

Model Comparison/Contrast Essays

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WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we will examine a model comparison/contrast essay to understand the characteristics that make it effective. We'll also analyze the essay to better understand its components. Read the essay (included below this tutorial) first in order to best understand the content covered in this tutorial. Our discussion will break down like this:

1. Identifying the Purpose
2. Analyzing the Topic
3. Examining the Organization

1. Identifying the Purpose

Remember that the purpose of a comparison/contrast essay is to inform the reader of the similarities and/or differences between two subjects. Comparison in writing discusses elements that are similar, while contrast in writing discusses elements that are different. Whatever the two subjects may be, a comparison/contrast essay should effectively and meaningfully draw connections between them.

The sample essay below identifies two clear subjects - the Northern and Southern colonies in colonial America - and discusses ways in which they differed. It is a contrast essay. Its thesis statement, *"The Northern and Southern colonies were very different socially, politically, and economically,"* clearly articulates the main idea of the essay and highlights the main points of contrast that will be explored in the body of the essay. Additionally, the essay is written using academic language and employs a non-biased tone, which makes it appropriate for an informative essay. This also tells us that the writer's purpose is to inform, rather than to persuade, argue a point, or entertain the audience.

2. Analyzing the Topic

In the model essay, the writer has chosen the Northern and Southern colonies as her subjects and makes contrasts between those two subjects in the body of the essay. These two subjects are within the same category (early American colonies) which ensures that there will indeed be some similarities, but there is also plenty of room to expand upon differences between them. Additionally, having an understanding of early American history and the foundations on which the nation was built is a meaningful topic that a variety of readers may find interesting and worthwhile.

3. Examining the Organization

Recall that there are two common ways to organize a comparison/contrast essay. However, all academic essays include an introduction paragraph with a thesis statement, body paragraphs which support the thesis statement, and a conclusion. Let's begin by examining the introductory paragraph of this model essay:

Before the founding of the United States of America, the Eastern portion of the continent was slowly being settled and developed by English colonies. Although these colonies were ruled by England and were settled by individuals who primarily came to the New World from England, they **differed significantly** in a variety of ways. Perhaps the most **stark contrasts** can be seen between the Northern and Southern colonies. The Northern and Southern colonies were very different socially, politically, and economically.

Notice how the introductory paragraph introduces the topic and sets the groundwork for what will be discussed in the remainder of the essay. It provides signal phrases (bolded above) such as “differed significantly” or “stark contrasts” which signal to the reader that this is a contrast essay. Additionally, this introductory paragraph includes a thesis statement, which clearly notes the points of contrast the essay will explore. The thesis statement (underlined) communicates the essay's main idea. It clearly tells us that the essay will explore ways in which the Northern and Southern colonies differed in regards to society, politics, and the economy. From here, the author could set up the rest of her essay in one of two primary ways: the point-by-point method, or the block method.



TRY IT

Which organizational method does it use? How do you know?

Take a look at the excerpt below, from the first two body paragraphs:

One way the colonies differed was in their social order. The Northern colonies were more town-centered and the culture revolved around church-members since religion was central to these colonies. Conflicts that occurred typically were of a religious nature. The puritans who lived in the northern colonies aimed to live an idealized Christian life where they were free to practice their religion. Additionally, education was more organized in the North with the implementation of schools and universities.

The social order in the South, on the other hand, revolved around plantations and the culture was primarily organized around wealthy landowners and the elite class of white males. Women and slaves were second class citizens in this culture with few rights. Education systems tended to develop more slowly in the south as well. Students who were educated were typically educated at home since formal schools were far less common.

In these body paragraphs, the author is discussing the first main point: societal aspects. She emphasizes the primary social differences between the colonies. She also uses some comparison and contrast words and phrases (underlined) as transitions to signal to the reader that a comparison or contrast is being made and to

help the essay flow. Use of these words or phrases is a helpful way to illuminate similarities or differences for the reader more clearly, and is part of an effective comparison/contrast essay.

As you may have figured out, for this sample essay, the author choose the point-by-point method. We can see that the author discusses the social order of the Northern colonies in one paragraph, followed by the social order of the Southern colonies in the next paragraph.

Lastly, consider the concluding paragraph of this essay, as seen below:

The settling of the colonies in the early 1700s set the early groundwork for the America that was to come. The colonies in the North and South developed along very different lines. In discussing the social, political, and economic differences between the two colonies, we can reach a greater understanding of their significance in American history. Today's America continues to reflect these differences when one considers the impacts of the different approaches in these two different parts of the country.

Notice how the conclusion reinforces the original thesis statement, effectively summarizes the main points of the essay, and explains the significance of the topic choice. This is an example of a summary conclusion, one of the three approaches to writing a conclusion.



SUMMARY

Recall that a comparison/contrast essay serves the purpose of conveying the similarities or differences that exist between two subjects. It may discuss the ways in which two subjects are alike, or ways in which they differ. In this lesson, we analyzed how a model essay employs common techniques and organization typical of this type of essay.