



COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

■ COMPARING TWO ARGUMENTS

This paper will help you weigh textual evidence more carefully as you examine the different treatments two writers give the same subject. Your instructor may select the paired essays, or you may be asked to find two sources of your own choosing from the library. If so, use this opportunity to do a topic search for your research paper. You'll find the topic more engaging if you investigate an issue you're considering for your research paper, or at least an argumentative issue related to your major.

After determining the topic and locating the two articles, begin a comparative analysis of the two sources. The purpose of this assignment is to help you perceive distortions in the writers' use of evidence, assess the reliability of the writers, recognize biases, and draw inferences from the data they present. Allow the following questions to guide your analysis of approximately 750 words.

Disputes over Facts

1. Do the authors basically disagree on certain facts? Can you resolve the conflict for the reader? Illustrate. Do the writers seem to have had access to the same facts; did one writer have unique access to facts?
2. Did one writer base conclusions on a narrow range of facts, thereby reaching a possibly distorted conclusion? Illustrate. Do both writers ignore something that seems obvious to you? Does one writer rely heavily on unusual or obscure facts to reach conclusions?

Disputes about Evidence

1. Are the writers agreeing on the same set of facts and making (roughly) the same selection of facts but reaching different conclusions? Are the conclusions of one writer more logical? Explain.
2. Is either writer an advocate of a special interest group? Has that commitment to a cause interfered with the writer's apparent interest in truth? Illustrate. Does either writer distort the picture—which writer presents a more complete, more balanced view of the topic? How does language, selection of detail, arrangement of detail, emotionalism betray the writer's position and evaluation of evidence selected?

Differences in Patterns of Thought

Does either writer make clear a fundamental way of looking at things? That is, does the writer have an identifiable political, religious, or philosophical perspective? Can you find evidence of this stance in what the author has said? Are you able to identify the author's intellectual commitment, religious belief, cultural background, personality type, and maturity as a thinker and demonstrate how these "findings" affect the writer's thinking and approach to the subject?

If you located two sources from the library, photocopy the passages you are analyzing. Otherwise, you are working out of the text. As you draft your paper, begin by giving it a title. State the thesis you are arguing; include in that thesis the major "disputes" or "differences" you will focus on to prove your position.

Present considerable evidence from each writer to support points you are arguing. Comment on each quotation you use, relating each quotation to the proof structure you are advancing. Do not string quotations together without evaluating them.

When you have completed the comparative analysis, write a general conclusion for your paper that draws inferences from all of your analysis. In organizing your conclusion, you might consider some (or all) of these questions:

1. What is your overall evaluation of the two works?
2. Which writer seems more reliable, persuasive, accurate?
3. Is one writer more emotionally engaged in the topic? Does this engagement make the argument he/she advances less or more convincing?
4. Does one writer's set of conclusions seem more logical? Remember that the two sources are quite separate until you tie them together in your analysis.

■ STRUCTURING COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

Traditionally, a comparative analysis essay compares (finds similarities) and contrasts (finds differences) two subjects while maintaining parallel structure. Often, comparative analysis acknowledges one (either similarities or differences) but emphasizes the other. For this assignment, your **subjects** will be two articles or essays, chosen either by you or by your instructor. After reading and understanding both articles, the first step is to establish a basis of comparison: the common element or elements in the subjects you will discuss. This will help you select several points for consideration; **points** are the particular aspects of each written work that you will address. Points will include an examination of each work's approach to a topic: thesis; use of ethos, logos, and pathos; style and tone; use of evidence; and techniques of persuasion.

In developing a comparative analysis essay, you will use one of two organizational strategies: point-by-point or subject-by-subject. Both strategies use subjects and points as organizational principles. Important: If you discuss one aspect of a subject, you must also discuss that same aspect of the other subject. These points must be relatively balanced in emphasis and scope. Take a look at the general models that follow:

Point-by-Point

Introduction

Point 1:
Subject A
Transition
Subject B

Point 2:
Subject A
Transition
Subject B

Point 3:
Subject A
Transition
Subject B

Conclusion

Subject-by-Subject

Introduction

Subject A
Point 1
Point 2
Point 3

**Transitional
Paragraph**

Subject B
Point 1
Point 2
Point 3

Conclusion

There are strengths and weaknesses to both approaches. For instance, point-by-point allows the reader to juxtapose the authors' views in the same paragraph, one point at a time; however, this style of presentation can be a bit back and forth, resulting in a rather predictable and repetitive presentation. On the other hand, subject-by-subject provides the reader a full discussion of one article at a time, presenting all information in one central location of the essay. Students who attempt this structure occasionally neglect to address the same points with both articles and often struggle with the transitional paragraph. Regardless of the organizational strategy you choose, pre-writing is essential in order to produce a well-organized and well developed essay.

