

Unit 5 : Comparison and Contrast

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Objectives:

After studying this Unit, a student

- knows what comparison and contrast paragraphs are, and what their purposes are.
- can make an outline of a comparison and contrast paragraph.
- can write effective topic sentences for comparison and contrast paragraphs.
- knows how to make comparison and contrast paragraphs coherent.
- can do the exercises effectively.

1. Definition and purposes of comparison and contrast

The first method for writing an argumentative paragraph in these materials is comparison and contrast. Using comparison and contrast as a method of argumentative paragraph development means that you show how two things are similar or different, or both. In other words, when you compare you take two objects, people, ideas, or whatever and discuss their similarities. In the same way, when you contrast, your discussion focuses on the differences between two objects, people, ideas, or whatever. A single paragraph may include only similarities, only differences, or both, depending on your subject and purpose. Consider the following paragraph whose discussion deals with different aspects of girls and boys.

Girls and boys have many differences in physical development from birth. Male babies are heavier and taller than females. After two months, boys eat more and they develop larger hearts and lungs in proportion to those of girls. Later, girls develop earlier than boys do: they generally sit up, crawl, and are able to talk before boys can. During adolescence, girls become sleeker and fatter than boys who are still thinner and bonier. After that, boys become stronger and more muscular than girls. (1)

(1) Adapted from Brittin, Norman A., A Writing Apprenticeship, 4th ed., Holt, Rinhart and Winston, New York, 1977, p. 149.

Again, consider the following paragraph whose discussion deals with only the similarities of two people.

My close friends, Linda and Malee, are alike in their appearance and looks. In fact, many people think that the two girls are twins because they are close in age, both of them in their early teens, and because they look and act a good deal alike. They are tall for their age and slender. Both of them wear their dark brown hair long and straight. Linda, who is fifteen, has attractive, large brown eyes with dark eyelashes, and Malee, who is fourteen, also has beautiful brown eyes. They both have lovely, olive complexions, and when they smile, they radiate warmth and happiness. They even dress alike. Because they are the same size, they can borrow each other's patterns as well as each other's clothes. What is most noticeable about the two girls is that they are talented, outgoing and friendly. (1)

And once again, look at the paragraph below, whose discussion deals with both the similarities and differences between two people.

(1) Adapted from Sullivan, op. cit., p. 68.

Although **Arthit** and Uthai have the same family and educational backgrounds, they are different **in** their livelihood. Both **Arthit** and Uthai came from poor farmer families and supported themselves to get an education. Both of them graduated from the same university and from the same faculty. **As** for their livelihood, **Arthit**, after his graduation, ran for Parliament several times. Finally, he was elected for his hometown. Now he has been appointed Minister of University Affairs. Uthai, on the other hand, went into business, starting in a small position. Now he is the President of the Board of a large and famous company.

Generally, using comparison and **contrast as** a method of paragraph or essay writing is based on at **least** two logical purposes: **(1)** to indicate similarities or differences between two or more subjects or whatever, and **(2)** to convince or evaluate that one subject is better, more important, or more useful than the other.

Usually, the purpose of comparison and contrast is always stated in the topic sentence of a paragraph or in the thesis sentence of an essay.

Look back at the three paragraphs given above, whose topic sentences clearly identify the purpose of comparison, or contrast, **or** both. The topic sentence of the first paragraph

"Girls and boys have many differences in physical development from birth" states the particular purpose to contrast physical development, pointing out "many differences between girls and boys ". The topic sentence of the second paragraph "My close friends, Linda and Malee, are alike in their appearance and looks" clarifies the similarities between Linda and Malee based on their "appearance and looks". The topic sentence of the third paragraph "Although Arthit and Uthai have the same family and educational background, they are different in their livelihood" announces the purpose of both comparison and contrast, pointing out similarities "the same family and educational background" and differences "different in their livelihood."

Consider the paragraph below whose purpose is to evaluate the subject or convince the reader which subject is better, or more useful or more important than the other. The purpose of contrast is clearly stated in the topic sentence.

