

Basics

Comparing means talking about how two (or more than two) things are similar. *Contrasting* means talking about how they are different. You probably compare and contrast things every day – for example, when you are talking about how books, places or people you know are similar or different.

The academic context

In the course of your studies, you will probably have to write essays or reports which require you to compare and/or contrast information. In this kind of writing, you will show how two or more ideas are similar or different. Often you will discuss both similarities and differences between them.

Key features

- An essay/report which compares/contrasts ideas has the same organization as any other piece of writing:
 - An introduction giving background information, methodology and a thesis statement
 - Main body paragraphs outlining your ideas
 - A conclusion which sums up your argument
- You can organize your main body paragraphs in two main ways:
 - 1 One or two paragraphs discuss similarities; then one or two paragraphs discuss differences.
 - 2 Every paragraph includes both similarities and differences.

To decide which option to choose, you need to think about what you are writing about and how you want to organize your essay.
- To compare, you can use comparative adjectives (e.g. *bigger/better + than*) and superlatives (e.g. *the biggest/the most interesting*). To contrast, you can use words such as *while* and *however*.
- You need to be clear in your comparison and show the connection between ideas. Just using comparing and contrasting words is not enough.

Challenges / difficulties

Organizing your ideas so that the reader can follow them is very important here. The easiest way to do this is to separate comparisons and contrasts into separate paragraphs – as in option **1** in the Key features section. See the report in Theory to practice for an example of how to do this.

How can I develop this skill?

Look online for articles that compare and contrast two things – for example, restaurant reviews or film reviews. Take notes of any language you can find that you might be able to use in your own writing.

Learning outcome

You will be able to write an essay or report showing two sides of a question if you are asked to compare and contrast, or a piece of writing that concentrates on just comparing or just contrasting. You will know some language which can help you to compare and contrast.

Theory to practice

Read the report comparing and contrasting two cafés which could be used for a student end-of-term party. Then answer the questions below.

End-of-term party: Jen's Café or Coffee House Fun?

The aim of this report is to look at two cafés and compare their advantages and disadvantages for our end-of-term party. The report will recommend which one is best.

Advantages of each venue

Firstly, Jen's is a large place with room for a lot of people, while Coffee House Fun (CHF) is smaller, but also has a nice garden. Moreover, CHF can be booked in advance, so we can be sure of having enough seats for everyone, which is more convenient. Jen's, however, is much closer to our college.

Disadvantages of each venue

The main problem with Jen's is that we cannot reserve seats before the party, so we will have to trust to luck that there is enough room if we go. On the other hand, CHF has the disadvantage of being quite small, and we can only use its garden if the weather is good. Moreover, CHF is further from our college than Jen's, so we would need to order taxis.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would suggest that we choose Jen's Café. This is because it is larger than CHF, which allows us to invite as many people as we want. Although we cannot book it in advance, we could choose a day when it is not usually so busy. Lastly, Jen's is much nearer the college, which is better for everyone.

- 1 Which paragraphs compare and contrast the two cafés?
- 2 Underline the words which show a comparison or contrast is being made.

Ways to get more practice

Write two or more sentences comparing and contrasting two things in the same category. They could be films, artists, school subjects, holiday destinations, or anything else you would like to discuss. Let your partner read your sentences and suggest how you could improve them.