

*Notes on Writing about Literature: A Brief Guide to Better Writing*  
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**Writing a Comparison or Contrast Essay: A Brief Refresher**

(from Prof. Pat Licklider's handouts for LIT 230, 231, & 232 courses)

To write a comparison or contrast essay that is easy to follow, first decide what the similarities or differences are by writing lists on scrap paper. Which are more significant, the similarities or the differences? Plan to discuss the less significant first, followed by the more significant. It is much easier to discuss **ONLY** the similarities or **ONLY** the differences, but you can also do both.

Then for organizing your essay, choose one of the plans described below, whichever best fits your list. Finally, and this is important, what main point (thesis) might you make in the essay about the two people/things being compared? Do not begin writing until you have a point that the similarities or differences you want to use help to prove. Your point should help shape the rest of what you say: For example, if you see that one of your similarities or differences is unrelated to the point, throw it out and think of one that is related. Or revise your point. Be sure this main point is clearly and prominently expressed somewhere in the essay.

**Plan A:** Use Plan A if you have many small similarities and/or differences. After your introduction, say everything you want to say about the first work or character, and then go on in the second half of the essay to say everything about the second work or character, comparing or contrasting each item in the second with the same item in the first. In this format, all the comparing or contrasting, except for the statement of your main point, which you may want to put in the beginning, goes on in the **SECOND HALF** of the piece.

**Plan B:** Use Plan B if you have only a few, larger similarities or differences. After your introduction, in the next paragraph discuss one similarity or difference in **BOTH** works or characters, and then move on in the next paragraph to the second similarity or difference in both, then the third, and so forth, until you're done. If you are doing both similarities and differences, juggle them on scrap paper so that in each part you put the less important first ("X and Y are both alike in their social positions . . ."), followed by the more important ("but X is much more aware of the dangers of his position than is Y"). In this format, the comparing or contrasting goes on in **EACH** of the middle parts.