Although many people do not mind taking a long trip by bus, I prefer the airplane, for the following reasons. First of all, travelling by plane is much quicker than travelling by bus. Travelling a long distance by bus takes a long time and can make me bored and tired. Secondly, travelling by plane is more pleasant than by bus. Soon after the plane lifts off, I enjoy seeing different perspectives of the earth and a heap of clouds below me. Travelling by bus cannot match the pleasure I get from seeing

such a majestic scene through the window. The most important aspect is that travelling by plane is more comfortable than travelling by bus. In the plane, I can lie back and take a nap, or enjoy seeing a movie or listening to music. And even going to the toilet is also more comfortable. Compared to the airplane, such comfort cannot be found on a bus.

2. Organization of a comparison and contrast paragraph

There are two ways to organize a comparison and contrast paragraph. The first way is to discuss X and Y for each point for differences or similarities. This way is called the "point-by-point pattern." The second way is to discuss all the points about X and then all the points about Y. This way is called the "All of one/ All of the other pattern".

Using the point-by-point pattern, you can outline the above paragraph in this way:

Topic sentence: Although many people do not mind taking a long trip by bus, I prefer the airplane for the following reasons.

- I. Rapidity (quickness) (point 1)
 - A. Airplane
 - 1. additional detail
 - 2. additional detail
 - B. Bus
 - 1. additional detail
 - 2. additional detail
- II. Pleasure (point 2)
 - A. Airplane
 - 1. additional detail
 - 2. additional detail
 - B. Bus
 - 1. additional detail
 - 2. additional detail
- III. Comfort (point 3)
 - A. Airplane
 - 1. additional detail
 - 2. additional detail
 - B. Bus
 - 1. additional detail
 - 2. additional detail

Conversely, using the All of one / All of the other pattern, you could outline the above paragraph in the following way:

Topic sentence: Although many people do not mind taking a long trip by bus, I prefer the airplane.

I. Airplane

A. Rapidity (point 1)

B. Pleasure (point 2)

C. Comfort (point 3)

II. Bus (On the contrary)

A. Rapidity (point 1)

B. Pleasure (point 2)

C. Comfort (point 3)

3. Language useful for the topic sentence of comparison and contrast paragraphs

It is true that the topic sentence plays an important role in paragraph writing. When writing a paragraph that compares or contrasts, you must focus your points of similarity or difference, or sometimes of both in the topic sentence. But it should be stated not only that X and Y are different or similar, but, in general, how specifically they are different or similar. In other words, the topic sentence should limit the basic point for comparing or contrasting. Look at the pairs of topic sentences below as examples.

Pair A

Travelling by bus is different from travelling by air plane.

OR

Travelling by bus and travelling by airplane are different.

Pair B

Travelling by airplane on a long trip is better than travelling by bus with respect to rapidity, pleasure and comfort.

OR

Travelling on a long trip by airplane is better than travelling by bus for the following reasons.

Pair A

Living in a large city and living in a small town are different.

OR

Living in a large city is different from living in a small town.

Pair B

Living in a large city is better than living in a small town with respect to the following aspects.

OR

I prefer living in a large city to living in a small town in that I can have the best educational chances and the best doctors I can afford.

In the above examples each sentence in pair A is an incomplete topic sentence because it does not clearly indicate the point for comparing and contrasting. But each sentence in pair B is a complete topic sentence; it does not say only that X and Y are different or similar, but also indicates in which aspect they are different or similar. The points for comparing or contrasting are marked by underlining. But there is no specific rule for writing a topic sentence. However, in writing a topic sentence, you should indicate the people, things, ideas, or characteristics that you will compare or contrast in the subject part of a topic sentence, and then limit the point of discussion in the predicate part of a topic sentence as in the examples in B pairs above. The following special expressions are helpful for making the topic sentence of a comparison and contrast paragraph.

comparison (similarity)	contrast (difference)
X is as (adj) as Y in that _____.	X is [adj. + er] than Y
Both X and Y are (adj.) in _____.	[more + adj.]
X can be compared to Y in _____.	in that _____.
X has something in common with Y	X is _____ but Y is _____.
in that _____.	X and Y are different
X is similar to (like) Y	in that _____.
in that _____.	X differs from Y in that _____.
	Although] X is ____, Y__.
	Even though] X is ____, Y__.

