

LESSON SIX: Types of Essays – Compare and Contrast

Compare and contrast Essay

1. Comparison and Contrast

Using **comparison and contrast** involves looking at **similarities (comparison)**, **differences (contrast)**, or both. You analyze similarities and differences when you make everyday decisions (when you shop for a pair of jeans or select a sandwich in the cafeteria), as well as when you make important decisions (deciding which college to attend for example).

These essays require written development exploring *the similarities and differences*, usually between *two* concepts. The thesis highlights the main points that will be explored. In the body paragraphs, it is helpful to introduce both concepts briefly before writing about the similarities and differences.

- Depending on their purpose and audience, writers using comparison and contrast may focus on similarities, differences, or both.
- An essay focusing on similarities often mentions a few differences, usually in the introduction, to let readers know the writer is aware of the differences. Conversely, an essay that focuses on differences might mention a few similarities.
- Whether you cover similarities, differences, or both in an essay, you should strive to treat your subjects fairly. Relevant information should not be purposely omitted to show one subject in a more favorable light.

N.B. Compare and contrast can be a pattern of development on its own (essay), or, as a technique, it can be integrated with other patterns of development/essays: narrative, argumentative, literary analysis, etc.

2. Why Compare and Contrast?

A comparison and contrast essay usually has one of three purposes:

- **To express ideas:** The purpose of an essay about playing Rockband could be to express the writer's love of the game, rock music, or both. The audience for this essay might be the readers of an online forum for the discussion of video games.
- **To inform:** The purpose of an essay about playing Rockband could be to inform readers new to the game how playing Rockband differs from playing in a real band. The audience for this essay might be dedicated amateur musicians looking for an electronic alternative to joining a band.

- **To persuade:** The purpose of an essay about playing Rockband could be to persuade readers that Rockband is much more challenging in some ways than playing in an actual band. The audience for this essay might be musicians who think the game seems easy.

3. Basis of Comparison:

You cannot compare or contrast two things unless they have something in common. When making a comparison, a writer needs to choose **a basis of comparison** — a fairly broad common characteristic on which to base the essay.

Example: the basis of comparison between an email and Messenger is that they are both means of communication.

*Car and train: both are means of transportation.

A *successful* comparison and contrast essay has **a main point** that sparks readers' interest in the subjects rather than boring them with a mechanical listing of similarities or differences. *This main point can serve as the thesis for the essay*, or the thesis can be implied in the writer's choice of details.

An explicit thesis statement has three functions:

1. To identify the subjects being compared or contrasted.
2. To suggest whether the focus is on similarities, differences, or both.
3. To state the main point of the comparison or contrast.

Example:

The following thesis statement example meets all three criteria. Note, too, that it suggests why the comparison or contrast is meaningful and worth reading about.

---- focus on similarities----- ----Subject: basis of comparison--- -----Main point-----
Similar appeals in commercials *for three popular breakfast cereals* **reveal America's obsession with fitness and health.**

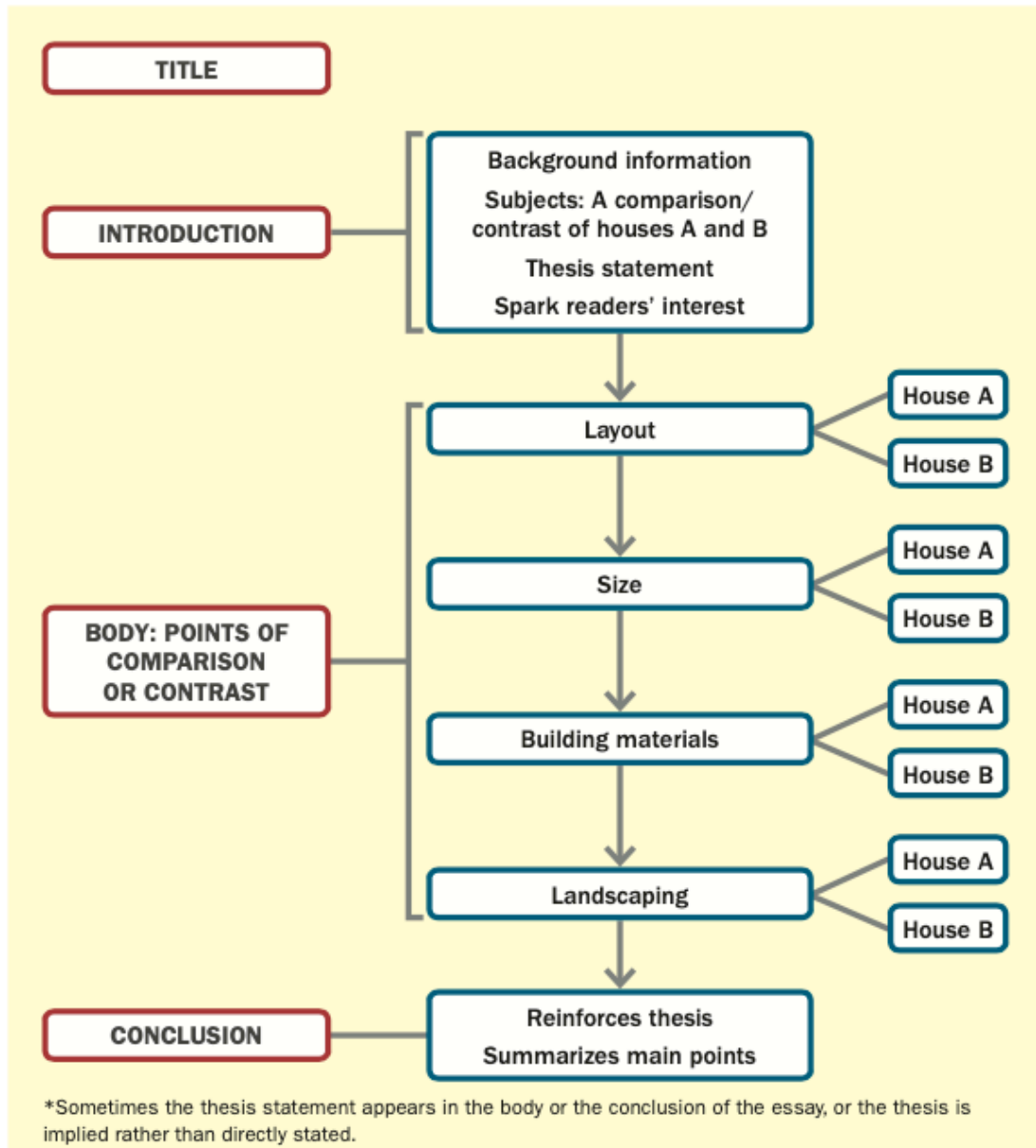
4. Organization patterns:

