

In my family, personality traits are said to skip generations, so that might explain why my grandfather and I have so much in common. My grandfather arrived in the United States at sixteen, a penniless young man from Italy looking for a new life and ready to earn it. He quickly apprenticed himself to a shoe cobbler and never stopped working until he retired fifty-three years later. Similarly, when I was fourteen, I asked permission to apply for my first job as a bank teller. My parents smiled and said, "She's just like Grandpa." Though everyone else in my family spends money the minute it reaches their hands, my habit of saving every penny does not seem strange to them. My grandfather also was careful with money, building his own shoe repair business out of nothing. He loved to work in his large vegetable garden and brought bags of carrots and tomatoes to our house on Saturday mornings. Like him, I enjoy the feeling of dirt on my fingers and the surprise of seedlings sprouting overnight. Though I raise zinnias instead of zucchinis, I know where I inherited a passion to make things grow. Only in opportunities, we differed. Although my grandfather's education ended with third grade, I am fortunate to attend college—and hope that education will be my legacy to the generations that come after me.

—Angela De Renzi, Student

- What words in the topic sentence does the writer use to indicate that a comparison will follow? _____

- In what ways are the writer and her grandfather similar? _____

- What transitional words stress the similarities? _____
- What pattern of presentation does the writer use? _____

- What one point of *contrast* serves as a strong punch line for the paragraph? _____

- Make a plan or an outline of this comparison paragraph.

Transitional Expressions

Transitional expressions in contrast paragraphs stress *opposition* and *difference*:

Transitional Expressions for Contrast	
conversely	nevertheless
however	on the contrary
in contrast	on the one hand
in opposition	on the other hand
although, even though, whereas, while*	but, yet†

Transitional expressions in comparison paragraphs stress *similarities*:

Transitional Expressions for Comparison	
also	in a similar way
as well	in the same way
equally	likewise
in addition	similarly

As you write, avoid using just one or two of these transitional expressions. Learn new ones from the list and practice them in your paragraphs.‡

PRACTICE 1

Read the following paragraph carefully and answer the questions.

Certain personality traits, like whether a person is more reactive or proactive, can predict success or its opposite. In his book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Steven Covey writes that reactive people tend to sit back and wait for life or circumstances to bring them opportunities. They react instead of act. When good things happen, they are happy, but when bad things happen, they feel like victims. Reactive people often say things like, "There's nothing I can do," "I can't because . . .," and "If only." In the short term, reactive people might feel comfortable playing it safe, holding back, and avoiding challenges; in the long term, though, they are often left dreaming. On the other hand, proactive people know that they

* For more work on subordinating conjunctions like *although* and *while*, see Chapter 27, Part B.

† For more work on coordinating conjunctions like *but* and *yet*, see Chapter 27, Part A.

‡ For entire essays developed by comparison or contrast, see Chapter 17, Part A.

have the power to choose their responses to whatever life brings. They act instead of react if things aren't going their way, they take action to help create the outcome they desire. Proactive people can be recognized by their tendency to say things like "Let's consider the alternatives," "I prefer," "We can," and "I will." In the short term, proactive people might face the discomfort of failing because they take on challenges, set goals, and work toward them. But in the long term, Covey says, proactive people are the ones who achieve their dreams.

1. Can you tell from the topic sentence whether a contrast or comparison will follow? _____

2. What two personality types are being contrasted? _____
3. What information does the writer provide about reactive people? _____

4. What parallel information does the writer provide about proactive people? _____

5. What pattern does the writer of this paragraph use to present the contrasts? _____
6. What transitional expression does the writer use to stress the shift from A to B? _____



PRACTICE 2

This paragraph is hard to follow because it lacks transitional words and expressions that emphasize contrast. Revise the paragraph, adding transitional words of contrast. Strive for variety.

American restaurant portions have increased dramatically between 1985 and the present, a trend that worries many nutritionists. The small food servings of twenty years ago were healthy, according to the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA). Modern portions have dangerously ballooned. For example, in 1985, a blueberry muffin weighed just 1.5 ounces. Today's typical muffin is a whopping 5 ounces. Compared with portions in 1985, today's supersized foods pack excess calories. For instance, a turkey sandwich once provided 320 calories. Now it delivers 820 calories, nearly half the fuel a male should consume in one day. The smaller food portions of years past contained reasonable amounts of dietary fat. Today's portions often ooze with fat. In 1985, a typical fast-food

hamburger delivered 15 fat grams. Today's burger contains 34 artery-clogging grams—even before the consumer adds extra sauce. Huge portions do give us more for our money: more calories, more fat, more obesity, more heart disease. Don't be a victim of portion distortion.

Spaghetti and Meatballs

<p>20 Years Ago</p>  <p>500 calories</p>	<p>Today</p>  <p>??? calories</p>
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How many calories do you think are in today's portion of spaghetti and meatballs?

