

DRAFTING EXPOSITION: COMPARISON/CONTRAST ESSAYS

When writing a comparison/contrast essay, remember to choose a topic where there are two subjects that are somewhat similar but have distinct differences. It is also important to note here that comparison/contrast can be used to inform as well as to persuade. When one is trying to inform (expository writing), it is essential for the writer to maintain an objective presentation of material. The reader is free to conclude a preference, but the writer should present both issues equally. Therefore, establishing a strong organizational format is essential. The following example shows how one writer gathered information for an essay comparing General Robert E. Lee with General Ulysses S. Grant, two rivaling generals during the Civil War.

Point of Comparison/Contrast	General Robert E. Lee	General Ulysses S. Grant
Education/training	Graduated 2 nd in class of 39 from West Point Military Academy; distinguished himself in battles of the Mexican War including the storming of Chapultepec; commanded the Department of Texas shortly before start of Civil War.	Graduated 21 st in a class of 39 from West Point Military Academy; distinguished himself during Mexican War at Molina Del Rey and Chapultepec; resigned commission due to loneliness and drinking problems; failed in farming and business.
Style of leadership	A master of universally studied strategies in anticipating the actions of his opponents and in comprehending their weaknesses.	Major strategy was to overpower the tired opponent; relied on supplies and support from the North.
Final results of war	Had to retreat and later surrendered to Grant.	Successfully pounded the Confederate army to bits.

In using comparison/contrast to inform a reader, a writer needs to choose a logical order of presentation. Two common methods are the point by point method and the block method. The following table illustrates how both methods could be used for the Grant/Lee essay.

Block Method	Point by Point Method
Subject 1: Robert E. Lee Feature 1: Education and training Feature 2: Style of leadership Feature 3: Final results of war Subject 2: Ulysses S. Grant Feature 1: Education and training Feature 2: Style of leadership Feature 3: Final results of war	Feature 1: Education and training Subject 1: Robert E. Lee Subject 2: Ulysses S. Grant Feature 2: Style of leadership Subject 1: Robert E. Lee Subject 2: Ulysses S. Grant Feature 3: Final results of war Subject 1: Robert E. Lee Subject 2: Ulysses S. Grant

In addition to planning carefully before one begins writing, it is essential for the writer to establish a strong thesis statement. He/She may choose to focus on the similarities, differences, or both similarities and differences. Whichever choice is made, that focus must be reflected in the thesis statement, a one or two-sentence summary of your thesis (main idea). The following are examples :

Stressing likeness: Even though history records that Ulysses S. Grant defeated Robert E. Lee during the U.S. Civil War, these two great generals were trained under similar circumstances.

Stressing differences: Although Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee shared some similar educational experiences, their lives were very different in their style of leadership and the end results of their professional experiences.

Balancing likenesses and differences:
Though the achievements of Generals Ulysses S. Grant and Robert E. Lee were similar in their early lives, the differing results at the peak of their careers changed the entire direction of a nation.

Now plan your comparison/contrast essay by

- +Analyzing your subjects to find their relevant features
- +Gathering information about the relevant features
- +Writing a thesis statement that identifies the subjects and the main idea
- +Arranging your information in the block method or the point-by-point method.