

Comparing/Contrasting: Essay Organization

In a comparison/contrast essay, a writer must do the following:

1. Identify and explain three or more key points that two or more subjects have in common.
2. Show the similarities and differences between these points.
3. Develop a thesis, indicating his or her position regarding the two subjects. The thesis may indicate that one subject is stronger than the other and that both subjects have strengths or that both subjects possess noteworthy flaws.

There are two ways to organize a comparison/contrast essay.

Block Approach

This organizational pattern is most effective when used on short essays, such as in-class papers. The body of such an essay is organized by discussing one subject, point by point, in complete detail before moving on to the next subject. The writer should select points by which both subjects can be examined. The number of body paragraphs will be determined by the number of points discussed in the essay.

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| Introduction: Introduce the two or more subjects being compared and lead to a thesis statement or argument. | Example: There are benefits to shopping at both Whole Foods and Safeway, but Whole Foods is ultimately the better grocery store because it offers more environmentally friendly products, organic produce, and healthy alternatives to traditional medicine. |
| First Body Paragraph: Discuss point #1 of the first subject. | Example: Whole Foods offers a wide selection of environmentally friendly products. |
| Second Body Paragraph: Discuss point #2 of the first subject. | Example: Whole Foods has a wide selection of organic produce. |
| Third Body Paragraph: Discuss point #3 of the first subject. | Example: Whole Foods has a wider availability of healthy alternatives to medications. |
| Fourth Body Paragraph: Transition to and discuss point #1 of the second subject, providing similarities and differences with point #1 of the first subject. | Example: Safeway does not offer very many environmentally friendly products. Most of the cleaning products and packaging sold by Safeway are not biodegradable and contain harmful chemicals that pollute our environment. |

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| Fifth Body Paragraph: Discuss point #2 of the second subject, providing similarities and differences with point #2 of the first subject. | Example: Safeway does not have as wide a selection of organic produce as Whole Foods. Instead, the majority of its produce is grown with pesticides and hormones. |
| Sixth Body Paragraph: Discuss point #3 of the second subject, providing similarities and differences with point #3 of the first subject. | Example: Safeway offers few natural remedies. Instead, Safeway has a large selection of over-the-counter drugs in addition to a pharmacy that sells medications manufactured by pharmaceutical companies. |
| Conclusion: Without repeating any claims or adding any new information, emphasize the importance of the similarities and differences between the two subjects as they are relevant to your thesis. | Example: With its wholesome products, Whole Foods is surely a healthier place to shop than Safeway. |

Point-by-Point Approach

This organizational pattern is most effective when used on longer essays, such as a comparison of two articles, novels, or short stories. The body of such an essay is organized by discussing one point at a time and how it applies to each subject before moving on to the next point. For long works, at least three points should be examined if not more.

Note: Unlike the first option for organization, this pattern will probably require more than one body paragraph for each point being discussed.

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| Introduction: Introduce the two or more subjects being compared and lead to a thesis statement or argument. | Example: There are benefits to shopping at both Whole Foods and Safeway, but Whole Foods is ultimately the better grocery store because it offers more environmentally friendly products, organic produce, and healthy alternatives to traditional medicine. |
| First Point: Discuss point #1 of both subjects, comparing and contrasting the manifestation of this point in each subject. | Example: Whole Foods offers a wide selection of environmentally friendly products, unlike Safeway whose cleaning products and packaging are not biodegradable and contain harmful chemicals that pollute our environment. |

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| <p>Second Point: Discuss point #2 of both subjects, comparing and contrasting the manifestation of this point in each subject.</p> | <p>Example: While Whole Foods has a wide selection of organic produce, the majority of the produce from Safeway is grown with pesticides and hormones.</p> |
| <p>Third Point: Discuss point #3 of both subjects, comparing and contrasting the manifestation of this point in each subject.</p> | <p>Example: Whole Foods has a wider availability of healthy alternatives to medications than Safeway, which has a large selection of over-the-counter drugs in addition to a pharmacy that sells medications manufactured by pharmaceutical companies.</p> |
| <p>Conclusion: Without repeating any claims or adding any new information, emphasize the importance of the similarities and differences between the two subjects as they are relevant to your thesis.</p> | <p>Example: With its wholesome products, Whole Foods is surely a healthier place to shop than Safeway.</p> |

Activity

Compare the benefits of eating fast food to those of eating home-cooked meals. Select three points of comparison for each subject and create one outline using the first pattern of organization and one outline using the second pattern. See the next page for possible answers.

Suggested Answers for Activity

The benefits of eating fast food versus those of eating home-cooked meals can be compared by examining each through three perspectives: cost, convenience, and health.

| Block Approach | Point-by-Point Approach |
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| Introduction: While fast food and home-cooked meals can both be appealing, the healthiest way to eat is by preparing our own food. | Introduction: While fast food and home-cooked meals can both be appealing, the healthiest way to eat is by preparing our own food. |
| First Body Paragraph: Most fast food restaurants are affordable. | First Point: Fast food restaurants can be more affordable than groceries, but groceries can be affordable if we shop smart. |
| Second Body Paragraph: Fast food is convenient because it can be obtained quickly and easily. | Second Point: Fast food is convenient because it is available so quickly; home-cooked meals take more time to prepare. |
| Third Body Paragraph: Fast food can fulfill our daily caloric needs, but it can easily exceed these and contains ingredients that are detrimental to our health. | Third Point: Home-cooked meals are healthier than fast food. |
| Fourth Body Paragraph: Home-cooked meals are more expensive than some of the cheapest fast food restaurants, but if we shop smart, we can find affordable ingredients. | Conclusion: Although fast food is tempting because it seems convenient and affordable, home-cooked meals will help us stay healthy in the long run. |
| Fifth Body Paragraph: Cooking for ourselves can be challenging and time consuming, but with some practice, it can be enjoyable. | |
| Sixth Body Paragraph: Cooking at home allows us to select fresh ingredients, many of which will not contain the preservatives and additives that are found in a majority of fast food items. These substances have been known to cause serious health problems. | |
| Conclusion: Although fast food is tempting because it seems convenient and affordable, home-cooked meals will help us stay healthy in the long run. | |