is developing skills required to provide a clear structure to compare and/or contrast two items, and to show in the thesis a point that emerges clearly from such comparing or contrasting.

As with most patterns of essay development, when writers select a point of view or voice for a comparison/contrast assignment, they should consider how essential their connection to their topic is to effectively making the essay’s point. Does their presence as “I” contribute something necessary or will it intrude on the reader’s understanding of their argument? The student essays in this chapter present examples of a first-person point of view, in “Betting on My Future,” and of a third-person point of view, in “What’s For Dinner?” These resulted from an assigned general topic requiring students to contrast two concepts relating to their everyday lives. Max, the author of “Betting on My Future,” as noted in the “Prewriting” section following, developed his essay from personal experience. The strength of his thesis, pattern of contrast, and supporting details derive from his personal connections to his topic, so first-person voice is appropriate here. For many writing assignments, however, first-person comparisons and/or contrasts will not likely be the rule; focus and emphasis will fall on the quality of factual support. Sari, author of “What’s For Dinner?,” felt that any first-person presence in her essay would detract from the impartial support she wished to provide for her thesis.



Her essay's strength would be based on specific facts that would be as accurate as possible, so she did some quick online research about nutritional content in various foods, and then included her source within the essay. Otherwise, she felt her essay would seem more the product of her own opinions than of objective facts. This type of third-person, factually supported comparison or contrast essay is more characteristic of later academic or career writing tasks.

## Prewriting

Both students featured in this chapter contrasted some aspects of their lives as students. Max, who wrote “Betting on My Future,” had started college four months earlier at the age of thirty-two.

“The evening before, a friend came into the store where I work part-time,” he said, “and asked why no one ever saw me any more. I tried to explain that if I weren't in classes, or at work, or doing assignments, I was probably asleep. As I said this, I realized how different my life was now from the way it used to be less than a year ago. So the contrasts between the two parts of my life were the clearest things in my mind.”

To generate ideas for his paper, Max decided to try freewriting. He tried to write “an open letter” to his friends, explaining why he never had any free time these days. He asked himself, “Why has my life changed so much? What are the differences between my life before college and my life now? If life is so demanding now, why am I doing this?” Here is what Max wrote:

Dear friends,

I know none of you has heard from me for a while, so I thought I'd try to tell you why, and how different my life is, now that I'm back in school after nearly fifteen years. I know I never thought of myself as someone who took chances, but now I just hope the gamble is worth it. Right now, I'm betting everything on college: all my money, my time, and all my fears about what I can do. I'm so beat most of the time that I don't even pick up the phone, and I don't have the extra money to go out anyway. When Judy came into the store last night, I'd even forgotten how long it's been since we all went out to a movie or since I worked out. And do I miss those paycheques! Right now, between tuition and textbooks, I haven't got \$10 left over this week. What I make part-time barely buys me groceries after the rent and the bills. I used to be bored at work. Now, I worry about failing or messing up on my courses—I hardly have time to eat, let alone panic. Going back to school is a bigger change than I'd thought it would be. I feel like an outsider with a lot of the students because I'm at least ten years older than they are, and I have to leave right after classes to get to work, so I haven't gotten to know people at college anyway. Younger students probably find me too serious, too, because I sit there in classes trying to take it all in. I can't afford not to because I've bet my whole future on trying to train for a career.

So, I guess I'm apologizing for dropping out of the life we all used to share. I just don't feel like I have much of a choice. There's so much riding on going back to school that I don't want to take chances.

Max

As Max looked over his letter, he saw that most of what he had written fell into three categories that he could use as the three points for comparison in his essay. He saw that his main feeling, or viewpoint, was that he felt the risk was worthwhile. Working from this view, and using these three points, he prepared this first outline for the essay:

**Thesis:** My life this year is so different from last year, and I hope the risks pay off.

1. Used to have enough money for a social life and hobbies; now, I'm scraping by.
  - Entertainment and clothes
  - Budgets and no extras
  - Debt and savings
2. Last year, I had time for people and for workouts; now, I'm always rushing.
  - Movies and free time vs no free time
  - Work vs school schedules
  - Have to use every minute now
3. I was bored at work; this year, everything is a challenge.
  - Nothing to try for at work
  - Courses are hard and I'm older than other students
  - It's all a competition now



### Writing a Thesis Statement for a Comparison or Contrast Essay

In academic, business, or technical writing, comparison and contrast is valuable because it offers readers a new way to see familiar concepts or things. Writing an effective thesis for an essay that is exclusively comparison or contrast, or a blend of the two, asks the writer to have a purpose for examining and interpreting the results of setting up likenesses and/or differences.