Most comparison and contrast essays use one of these two primary methods of organization:

- **Point-by-point organization:** The writer moves back and forth between two or more subjects, comparing them on the basis of several key points or characteristics.
- **Subject-by-subject organization:** The author describes the key points or characteristics of one subject before moving on to those aspects of a second subject.

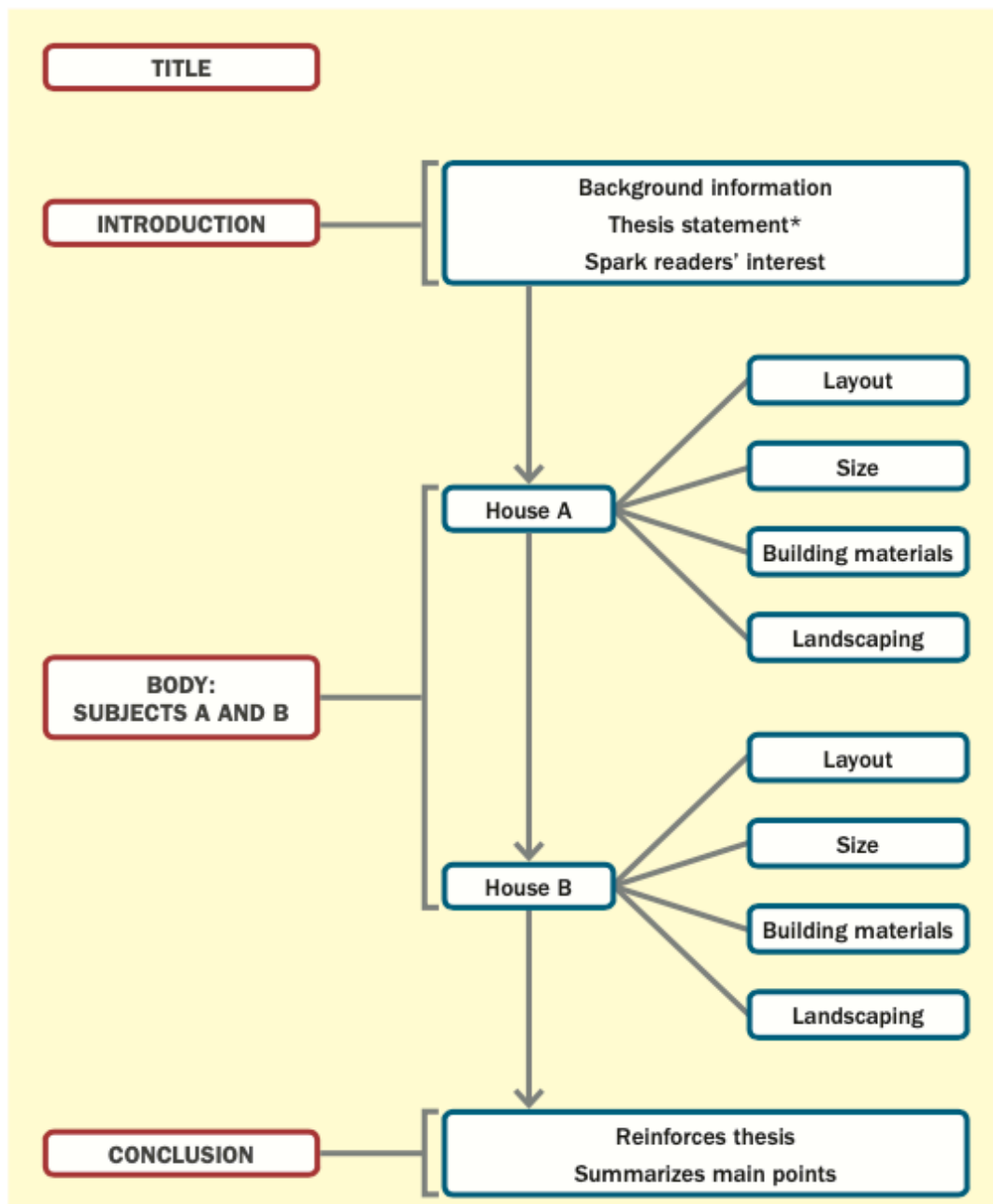
Point-by-point organization:

FIGURE 16.1 Graphic Organizer for a Point-by-Point Comparison and Contrast Essay*



Subject-by-Subject Organization.

FIGURE 16.2 Graphic Organizer for a Subject-by-Subject Comparison and Contrast Essay*



Transition Expressions to Use in a Compare and Contrast Essay:

Comparison:

in the same way
by the same token
similarly
in like manner
likewise
in similar fashion

Contrast:

Yet, but,
nevertheless, nonetheless
on the contrary, in contrast, on the other hand
notwithstanding
however, though, unlike