



# Social Studies Strategies: When to Compare and Contrast

## Compare and Contrast

### What:

Compare and Contrast is a strategy to analyze similarities (likenesses) and differences of two or more places, people, events, or things that are being compared

### Why:

Often students have difficulty organizing information into a meaningful way in order to understand it. This strategy helps students to organize information so that they can summarize the information or explain it in a cause-and-effect essay.

### How:

The Cause and Effect strategy systematically analyzes and evaluates the relationship of two or more subjects. The comparison is a process that shows how subjects are alike (similarities), while the contrast is the process of showing how subjects are unlike (differences). An effect comparison attempts to identify one of four general purposes:

- Two subjects thought to be different are actually similar.
- Two subjects thought to be similar are really quite different.
- Two subjects, although comparable, are not equal, that is, one is better than the other.
- A complex subject is defined by comparing it to a similar subject and contrasting it with an opposite one.

When doing a Compare and Contrast strategy, focus the activity around four general questions:

- “What subjects are being compared?” The answer to this question identifies the two or more subjects that will be compared.
- “How are they alike?” The answer lists all ways that these subjects are the same.
- “How are they different?” The answer lists all ways that these subjects are different.
- “What is the conclusion?”

The answer is a summary statement or a generalization that can be made after completing the comparing and contrasting. When doing a compare and contrast activity, several different graphic organizers can be utilized according to how the information needs to be organized. Among the different forms of graphic organizers are the

- Venn Diagram
- T-Chart
- Similarities and Differences Chart
- Compare and Contrast Table
- Compare and Contrast Chart
- Compare/Contrast Matrix



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Other variations of graphic organizers that utilize compare and contrast are

- Advantages and Disadvantages Chart
- Fact and Opinion Chart

Compare and Contrast Essay is often used to explain the similarities and differences of two or more subjects. The writer can organize the essay by writing about one subject first and then comparing it with the second subject (a whole to whole comparison). Another approach to organizing the essay is to first compare the subjects, then contrast them. A third method is to only compare or only contrast the subjects. A very effective approach is to organize the essay by comparing each subject by category (a point-by-point comparison).

The Divided Pattern of Comparison is the most common approach for developing a comparison where the first half of the essay discusses the first subject and the latter half is a discussion of the second subject. This structure seems more focused on the subjects being compared and contrasted than on the comparison and contrast itself. The similarities and differences do not begin to emerge until the writer gets to the second subject. The examples or categories for the first subject should be linked to those for the second subject to unify the contrast between the two subjects. A way to achieve this linkage is to follow a similar pattern in both sections of the essay. The writer can also arrange the basic points for each subject in the same sequence and devoting about the same amount of space to each point. The divided pattern of comparison is a common approach because it is an easier pattern to organize and control, particularly in short essays.

The Alternating Pattern of Comparison is an approach that presents the details of both subjects in matched pairs, often in the same paragraph, sometimes in the same sentence. The alternating pattern of comparison requires the writer to organize the material more precisely and according to certain categories. This form of the compare and contrast essay focuses only on those points that are explicitly comparable or contrasting. This pattern is easier and more interesting for the reader because the point-by-point development reinforces the comparison with every pair of matched details and because the balanced sentence structure emphasizes the comparison or contrast.

## **When:**

Use this strategy whenever two or more subjects need to be compared and contrasted. Complete a compare and contrast graphic organizer to help the students organize the information and use a compare and contrast essay to improve their critical thinking skills.



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Word Clues for Compare	World Clues for Contrast
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>In like manner</b></li><li>• <b>Likewise</b></li><li>• <b>Similarly</b></li><li>• <b>As well as</b></li><li>• <b>At the same time</b></li><li>• <b>In the same way</b></li><li>• <b>Compared to</b></li><li>• <b>Also</b></li><li>• <b>Both</b></li><li>• <b>Each of</b></li><li>• <b>(Just) like</b></li><li>• <b>Neither</b></li><li>• <b>The same too</b></li><li>• <b>Equally important</b></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>In spite of</b></li><li>• <b>Although</b></li><li>• <b>The difference between</b></li><li>• <b>As opposed to</b></li><li>• <b>On the other hand</b></li><li>• <b>In contrast</b></li><li>• <b>On the contrary</b></li><li>• <b>After all</b></li><li>• <b>Instead of</b></li><li>• <b>However</b></li><li>• <b>Conversely</b></li><li>• <b>Regardless</b></li><li>• <b>Nevertheless</b></li><li>• <b>And yet</b></li><li>• <b>Yet</b></li><li>• <b>While</b></li><li>• <b>Unlike</b></li><li>• <b>But</b></li><li>• <b>Nor</b></li><li>• <b>Despite</b></li><li>• <b>Though</b></li><li>• <b>Unlike</b></li><li>• <b>While</b></li></ul>