Take a look at this brief and informal outline of a comparative analysis. The full essay follows:

An Analytical Comparison of Ellen Hopkins' "Sex Is For Adults" and
Carol F. Roye's "Protect Our Children"

Introduction: both authors, both titles, quick overview of the topic

Thesis: Hopkins and Roye agree on the issues of pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases but propose different solutions to the actions that should be taken toward the sex education of teenagers.

Body Paragraphs:

- I. Roye is concerned about the importance of sex education.
 - The rate of STD's and pregnancy is increasing.
 - Teens must be taught to take precautions.
 - Abstinence is best but unrealistic.
- II. Hopkins' view is different.
 - Abstinence is the only option.
 - Sex education and contraceptives don't work.
- III. Hopkins and Roye had access to the same facts.
 - Both present statistical information on AIDS and pregnancy.
 - They agree on the problem but differ in their proposed solutions.
- IV. Roye favors sex education.
 - Teens respond to honesty.
 - Knowledge is the key.
- V. Hopkins favors abstinence education.
 - Sex is not for teens.
 - Knowledge increases sexual activity.
- VI. Roye's professional background gives her a better perspective.
 - As a nurse, she has first hand exposure to teens' problems
 - She uses statistics in her argument.
- VII. Hopkins's argument is based on statistics.
 - She uses only statistics, no real experience.
 - Her conclusion is distorted, based on statistics that don't support her stand against sex education.

Conclusion: both authors, both titles, summing up, statement of preference

Roye presents the stronger argument. She appears to be more aware of the reality that teenagers are not going to stop their sexual activity and that they are better off being aware of the consequences and taking proper precautions.

Name: _____

Comparative Analysis Exercise

Step One: Select one of the two works for comparative analysis. Read it carefully, marking the author's main points on your copy of the essay; list those points in the left column. The author likely grouped main points in individual paragraphs, so topic sentences should prove useful in identifying the main points. Also, make note of any particular use of evidence and language. Read the second work and record your observations in the right column.

Main Points in Article A:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

Main Points in Article B:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

6. _____

7. _____

Step Two: Now that you have the main points identified in both essays, find the main points that both articles address; draw lines connecting these shared points. For instance, each essay may offer a definition of a single term or present an opinion on a particular issue. Whether the definitions or opinions are similar or different does not matter at this point. You need only to identify the main points the articles share.

Step Three: After you have identified the shared points, reword and list them in the following spaces. You might find it useful to begin your entries with the words like “Both articles discuss,” and you might note where they agree or disagree.

Shared Main Points:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Step Four: From here, your assignment will be determined by your instructor. You may be asked to select several of these shared points and discuss the similarities or differences of the authors’ opinions, or you might be required to discuss each author’s use of logos, ethos, or pathos. Additionally, you could be asked to provide summary paragraphs or include analysis of the tone presented by each author. Whatever your instructor assigns, this list should provide a better understanding of how the two texts communicate with each other. This exercise should serve as a good starting point for developing a comparative analysis essay.

Comparative Analysis Essay Plan Sheet

Choose one of the templates on this sheet to organize your comparative analysis essay. Both templates are general models: your essay might include more than three points and more than three body paragraphs; adjust accordingly.

Introduction: Regardless of the organizational strategy, your introduction will contain the same information: a strong hook, essential background information, the names of both authors and both articles, and a general statement of the points you plan to discuss. In addition, you must include a thesis that informs the reader of your main focus (similarities or differences), probably while acknowledging the other.

