In academic writing, comparison and contrast are often used to support a point or persuade the reader. For example, in a political science class, you might compare and contrast two leaders to show which one was more successful at bringing about economic reforms. In a literature class, you might compare and contrast two short stories to show which one you liked better. In an engineering class, you might compare and contrast two methods of combustion to show which one is more efficient.

The Language of Comparison and Contrast: Useful Phrases and Sentence Patterns

The following signals indicate a comparison:

- in the same way that
- similarly
- \( \times \) compared to
- both
- is similar to
- is like
- have in common
- just as
- \( \times \) likewise

The following signals indicate a contrast:

- however
- nevertheless
- although
- unlike
- even though
- \( \times \) in spite of, despite
- whereas
- yet
- \( \times \) different from
- in contrast
- conversely

Russia and the United States: Differences and Similarities

1. In a shrinking world, it has become vitally important to know and understand countries and cultures that were once seen as distant. Improvements in technology and long-distance transportation, along with the rise of a global economy, have created a need to identify how the society and circumstances of one country may be similar to or different from another's. In fact, although countries may differ significantly, usually enough similarities exist to enable each culture's representatives to find common ground. The United States and Russia provide a good example of two countries that are geographically distant and have fundamental differences but that still find commonalities.

2. As many people are aware, there are significant differences between Russia and the United States in their history and form of government. The United States is a young country with a long history of democratic government. Russia is a country with ancient roots that has experienced different kinds of government, including hundreds of years of monarchy, almost a century of communism, and, more recently, democracy. However, there are also many other areas in which the similarities and differences between these two countries can influence their relations.

3. A key difference between Russia and the United States is population growth. Russia's population has been shrinking because the birth rate is fairly low, although it has increased in recent years. In the United States, on the other hand, the fertility rate has been consistently high: 2.06 children, compared to only 1.6 for Russia (CIA). There is comparatively little immigration to Russia, mostly from countries that were once part of the former Soviet Union. In the United States, on the other hand, immigration adds about 2.3 million people per year. The difference in population growth in Russia and the United States is also due in part to the fact that the death rate in Russia is second highest in the world. This is much higher than in the United States, which is 87th. The Russian population growth has increased with recent economic improvements, but the United States is likely to continue to grow at a faster pace.

4. Another important difference is in energy production and consumption. The U.S. population is much more reliant on energy than Russia, but the United States also produces more energy. While residents of the United States consume roughly 12,000 kilowatt-hours of electricity per capita, Russia uses only half that amount (The World Bank). Russians use even less oil compared to Americans, at a rate of 15 barrels per day per capita. This is about one-third of the American rate of 62 barrels per day (Indexmundi). At the same time, U.S. energy production is about 1.5 times that of Russia. However, Russia has large reserves of natural gas and does surpass the United States in the production of this energy source (U.S. Energy).

5. Despite the differences in population growth and energy use, there are still similarities between the two countries. One common factor is the relative diversity of the populations. The United States and Russia both have a majority racial group that constitutes about 80 percent of the population and several significant minority groups (CIA). Like the United States, Russia also has linguistic minorities, and there are parts of both countries in which it is common to see signs in two or more languages. The countries are also similar in their religious diversity. Although both countries' populations are largely Christian, they also both have significant numbers of religious minorities. Both countries have substantial populations of Muslims, Jews, and other small groups of religious minorities.

6. Not only do Russia and the United States have similarly diverse populations, but they have also both faced economic challenges in the recent past. Russia had a financial crisis in the late 1990s, and the United States followed almost ten years later. In both cases, the crises led to high unemployment, reduced social spending, and increased poverty (Perry). In Russia's case, the crisis was preceded by confused government policies regarding currency and privatization of industry (Stiglitz). Similarly, in the United States, inadequate government policies for regulating the financial industry were partly responsible for the recession. In both cases, the economic downturns had far-reaching global consequences.

7. In conclusion, there are many differences between Russia and the United States in areas as diverse as population growth and energy consumption. However, the similarities in other areas, such as diversity and recent economic challenges, cannot be ignored. Furthermore, their similarities and differences point to the need that these two countries have to cooperate in the international arena. It will be interesting to see how Russia and the United States work together in the future.

Sources:
1. CIA World Factbook.
5. U.S. Energy Information Administration.
Outlining the Model
Look at the writing model on pages 134–135. Then complete the outline.

I. Introduction
   
   **Thesis statement:** The United States and Russia provide a good example of two countries that are geographically distant and have fundamental differences but still find commonalities.

II. Body
   
   **A.** One key difference between Russia and the United States is population growth.
   1. The United States has higher fertility.
   2.
   **B.**
   1.
   a. 
   b. 
   2. Americans produce more energy than Russians.
   **C.** There are similarities between the two countries.
   1. Diverse populations
   a. 
   b. 
   c. 
   2. 
   a. Russian economic crisis in 1990s
   b. U.S. recession 10 years later

III. Conclusion

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**STEP 1: Brainstorm about the topic.**

- Collect information and generate ideas about your topic.
  One tool you can use is a **Venn diagram**. A Venn diagram is a brainstorming tool that uses overlapping circles to show the similarities and differences between two or more ideas.
  - Draw two circles that are partly overlapping.
  - Write one thing that you are comparing in one circle and the other thing in the other circle.
  - Then write the similarities between the two things in the overlapping part of the circle, and the differences between them in the separate areas of the circle. Brainstorm as many ideas as you can. You can decide which ideas to include later.