That purpose will usually emerge during prewriting. As you work on your comparison/contrast essay, ask yourself, “What did I learn from this?”, “Why did I compare or contrast these?”, or “What important or significant ideas emerged from putting these two ideas together?” Your point is what you learned.

A comparison or contrast thesis does not *announce* “A and B are very different,” or “A and B have important similarities.” Neither of these offers a point derived from the acts of comparing or contrasting. Instead, an effective comparison or contrast thesis offers readers what the writer discovered from setting one thing up against another—that “something new” is the writer’s purpose. For example, “A and B’s similarities are so pronounced that buyers could easily be fooled . . .”

Therefore, a formula for a comparison/contrast thesis might be *topic + intention to compare and/or contrast + suggestion or statement of outcome/discovery gained from comparing and/or contrasting*. In some cases, it may also be appropriate to mention the basis of comparison and/or contrast (see page XXX).

An example of a comparison essay's thesis, following the formula above, would be:

The coverage of the student walk-out in the *Vancouver Sun* and the *Vancouver Province* was so similar that the reporters might have plagiarized from each other.

An example of a contrast essay's thesis, following the formula above would be:

The contrasts between the cooking styles of the two chefs are so pronounced that diners often do not recognize a dish they ordered previously.

## First Draft and Revision

Working from his outline, Max wrote the following first draft of his essay:

Judy asked me last night why no one ever sees me anymore. I told her my life feels like “risky business” right now because I’ve spent all my money to go back to school, and everything in my life has changed this year. **1**

Last year, my friends and I went to the movies nearly every week and ate in restaurants whenever we felt like it. Now, I can’t even afford takeout. I had some savings put aside, but I used them for my tuition for college this year. We all used our charge cards for clothes and ski trips. Recently, though, I had to put my cards in the deposit box at the bank because I don’t have enough income to pay the minimum on credit-card bills. Without a full-time paycheck, I’m afraid of debt, so I have to watch every penny this year. It all feels like such a gamble. **2**

Workouts three times a week were a big part of my life last year and so was all the time I spent with my friends. Now, I barely have time to sleep. Classes, studying, printing my assignments during spare hours, and running for the bus to work eat up every minute of my days. I fall asleep trying to do homework at night when I get home from my part-time job. Even though I miss my friends, I don’t have time to meet new people at college because I’m always in such a rush and because the other students seem so much younger and more carefree. **3**

Now, I am never bored, but I am not sure I enjoy the pressure of my life these days. Work used to be dull but predictable; there were never any challenges or any chances for growth. That’s why I decided to go to college—for the opportunity for a career. Every essay is a struggle for me and so are the courses like digital graphics; there are so many new things and so many things I remember that I used to find difficult and still do. There will be so much competition for jobs when I finish; that scares me too. And most of those people applying for jobs along with me will be so much younger. At least I feel like I’m trying to make something out of my life. **4**

So, if all these things sound like challenges, they are. My life has changed completely from the way it was a year ago, and I keep trying to believe the costs in money, time, and energy are worth it. **5**

Max put the first draft of his essay aside and took it to his English class the next day. His instructor asked Max and the other students to work in small groups, reading their drafts aloud and making revision suggestions to one another. Here are the notes Max made on the basis of his group’s comments:

- I don’t need to bring up Judy—I think I can explain my situation without that story.
- I’m not consistent about developing my paragraphs. I forgot to do a “one-side-at-a-time” or “point-by-point” comparison. I think I’ll try a “one-side-at-a-time” technique. I’ll describe in each paragraph what last year was like, then describe how different each aspect of this year is.
- I could use more support for some of my points, especially the points about where my money goes now and about how little time I have.
- I should clarify my point about why this “bet” in my life is worth it—say why what I’m doing feels right to me.