The expressions given above are guidelines that can be applied or adapted for use in a variety of ways, depending on your subject or topic.

4. Coherence in comparison and contrast paragraphs

As discussed in Unit 3, coherence in all kinds of writing can be achieved by arranging all the details (support sentences) in a logical order and by making clear relationships among sentences by using transition markers.

4.1. Arranging details in logical order

Details of some comparison / contrast paragraphs are arranged in chronological order -- order of time. And others are arranged in other orders, that is, from most important to least important points or, conversely, from least important to most important points. When arranged in this way, the important point depends on your logic or rationale. Look back at the paragraph that contrasts the Bangkok of thirty-five years ago with the Bangkok of today on page 81 in Unit 4 whose details are arranged in sensual order. "Look" is the most general sense, while "smell" and "sound" are more specific senses. Also, look back at the paragraph on page 93 in this Unit that contrasts travelling by plane with travelling by bus, whose details are arranged from the most obvious point (rapidity) to the least obvious point (comfort).

4.2. Using transition markers

The transition markers that can be used for achieving coherence in a comparison / contrast paragraph fall into four major groups according to their uses. (See also the list of transition markers, in Unit 3, pp. 65-68 .)

1. The first group includes: **And, Additionally, In addition, Also, Besides, First, Furthermore, Moreover, Next, Second, Third, Then, etc.**

The transition markers in this group are generally used in any kind of writing to indicate chronological or numerical order, to list examples, or to add more information to something that has just been said. In comparison / contrast, they can also fulfill all these functions. And these transition markers are usually placed between two independent clauses, and must be preceded by either a period (.) or by a semicolon (;) and followed by a comma (,).

Examples: *To pass EN 305, a student should practice writing a lot. In addition, he should read a lot.*

OR

To pass EN 305, a student should practice writing a lot; in addition, he should read a lot.

At one time, Khaosai was the best Thai boxer. And now, he is a very rich man.

At one time, Khaosai was the best Thai boxer; and now, he is a very rich man.

Occasionally, these transition markers can be placed within an independent clause. In this case, they must be separated by commas(,) except **also**.

Example: *To pass EN 305, a student should practice writing a lot. He should, moreover, read a lot.*

2. The second group used to indicate similarity consists of transitions, such as **Similar to**, **Like**. These two expressions must be followed by a noun. They are usually placed at the beginning of a sentence and followed by a comma.

Examples: *Similar to Tokyo, Bangkok is congested by terrible traffic.*

OR

Like Tokyo, Bangkok is congested by terrible traffic.

Also the transitions in this group include: **Likewise**, **Similarly**, **In the same way**. These expressions are used for indicating a similarity between the items stated in the two sentences. They are generally placed at the beginning of the second sentence.

Examples: *Bangkok has many recreation places. Likewise, Chiangmai has many public parks and play areas.*

In Bangkok, there are a lot of seafood businesses.

Similarly, a great deal of fishing and oyster farming is done in the South of Thailand.

3. The third group used to indicate difference consists of two types of transition phrases or expressions, according to their uses.

The first type includes: **Different from, In contrast to, Compared with, Unlike.** These expressions must also be followed by a noun and placed at the beginning of a sentence.

Examples: *Unlike most other religions, Buddhism does not believe that the Supreme Power can determine man's destiny.*

Different from most other religions, Buddhism believes that one's deeds (karma) are the determinatives of his destiny.

The second type includes: **On the other hand, On the contrary, Conversely, In contrast, However.** These expressions are used to indicate a difference or contrast between the items in the two sentences, and also are placed at the beginning of the second sentence and followed by a comma (,).

Examples: *The weather in the North of Thailand is warm and clear. In contrast, the weather in the central part is rather hot and humid.*

A student who wants to learn English well should enroll in the Faculty of Humanities. On the other hand, a student who wants to be a good lawyer should enroll in the Faculty of Law.

These expressions can also be placed within a sentence, but must be separated by commas (,).

Example: Bangkok now is a boring city to live in. It has, on the other hand, a lot of good educational institutions.

