

## Comparative Essay

### What is a Comparative Essay?

A comparative essay usually requires you to complete these three tasks:

1. Compare and contrast at least two items.
2. Explain the significance of the comparison:
  - a. Why does the comparison matter?
  - b. What does the comparison suggest about the items?
3. Assess the items based on some criteria:
  - a. Sometimes your assignment guidelines will provide a basis for a comparison that sets the criteria.

Even though your professor may call it a “comparison”, it is usually expected that you will discuss both the similarities and the differences between the items.

### How to Write a Comparative Essay

#### 1. Pick a basis for your comparison

You need a specific basis for your comparison. Without one, there will be too much information to research.

Your assignment guidelines may already include a scope of focus for you to write about. If not, your basis should be an idea, category, or theme that applies to each of the items you are comparing. To get started, you may need to complete some preliminary research about your topics or speak with your professor to understand the assignment expectations.

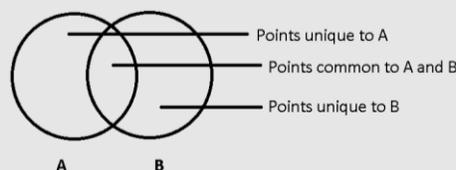
#### 2. Identify the similarities and differences

Gather information about the items that you will be comparing. You'll need to identify the similarities and differences for each of the items.

Remember, your end goal is NOT to list out the similarities and differences between the items. You need to move beyond basic identification to explaining the significance of the similarities and differences.

#### Writing Tip: Use a graphic organizer to collect the similarities and differences

Try using a Venn diagram or a chart to organize your ideas.



#### 3. Develop a thesis statement

Create a thesis statement based on the results of your comparison. Remember, your thesis needs to be arguable and appropriate for your course.

## Create an arguable thesis

Go beyond the identification of similarities and differences by explaining their significance. Explain why this comparison matters. Your thesis will become arguable once you add in this portion.

For instance, you might have compared two islands with similar goat overpopulation for a science course. It's useful to set the context of these islands and the interventions that people used to deal with the goat overpopulation, but your thesis is not arguable if you only state facts. Adjust your thesis to explain why the similarities and differences matter. For instance, you might explain how the differences in the intervention impacted the ecosystem and the island populations. Depending on your assignment guidelines, you could make suggestions about a future intervention that could be effective in handling goat overpopulation on islands.

Try these strategies for creating an arguable thesis:

### A. Cause and Effect

Identify how the differences and similarities lead to an outcome. For instance, you might discuss how the two different endings in *Great Expectations* affect how readers understand Pip's relationship with Estella.

### B. Degree of Similarity or Difference

Are there more similarities or more differences between the items you're comparing? You can create a thesis based on the degree of similarity or difference, but it can become descriptive if you don't explain why the comparison matters. For example, you could write about the characteristics of Harry Potter and Lord Voldemort from the *Harry Potter* series. Both characters have similar challenges in their early lives, but the paths they choose lead to different outcomes.

## 4. Structure your essay

There are two basic structures that are typically used for comparative essays.

### Point-by-point method

The point-by-point method alternates between the items. In this style, you pick a common point of comparison and describe the first item and then the second item.

### Example of Point-by-point method essay outline

#### Introduction

**Introductory material:** Describe the wizarding world of *Harry Potter* and the key characters in the comparison.

**Thesis:** Although Ron Weasley and Draco Malfoy are both pure-blood wizards, their interactions with other magical creatures reveal the different values in their socialization.

### **Body 1: Discrimination towards House Elves**

- Ron's opinion of House Elves and their role in the wizarding world
- Draco's opinion of House Elves and their role in the wizarding world
- Comment upon the origin in the differences in opinion and how the opinions changed through socialization

### **Body 2: Discrimination towards Giants**

- Ron's perception of Hagrid
- Draco's perception of Hagrid
- Comment upon the origin in the differences in opinion and how the opinions changed through socialization

### **Conclusion**

Summary

Explain why this comparison between Ron and Draco matters

### **Block method**

The block method identifies themes to compare and describes all your items together.

### **Example of Block essay method outline**

#### **Introduction**

**Introductory material:** Describe the wizarding world of *Harry Potter* and the key characters in the comparison.

**Thesis:** Although Ron Weasley and Draco Malfoy are both pure-blood wizards, their interactions with other magical creatures reveal the different values in their socialization.

#### **Block A: Ron Weasley – Discrimination towards magical creatures**

Ron's social context and how he learns about the magical hierarchy  
How Ron discriminates against other magical creatures

#### **Block B: Draco Malfoy – Discrimination towards magical creatures**

Draco's social context and how he learns about the magical hierarchy  
How Draco discriminates against other magical creatures  
Analysis – significance of the similarities and differences between Ron and Draco

### **Conclusion**

Summary

Why this comparison matters

### **More resources for comparative essays**

Get feedback on your writing and discuss your thought process. Book an appointment with an Instructor: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/appointments-undergraduate>.

Looking for more learning strategies? Visit us at: <http://www.utm.utoronto.ca/asc/>.