

MPC English & Study Skills Center

Comparison Formats

Essays in which the student looks at two different things and makes a judgment in relation to the two of them are called "comparison," "contrast" or "comparison and contrast."

Comparison--focuses on similarities, differences, or a combination

Contrast—focuses only on differences

Comparison essays can be organized in two different basic formats: block by block or point by point. Some essays use a combination of these two forms, but, in general, it's better for academic writing to use one format or the other.

Block by Block

In this format, when comparing two things, after making a thesis that shows the point that the writer is making, the writer will say everything he or she has to say about the first thing in one block and then will follow this with everything about the second in another block. Please note that the topics are covered in the same order for both things—the same issues in the same order.

Sample outline of Block by Block:

Thesis: There are many differences between a community college and a university.

- A. Community college
 - 1. Cost of tuition
 - 2. Access to instructors
 - 3. Availability of classes
- B. University
 - 1. Cost of tuition
 - 2. Access to instructors
 - 3. Availability of classes

Point by Point

In a point by point comparison essay, after the initial thesis, there are points of comparison made between the two things being compared. In this format, the writer goes back and forth between the two things being compared. This is the most common format for academic writing.

Sample outline for Point by Point:

Thesis: There are many differences between a community college and a university.

- A. Cost of tuition
 - 1. Community college
 - 2. University
- B. Access to instructors
 - 1. Community college
 - 2. University
- C. Availability of classes
 - 1. Community college
 - 2. University