1,025
 600
 800

Image Source: National Heart, Lung, and Blood Institute, National Institutes of Health, U.S., Department of Health and Human Services.

A picture is worth a thousand words at the U.S. government's "Portion Distortion" website, which contrasts typical food portions 20 years ago and now.



EXPLORING ONLINE

<http://hp2010.nhlbihin.net/portion/>

Learn more about "portion distortion" and maintaining a healthy weight; take notes on facts or ideas for further writing.

PRACTICE 3

Below are three plans for contrast paragraphs. The points of contrast in the second column do not follow the same order as the points in the first column. In addition, one detail is missing. First, number the points in the second column to match those in the first. Then fill in the missing detail.

1. Shopping at a Supermarket

1. carries all brands
2. lower prices

Shopping at a Local Grocery

- _____ personal service
- _____ closed on Sundays

3. open seven days a week
4. little personal service
5. no credit

_____ prices often higher

_____ credit available for steady customers

2. My Son

1. fifteen years old
2. likes to be alone
3. reads a lot
4. is an excellent cook
5. wants to go to culinary school

My Daughter

_____ good at making minor household repairs

_____ likes to be with friends

_____ doesn't like to read

_____ expects to attend a technical college

3. Job A

1. good salary
2. office within walking distance
3. two-week vacation
4. work alone
5. lots of overtime
6. no health insurance

Job B

_____ three-week vacation

_____ work on a team with others

_____ one-hour bus ride to office

_____ health insurance

_____ no overtime

PRACTICE 4

Here are three topics for either contrast or comparison paragraphs. Compose two topic sentences for each topic, one for a possible contrast paragraph and one for a possible comparison paragraph.

Topic

Topic Sentences

EXAMPLE Two members of my family

- A. My brother and sister have different attitudes toward exercise.
- B. My parents are alike in that they're easygoing.

1. Two friends or coworkers

- A. _____
- _____
- _____

2. You as a child and you as an adult

B. _____

A. _____

B. _____

3. Two vacations

A. _____

B. _____

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PRACTICE 5

Here are four topic sentences for comparison or contrast paragraphs. For each topic sentence, think of one supporting point of comparison or contrast and explain that point in one or two sentences.

1. When it comes to movies (TV shows, books, entertainment), Demetrios and Arlene have totally different tastes.

2. My mother and I have few personality traits in common.

3. Although there are obvious differences, the two neighborhoods (blocks, houses) have much in common.

- What transitional words and expressions in the paragraph emphasize similarities and differences? _____

Before composing this comparison and contrast paragraph, the writer probably brainstormed or freewrote to gather ideas and then made an **outline** like this:

TOPIC SENTENCE: Although contemporary fans would find the game played by the Knickerbockers—the first organized baseball club—similar to modern baseball, they would also note some startling differences.

Comparisons	Knickerbockers	Modern Game
Point 1	four bases, ninety feet apart, in diamond shape	
Point 2		nine players
Point 3		scoring points
Point 4		three outs
Contrasts		
Point 1	umpire sat at third base line	umpire at home plate
Point 2	no gloves	gloves
Point 3	pitcher gently tossed ball	pitcher fires ball at plate
Point 4	no balls and strikes	balls and strikes
Point 5	twenty-one "aces" to win, no innings	most runs to win, nine innings

- A plan or outline such as this makes it easier for the writer to organize a great deal of material.
- The writer begins by listing all the points of comparison—how the Knickerbockers' game and modern baseball are similar. Then the writer lists all the points of contrast—how they are different.

PRACTICE 7

Here is a somewhat longer comparison and contrast (two paragraphs). Read it carefully and answer the questions.

Most people don't connect Dr. Gregory House, the brilliant medical detective on the television show *House*, with Sherlock Holmes, the legendary crime-solver invented by writer Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in 1887. The differences are obvious. House is a medical

doctor confronting people's illnesses while Holmes is a detective who tracks murderers and jewel thieves. House stars in a TV drama created by David Shore, but Holmes stars in Doyle's four novels and fifty-six short stories. House is a 21st-century American man, whereas Holmes is a British character of the last century, with his quaint pipe and old-fashioned plaid cap.

