

Compare and Contrast Essay

The compare and contrast essay is very common in university writing. Professors assign this type of essay to encourage students to think more critically about a topic than simply summarizing.

A prompt can be general:

Compare and contrast the poetry of William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge.

With this type of prompt, you are free to choose which topics or aspects of their poetry you wish to discuss.

On the other hand, a prompt can be quite specific:

Compare and contrast the role of memory in the work of William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge.

In this case, you may choose the poems you wish to examine, but the topic must be memory. The prompt may even specify the names of the poems to be discussed.

Examples

For the purposes of this handout, the prompt will be:

Compare and contrast the presentation of the pastoral in Christopher Marlowe's "The Passionate Shepherd to his Love" and Sir Walter Raleigh's "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd."

Once your topic is clear, you can begin to organize your thoughts on how they differ and how they are alike.

Marlowe

Pastoral

Idealistic/romantic

- summer
- youth
- leisure

Raleigh

Pastoral

Realistic

- winter
- age
- work

From this, you can create a working thesis (probably not your final thesis statement):
While both poets write in the pastoral style, Raleigh's realistic view of the lives of shepherds differs sharply from Marlowe's more romantic view.

There are two ways to organize the essay: block or point by point.

Block organization: All pertinent points about one author are considered and then all points about the second author are considered.

Paragraph 1: Raleigh:

Realistic:	Cold hard facts
Winter:	Seasons happen
Age:	People grow old
Work:	Sheep don't herd themselves

Paragraph 2: Marlowe:

Idealistic:	Rose coloured glasses
Summer:	Weather is always beautiful
Youth:	Eternally young
Leisure:	No need to work

Point-by-point organization: Individual points from each work are compared.

Paragraph 1: Seasons

Marlowe:	Summer
Raleigh:	Winter

Paragraph 2: Life stage

Marlowe:	Youth
Raleigh:	Age

Paragraph 3: Physical activity

Marlowe:	Leisure
Raleigh:	Work

Conclusion: Summarize what you have discovered and, perhaps, how the two poems interact.