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**STEP 2: Organize your ideas.**

The following sentence patterns are useful in writing topic sentences and thesis statements for comparison/contrast essays and paragraphs:

1. **There are several differences** between _______ and _______.  
   **There are several differences** between high school and college.
2. _______ and _______ are similar in many ways.  
   Thai food and Vietnamese food are similar in many ways.
3. _______ is different from _______ in many ways.  
   My father is different from his older brother in many ways.
4. _______ and _______ have several things in common.  
   My best friend and I have several things in common.
5. A comparison between _______ and _______ reveals _______.  
   A comparison between jazz and rock ‘n’ roll reveals some surprising similarities.
Write a thesis statement for a comparison/contrast essay on each of the following topics. Use a variety of sentence patterns.

1. Topic: Your two best friends
   Thesis statement: ____________________________________________

2. Topic: Soccer and rugby
   Thesis statement: ____________________________________________

3. Topic: Capitalism and communism
   Thesis statement: ____________________________________________

4. Topic: American cars and Japanese cars
   Thesis statement: ____________________________________________

5. Topic: Two of your classmates
   Thesis statement: ____________________________________________

**ORGANIZATION**

The first key to writing a successful comparison/contrast essay is to organize it carefully. In order to structure your essay, you need to select which things you are going to compare. Then you need to choose the specific points of comparison, or factors, that you will use to explain the similarities and differences you identify.

**POINTS OF COMPARISON**

Suppose, for example, that you want to compare family life in two cultures. There are many different aspects of this topic that you could examine. Which points of comparison will be your focus?

Before deciding how to organize your essay, you can list the points of comparison that you want to examine in each culture. After listing these points, you can make a chart that shows how they are similar or different in each culture.

**Comparison / Contrast Chart**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Point of Comparison</th>
<th>Culture X</th>
<th>Culture Y</th>
<th>Same or Different</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of children</td>
<td>1–2</td>
<td>5–6</td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living arrangements</td>
<td>Each set of parents and small children lives separately</td>
<td>Grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, children live in separate buildings on the same property</td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support</td>
<td>Both parents work outside the home</td>
<td>Both parents work outside the home</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of grandparents</td>
<td>Occasional visits</td>
<td>Primary childcare provider</td>
<td>Different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age of adulthood</td>
<td>When they get married</td>
<td>When they get married</td>
<td>Same</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Once you have decided on the particular points of comparison you want to use for your essay, you are ready to decide how you want to organize it. There are two methods for organizing a comparison/contrast essay: point-by-point and block.

**BLOCK ORGANIZATION**

The other way to organize a comparison/contrast essay is to arrange all the similarities together in one block and all the differences in another. The writing model on pages 134–135 uses this type of organization. In block organization, you can discuss either the similarities first or the differences first. Of course, you could discuss only similarities or only differences.

**Block Outline**

1. Introduction
   - Thesis statement: Family life in Culture X and Culture Y is very similar in some ways, but it also shows several key differences.

2. Body
   A. Similarities
      1. Financial support
      2. Age of adulthood
   B. Differences
      1. Number of children
      2. Living arrangements
      3. Role of grandparents

3. Conclusion
POINT-BY-POINT ORGANIZATION

In point-by-point organization, each point of comparison becomes the topic of a paragraph. As you discuss individual points, you describe both similarities and differences. You can put the paragraphs in any order you wish—perhaps in order of importance.

Point-by-Point Outline

If you decided to use point-by-point organization for an essay based on the chart on page 137, your outline might look like this:

I. Introduction
   Thesis statement: It's possible to better understand Culture X and Culture Y by comparing several important aspects of family life in both cultures.

II. Body (Points of Comparison)
   A. Number of children
      1. 1-2 in X
      2. 5-6 in Y
   B. Living arrangements
      1. Separately in X
      2. Extended families together in Y
   C. Financial support
      1. Parents work in both countries
      2. Willing to work outside home
   D. Role of grandparents
      1. Occasional visits in X
      2. Primary caregivers in Y
   E. Age of adulthood
      1. At marriage in both cultures
      2. Specific ages

III. Conclusion

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transition Words and Phrases</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>however</td>
<td>Rock music used to appeal primarily to younger listeners; however, some rock today has enthusiastic fans among senior citizens.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in contrast</td>
<td>Jazz is not just one style of music; on the contrary, jazz has many styles such as Chicago jazz, Dixieland, ragtime, swing, bebop, and cool jazz, to name just a few.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in (by) comparison</td>
<td>Note: <em>On the contrary</em> contrasts a truth and an untruth.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the other hand</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on the contrary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>although</td>
<td>Although most dieters initially lose a few pounds, most gain them back again within a few weeks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>even though</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>whereas</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>while</td>
<td>New Orleans-style jazz features brass marching-band instruments, while ragtime is played on a piano. Note: Use a comma with <em>while</em> and <em>whereas</em> even when the dependent clause follows the independent clause.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but</td>
<td>Jazz music was born in the southern part of the United States, but it now enjoys a worldwide audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>but</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yet</td>
<td>Doctors say that “fad” diets do not work, yet many people still try them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>differ (from)</td>
<td>Present-day rock music differs from early rock music in several ways.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>compared (to / with)</td>
<td>Present-day rock music has a harder sound compared with early rock.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(be) different (from)</td>
<td>The punk, rap, grunge, and techno styles are very different from the rock music performed by Elvis Presley 50 years ago, but they have the same roots.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(be) dissimilar to</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(be) unlike</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>despite (+ noun)</td>
<td>Despite ten years of dieting, I am still overweight.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in spite of (+ noun)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from *Longman Academic Writing Series 4* and *Ready to Write More*