The Compare/Contrast Essay:

A compare/contrast essay looks at two or more things to find meaningful similarities or differences between them. A comparison explores similarities, and contrasting discusses differences. By analyzing common parts of different things, readers should get a deeper understanding of them.

Two Main Approaches

Although they have many different names, the two main approaches to a compare/contrast essay are block style and point-by-point style. The block approach explains about three aspects of one topic in a paragraph, then compares or contrasts the same three aspects about another item in the next paragraph. For instance, you may describe Movie A's setting, dialogue, and music, then analyze Movie B's setting, dialogue, and music in relation to Movie A. Meanwhile, in the point-by-point style you write about just one point or aspect of two or more items, identifying their differences and similarities in one or two paragraphs, before moving on to explore the next point of comparison. Block style organization is easier to follow for short essays, while the point-by-point approach is better suited to longer, more complex papers (Comprone 275; Fawcett 123-124). Regardless of essay style, the purpose of a compare/contrast essay is to carefully examine and evaluate the similarities and differences between two or more things.

Compare/Contrast Writing Process

With any comparison essay, brainstorming and prewriting are especially helpful to prevent shallow or circular writing. Make a list or diagram to find common parts to compare, then figure out how those common parts are similar and different, and what effects they have on you as an audience member or on the subjects themselves. In the prewriting stage, it may become clear that the topics of comparison are very similar, so focusing on their differences could be necessary to make your essay more meaningful. Likewise, if the topics seem completely unlike each other at first glance, discussing their hidden similarities may prove more interesting (Fawcett 284). Making these kinds of decisions before drafting can help keep your essay focused and organized.

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