Note = The expressions "On the other hand" and "On the contrary" are different in meaning. The expression "On the other hand" is used to give the other side of what is talked about as in the example below.

Bangkok now is not as beautiful as before; on the other hand, it is not ugly, either.

In this sentence, the expression "On the other hand" is similar in meaning to and or but

The expression "on the contrary" is used to indicate the opposite side of what is talked about as in the example below

Fast food is not new to Thailand; on the contrary, it is part of Thai culture.

In this sentence, the expression "on the contrary" is similar to the expression "in fact"

4. The fourth group includes two coordinate conjunctions: **but** and **yet**. These words are used to indicate the opposite conditions that are expected to occur. They are usually placed between two complete sentences and preceded (but not followed) by a comma (,)

Examples: Sumon is a beautiful girl, but Suvadee is not.
Hyundai is a cheap car, yet it has a good
air-conditioning system.

To sum up:

1. Comparison indicates similarities between two or more subjects. Contrast indicates differences between two or more subjects.

2. The purpose of comparison and contrast writing is to show similarities or differences between two subjects, and to convince or show that one subject is better or worse than the other.

3. Comparison and contrast can be outlined in two patterns; "Point-by-point" pattern and "All of one / All of the other" pattern.

4. A topic sentence of comparison and contrast should indicate clearly the point of comparison and contrast. There is no specific rule for writing a topic sentence. The expressions useful for writing a topic sentence given in this Unit are only guidelines that can be applied in a variety of ways, depending on the topic given.

5. Coherence can be achieved by arranging details (support sentences) in chronological order, ordering from the least important point to the most important point or vice versa, and by the use of transition markers.

5. Exercises about comparison and contrast paragraphs

Exercise 1.

Directions: The following sentences are not good topic sentences because they are ineffective, unclear and incomplete. Improve these sentences so that they are effective topic sentences for comparison and contrast paragraphs. Write your topic sentences in the spaces provided. The first one is done as an example.

1. For a family, living in a house is better.

For a family, living in a house is better than living in a condominium in many aspects.

2. Watching a movie on TV. at home is convenient.

3. Using credit cards is better.

4. Water buffaloes and cows are different.

5. Although mosquitoes and houseflies differ in appearance, they are similar.

6. The work of the Buddha and the work of a doctor are similar.

7. There are differences between my hometown and Bangkok.

8. In Bangkok, I prefer travelling by bus.

9. Being a farmer makes one happier.

10. Educated people will have great advantages.

Exercise 2.

Directions: Each of the following topics could be suitable for comparison and contrast paragraph writing. Write effective topic sentences with these topics in the spaces provided. The first one is done as an example.

Topic: Single life and married life

Topic sentence: Single life and married life are different in the following aspects. **OR** Single people are happier than married people.

Topic: Two occupations; Doctors and Teachers

Topic sentence: _____

Topic: Two politicians with the same goal

Topic sentence: _____

Topic: Country life and city life

Topic sentence: _____

Topic: Government supported universities and private ones

Topic sentence: _____

Topic: The work of a teacher and the work of a ferryman

Topic sentence: _____

Topic: Differences between a paragraph and an essay

Topic sentence: _____

Topic: Experiences in high school and in university

Topic sentence: _____

Topic: The social status of men and women in Thailand

Topic sentence: _____

Topic: Differences and similarities between man and animals

Topic sentence: _____

Exercise 3.

Directions: Read the following two paragraphs. Consider their organization, decide which paragraph is based on the "Point-by-Point pattern" and which is based on the "All of one and All of the other Pattern". Then write an outline of each paragraph in the space provided.

Paragraph 1.

A good instructor and a bad instructor differ remarkably in their teaching ability and conduct. A good instructor knows his subject thoroughly, and is able to pass on his knowledge to his students clearly. Unlike a good instructor, a bad instructor, even though he knows his subject well, is unable to communicate his knowledge to his students at all. In addition, a good instructor really cares about students' learning problems. He always spends time

beyond office hours, listening to students' questions and complaints. Moreover, he is willing to clarify what the students do not understand, and never embarrasses his students. On the contrary, a bad instructor does not care about his students' learning problems. He is always busy off-campus, spending time in personal consultation with private students. When students ask for help, he always patronizes his students. Also he always cancels his lectures and disappears, leaving the students feeling bored and inferior.

