



# OWLS Writing Guides: COMPARISON-CONTRAST

## PURPOSE OF COMPARISON-CONTRAST

- ⇒ Comparison-contrast analysis examines the similarities (comparison) and/or differences (contrast) between two or more things belonging to the same general class.
- ⇒ In practice, the single term “comparison” is often used to refer to any analysis that examines similarities, differences, or both.
- ⇒ Sometimes, the wording of the assignment will not use the words “compare” or “contrast,” but if your assignment asks you, for example, to discuss the similarities and/or differences between two or more items, or to examine the advantages of one thing over another, or to argue that one thing is preferable to or better than another, you are being prompted to write a comparison-contrast analysis.

## SUITABLE SUBJECTS

- ⇒ Subjects for comparison or contrast must share enough features that make them logical subjects for analysis: two (or more) universities, two arguments, two short stories, two world religions, two ads for SUV’s, two historical events (their causes and outcomes), race relations in the 50s and in the present day, and so on.

## THESIS

- ⇒ The **thesis** for a comparison-contrast analysis may be purely **informative** and objective: “While *Armageddon* and *Independence Day* are both popular sci-fi thrillers about world annihilation, they differ significantly in their themes, characters, and the quality of special effects.”
- ⇒ Or the thesis may be **evaluative**, using the analysis to support a judgment about the relative worth of the subjects: “While *Armageddon* and *Independence Day* are both popular sci-fi thrillers about world annihilation, *Independence Day* is the superior film, with its more meaningful themes, engaging characters, and state-of-the-art special effects.”
- ⇒ The **thesis** should indicate whether the essay will emphasize similarities, differences, or both. The thesis statements above make clear that the paper will focus on the differences between two subjects that share a basic similarity (their genre).

## COMPARISON AND CONTRAST WORDS

- ⇒ Use transition words that indicate comparison and contrast:
  - **COMPARISON words:** likewise, like, the same as, just as, similarly, in the same way, also,
  - **CONTRAST words:** in contrast, unlike, on the other hand, on the contrary, contrary to, the opposite of, but, yet, however, conversely, while

## ORGANIZING AN ESSAY

### **SUBJECT-BY-SUBJECT (also called WHOLE TO WHOLE or BLOCK PATTERN):**

I. Introduction with thesis

II. One or more paragraphs that examine subject A, *Independence Day*, looking at one or more of its elements:

Themes of *Independence Day*  
Characters of *Independence Day*  
Special effects of *Independence Day*

III. One or more paragraphs that examine subject B, *Armageddon*, referring back to subject A when needed to emphasize and clarify the comparisons/contrasts made:

Themes of *Armageddon*  
Characters of *Armageddon*  
Special effects of *Armageddon*

IV. Conclusion

### **POINT-BY-POINT (also called PART TO PART or ALTERNATING PATTERN):**

I. Introduction with thesis

II. Paragraph(s) that compares/contrasts subjects on one element:

Themes of *Independence Day*  
Themes of *Armageddon*

III. Paragraph(s) that compares/contrasts subjects on the next element:

Characters of *Independence Day*  
Characters of *Armageddon*

IV. Paragraph(s) that compares/contrasts subjects on a final element:

Special effects of *Independence Day*  
Special effects of *Armageddon*

IV. Conclusion