After making these observations about his first draft, Max proceeded to write the final version of “Betting on My Future,” which appears on pages 207–208.

## Writing a Comparison or Contrast Essay

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### ■ Writing Assignment 1

Write an essay of comparison or contrast on one of the topics below:

- Two search engines
- Two bosses you’ve worked for
- Two groups or two genres of music you listen to
- Two possessions you prize
- Two fashion designers
- Two games, sports, or leisure activities
- Two magazines you read regularly
- Two forms of communication (e.g., phone calls and e-mail)
- Two ways of spending (e.g., cash and credit cards)

### Prewriting

- 1 As you select your topic, keep in mind that you won’t merely be *describing* the two things you’re writing about; you will be *emphasizing* the ways they are different or alike.
- 2 Make two columns on a sheet of paper—one for each of the subjects you’ll write about. In the left-hand column, jot down words or phrases that describe the first of the two. Write anything that comes into your head. Then, go back and write a corresponding word or phrase about the subject in the right-hand column. For example, here is Nazima’s list of characteristics about two games she plays. She began brainstorming for words and phrases to describe Scrabble. She then wrote a corresponding list of characteristics for volleyball, which she added to complete her list.

**Scrabble**

Quiet  
 Involves words  
 Played sitting down  
 Involves as few as 2 players  
 Can let mind wander when it's not your turn  
 Mental concentration, not physical  
 Part chance (what letters you get)  
 Part strategy and skill  
 Some see as boring, nerdy game  
 Players' size doesn't matter

**Volleyball**

Noisy, talking and yelling  
 Involves ball and a net  
 Played standing up, jumping  
 Involves 12 players  
 Have to stay alert every minute  
 Mental and physical concentration required  
 Mostly skill, strategy; little chance  
 Seen as glamorous—stars get advertising contracts  
 Being tall helps

- 3 Your list of characteristics will help you decide if the two things you are writing about are more alike (in which case you'll write an essay *comparing* them) or different (in which case you'll write an essay *contrasting* them.)
- 4 As you look over your lists, think about how the characteristics you've written down (and others that occur to you) could fit into three categories that can serve as your supporting points or "points of comparison or contrast."
- 5 Decide if you will design your essay with the *one-side-at-a-time* method of development or the *point-by-point* method of development. Be consistent in your use of one method or the other as you prepare an outline.

Nazima decided on three headings under which the two games could be contrasted, and she resolved to use the *point-by-point* method of development.

Fill in the blanks in her outline to indicate the supporting points, or points of contrast, between the two games.

**Trial Thesis:** Although they are two of my favourite activities, Scrabble and volleyball could hardly be more different.

Point: \_\_\_\_\_

- Scrabble requires a board and letter tiles
- Volleyball needs a ball and a net
- Scrabble can be played by two people
- Twelve people needed for a volleyball game
- Scrabble can be played anywhere there's room for two people to sit down
- Volleyball needs a large room and high ceilings or an outdoor playing area

Point: \_\_\_\_\_

- You have to concentrate mentally to play Scrabble
- You need mental and physical concentration to play volleyball
- It doesn't matter what size you are to play Scrabble

- It helps to be tall to play volleyball
- There's some chance involved in Scrabble
- Chance is not a big part of volleyball

Point: \_\_\_\_\_

- Scrabble players are seen as “eggheads” by the general public
- Star volleyball players are seen as glamorous by public
- Volleyball players get contracts to endorse athletic shoes
- Scrabble players don't endorse anything, even dictionaries
- Volleyball players are admired for the power of their spike
- Scrabble players are admired for the number of unusual two-letter words they know

**6** Using your own outline, proceed to write the first draft of your essay.

### Revising

As you review the first draft of your essay, ask yourself these questions:

- Have I made it clear in my thesis statement what two things I am writing about, my viewpoint about them, and whether I will compare or contrast them?
- Do my supporting points represent three ways in which I will compare or contrast my two subjects?
- Does each of my supporting paragraphs have a clear topic sentence?
- Have I consistently used either the *one-side-at-a-time* or the *point-by-point* method of development?
- Have I used transition words to help readers follow my train of thought?
- Have I rounded off my essay with a conclusion that confirms what my comparison or contrast has shown?