Outline of the above paragraph

Paragraph 2.

The differences between good students and poor students can easily be seen in their study techniques. A good student always plans his study time long before the examination. In this way, he can have enough time to look over all the lessons and ask about something that he does not understand. Also, a good student always finds a quiet place to read so that there will be no distractions while reading. In contrast, a bad student leaves everything unread until the night before the examination. So he is unable to cover all the things in the textbook, and has no time to check on what he does not know. In addition, a bad student likes to study in a place which is noisy, with the TV or radio blaring, or children playing. By doing so, he cannot concentrate on what he is reading. (1)

(1) Adapted from Bossone., Richard M., English Proficiency: Developing Your Reading and Writing Power, McGraw-Hill, Inc., New York, 1979, p.34.

Paragraph 1.

1. *The conservative thinks that business should not be interfered with.*
2. *The conservative believes that jobs will result from the competitive system.*
3. *The liberal thinks that the government should interfere in the business system.*
4. *Although conservative and liberal politicians aim at making the country prosperous and well-run, they are different in their ways to reach such a goal.*
5. *And that it should create some jobs.*
6. *The conservative fears that government interference with business will cause high taxes and inflation.*
7. *The liberal believes that the government should be involved in business in order to insure that the needs of the poor and the unemployed are taken care of. (1)*

(1) Adapted from Bossone, *ibid.*, p.35.

Write your complete paragraph here.

Paragraph 2.

1. *For example, there is much more activity in the street of the typical city in France than in the United States.*
2. *People dress more stylishly and formally in France, especially in Paris, than in the United States.*
3. *People in France gather in the open markets, the sidewalk cafes and numerous parks and squares.*
4. *There are some aspects of life in France that are different from life in the United States.*
5. *Another noticeable difference between the two countries is the relative importance of food.*

Paragraph 3.

1. *Buddhism bases its beliefs on the law of Karma or action or deed.*
2. *Christianity bases its beliefs on the existence of one Supreme Being or God, and His Power.*
3. *Though both Buddhism and Christianity have the same purpose in teaching their believers to be good, they have contrasting basic beliefs.*
4. *The law of Karma is that good actions produce good effects.*
5. *Bad actions produce bad effects.*
6. *According to Christianity, God has power over man.*
7. *It is also believed that good or bad actions are determinatives of one's life both in the present and in the hereafter.*
8. *It is God who determines man's life both in the present and in the future.*

Write your complete paragraph here.

Exercise 5.

Directions: The following two paragraphs are not coherent because they lack appropriate transition markers. Fill the blanks with the transition markers given.

(Transition markers: unlike, on the contrary, for example, in the same way, but, in contrast, because, similarly, therefore)

Paragraph 1.

Money and power have equal importance to man in some aspects. _____, in day-to-day life, money can be used to purchase whatever he wants. _____, power can bring him whatever he requires through those falling under his power. _____, power lead him to wealth. A big man, _____, has to possess both money and power. This is supported by the Buddha's saying "a powerful person without wealth is destined to downfall."

Paragraph 2.

Democratic government and communist government are different in their treatment of people. Democratic government believes that people are supreme and the government is their servant _____ democratic

government, communist government is supreme and people are its servants. Democratic government guarantees its people the right to choose their leader. The two-party system insures them a choice. _____, control of the communist government rests in the hands of a small group of leaders. Voting is only a farce _____ there is only one party--the Communist party--and any citizen who dares to oppose the ruling group will receive harsh treatment. Democratic government guarantees people complete freedom to worship as they please, _____ communist government discourages religion and religious worship. Democratic government gives everyone freedom of speech. People can say exactly what they think, even to the point of criticizing their government. _____, freedom of speech does not exist under communist government. People, living in constant fear of their government are afraid to express any view contrary to those of leaders. (1)

(1) Adapted from Warriner, op. cit., pp. 339-340.