Subject: _____

Subject: _____

General points of comparison: _____

Thesis: _____

Body Paragraphs for Subject-by-Subject Construction

Subject A: _____

Point 1: _____

Support: _____

Point 2: _____

Support: _____

Point 3: _____

Support: _____

Transitional Paragraph: This paragraph signals the shift of subjects, looking back at Subject A and forward to Subject B. List the points you plan to include in this paragraph:

Subject B: _____

Point 1: _____

Support: _____

Point 2: _____

Support: _____

Point 3: _____

Support: _____

Body Paragraphs for Point-by-Point Construction

Point 1: _____

Subject A: _____

Support: _____

Support: _____

Subject B: _____

Support: _____

Support: _____

Point 2: _____

Subject A: _____

Support: _____

Support: _____

Subject B: _____

Support: _____

Support: _____

Point 3: _____

Subject A: _____

Support: _____

Support: _____

Subject B: _____

Support: _____

Support: _____

Conclusion: The conclusion for either strategy must summarize and restate the main ideas. It is also likely to make an assertion based on the evidence you presented in the body of the essay. List the points you'd like to include:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

Writer: _____ **Comparative Analysis Peer Response**

Reviewer: _____

Provide thorough and thoughtful responses to the following questions. **Yes and No answers are insufficient**, so comment, explain, or offer suggestions for all responses. You may also write on the draft and mark grammar and punctuation mistakes.

1. How does the title grab your interest? In what way does it suggest the essay's content?

Read only the introduction before responding to questions 2 and 3.

2. Identify the authors and the titles of their articles; what is the basis for comparison?
3. Underline the thesis. Does it identify the focus of the essay as analysis? List the points chosen for comparison.
4. Does the essay focus on disputes over facts, evidence, or patterns of thought?
5. Does the essay focus on analysis and comparison rather than simply present the two arguments? Does the writer avoid arguing the issue?
6. Is the essay structured using the point-by-point or subject-by-subject strategy? Is the strategy executed correctly? Is it the best choice? Why or why not?
7. Is each point fully developed? Supported by sufficient evidence from the text? Appropriately analyzed? What needs more support?

8. Are appropriate transitions used to avoid confusion about which work is being discussed? Note places of confusion.

9. Does each body paragraph have a topic sentence that relates to the thesis? A concluding sentence?

10. Is each quotation, paraphrase, or summary properly introduced? Smoothly woven into the text? Properly documented with a parenthetical citation?

11. Does the essay have a complete and relevant conclusion? Is the thesis restated in different words? Has the idea of the thesis been expanded in light of evidence presented in the body paragraphs?

12. Does the writer have appropriate transitional words, phrases, and sentences? Mark all transitions on the draft. Note any place that needs a transition or has an inappropriate or ineffective one.

13. Are all sources properly documented on the Works Cited page?

14. Does the writer follow MLA format? Consider margins, spacing, headers, and font size.

15. Discuss the strongest and weakest aspects of this essay with the writer.

Writer: _____ **Comparative Analysis Peer Response**

Reviewer: _____

Provide thorough and thoughtful responses to the following questions. **Yes and No answers are insufficient**, so comment, explain, or offer suggestions for all responses. You may also write on the draft and mark grammar and punctuation mistakes.

1. How does the title grab your interest? In what way does it suggest the essay's content?

Read only the introduction before responding to questions 2 and 3.

2. Identify the authors and the titles of their articles; what is the basis for comparison?
3. Underline the thesis. Does it identify the focus of the essay as analysis? List the points chosen for comparison.
4. Does the essay focus on disputes over facts, evidence, or patterns of thought?
5. Does the essay focus on analysis and comparison rather than simply present the two arguments? Does the writer avoid arguing the issue?
6. Is the essay structured using the point-by-point or subject-by-subject strategy? Is the strategy executed correctly? Is it the best choice? Why or why not?
7. Is each point fully developed? Supported by sufficient evidence from the text? Appropriately analyzed? What needs more support?

8. Are appropriate transitions used to avoid confusion about which work is being discussed? Note places of confusion.

9. Does each body paragraph have a topic sentence that relates to the thesis? A concluding sentence?

10. Is each quotation, paraphrase, or summary properly introduced? Smoothly woven into the text? Properly documented with a parenthetical citation?

11. Does the essay have a complete and relevant conclusion? Is the thesis restated in different words? Has the idea of the thesis been expanded in light of evidence presented in the body paragraphs?

12. Does the writer have appropriate transitional words, phrases, and sentences? Mark all transitions on the draft. Note any place that needs a transition or has an inappropriate or ineffective one.

13. Are all sources properly documented on the Works Cited page?

14. Does the writer follow MLA format? Consider margins, spacing, headers, and font size.

15. Discuss the strongest and weakest aspects of this essay with the writer.