Continue to revise your essay until you can answer “yes” to each question. Then, be sure to check the next-to-final draft for the sentence skills listed on the inside front cover.

### ■ Writing Assignment 2

Write an essay that contrasts two attitudes on a controversial subject. You may want to contrast your views with those of someone else or contrast the way you felt about the subject in the past with the way you feel now. Essays that strongly contrast two views tend to be more dramatic and sound more forceful to readers.

This is an essay assignment in which writing in the third-person point of view is recommended.

Here are some subjects you might consider writing about:

- Women serving in combat positions in the Canadian Armed Forces
- Legal marriage status for gay couples
- Censorship of the Internet
- Tax-funded shelters for street people
- Cuts in education (or hospital/medical) funding
- “The right to die an assisted death”
- Canada's unemployment insurance system

- 1 In order to gather information about an attitude that contrasts with your own, you will need to do some research. Two approaches may help you to find useful material: going to the library to search through article indexes for recent Canadian and international news magazines (ask your instructor or library assistant if you need help) or doing an Internet search, using key words to find websites on these subjects. For help with using search engines, incorporating quotations, paraphrasing material from your sources, and correctly acknowledging your sources in your essay, refer to the “Research Skills” chapter on pages 268–291. Alternatively, you could interview friends and acquaintances whose attitude on the subject is different from yours.
- 2 As you examine your research and your own attitude about the issue, note the strongest points on both sides. From them, formulate your three main supporting points.
- 3 Decide whether it is more effective to contrast your attitude and the opposing one point by point within each paragraph or one side at a time
- 4 Write a thesis statement, and prepare an outline, which reflects the method of development you have chosen. Using your outline, write the first draft of your contrast essay.
- 5 Refer to the guidelines for revising your contrast essay provided on page 217.

### ■ Writing Assignment 3

In this comparison or contrast essay, you will write with a **specific purpose** and for a **specific audience**.

**Option 1:** Your niece or nephew is finishing high school soon and is thinking about getting a job instead of going to college or university. You would prefer to see him or her give college a try. Write him or her a letter in which you contrast the two courses of action. Use a one-side-at-a-time method in making your analysis.

**Option 2:** Write a letter to your boss in which you compare your abilities with those of the “ideal” candidate for a position to which you would like to be promoted. Use a point-by-point method to discuss each ideal requirement, and then describe how well you measure up to it. Use the requirements of a job you’re relatively familiar with or a job you would really like to apply for some day.

### ■ Writing Assignment 4

Read the selection titled “Smash Thy Neighbor” on pages XXX–XXX. Pay special attention to how the author compares and contrasts football and war in paragraphs 5–8 and compares football and the rest of society in paragraph 14. Notice how he makes the comparisons and contrasts in order to describe football more fully. Then, write an essay in which you use a comparison to fully describe three aspects of an activity, place, or person. You may use serious or humorous supporting details.

Following are some suggestions that you might consider for a thesis statement:

**Thesis:** In a few significant ways,

- going to college or university is like working at a career.
- meditation is like exercise.
- instructors should be like parents.

Feel free to use any other thesis that makes a comparison in order to fill out a description of an activity, person, or place. (Note that a comparison that points out similarities between things that are otherwise quite different, as in the above examples, is called an *analogy*.)

### CHECKLIST OF LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR CHAPTER 13

To ensure that you have understood and met the learning outcomes for this chapter, answer the following questions upon completing any of its writing assignments:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Have you chosen two subjects or two sides of one subject that can logically be compared or contrasted? Does a worthwhile point emerge from the process of comparing or contrasting the two parts of your thesis?</li> <li>✓ Does your thesis statement state both subjects (or both sides of your subject), whether you will compare or contrast, and the point you will make based on that action?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Have you consistently used the method of development (either the <i>point-by-point</i> or <i>one-side-at-a-time</i> method) most appropriate to your subject(s)?</li> <li>✓ Have you used a valid basis for comparing or contrasting and presented an equal amount of supporting material for both sides or both subjects?</li> <li>✓ Does the conclusion sum up the points made during the comparison or contrast and reinforce your thesis point?</li> </ul> |
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