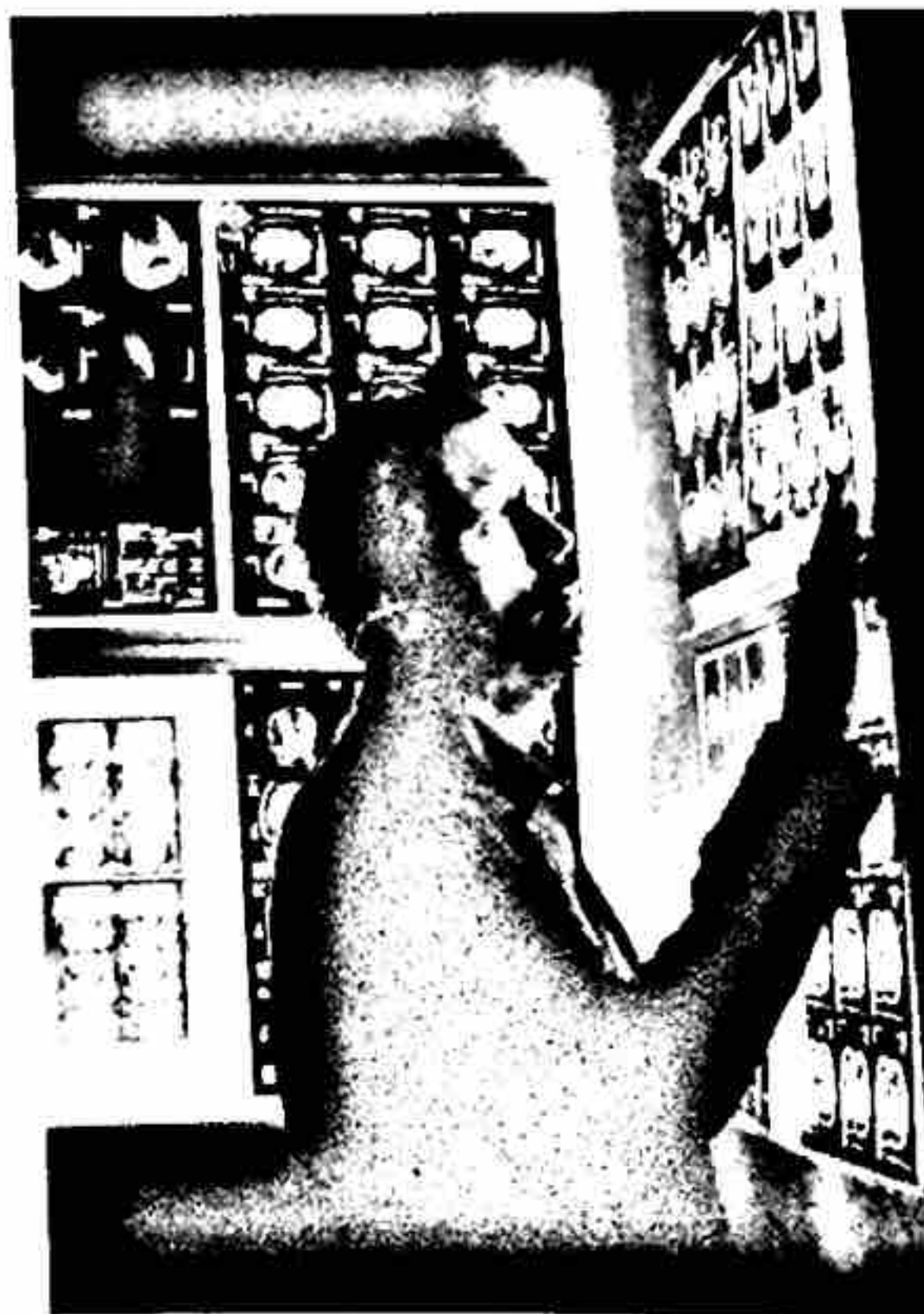
Yet despite these differences, the two sleuths share startling similarities. Both solve mysteries by their brilliant powers of deduction. Both are extremely arrogant, alienating people around them, and both are lazy until a good case rivets their attention. House is notoriously addicted to pain-killers, supposedly to help him cope with a wounded leg; similarly, the fictional Holmes is addicted to cocaine. Dr. Greg House's only true friend is his colleague Dr. Wilson, just as Sherlock Holmes's only friend is his assistant, Dr. Watson. Each of these troubled loners turns to music. House plays the guitar, and Holmes, a violin. "House" is another word for "home," which sounds like Holmes. One TV episode showed House's address as 221B, with the street name covered. Sherlock Holmes fictional address is 221B Baker Street. For those doubters who still say all this is just coincidence, *House* creator David Shore admitted in a 2005 interview that the brilliant and complex Sherlock Holmes inspired him to create Dr. Gregory House.

1. What two persons or things does this writer compare and contrast? _____

2. What words indicate that both contrast and comparison will follow? _____

3. How are Dr. House and Sherlock Holmes different? _____

TV's Dr. House and Sherlock Holmes have more in common than inquiring minds.



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4. How are Dr. House and Sherlock Holmes similar? _____
-
5. On a sheet of paper, make a plan or outline for these paragraphs.

Working Through the Comparison and Contrast Paragraph

You can work through the comparison and contrast paragraph in the same way that you do a comparison paragraph or a contrast paragraph. Follow the steps in the earlier checklist, but make certain that your paragraph shows both similarities and differences.

Suggested Topics for Comparison and Contrast Paragraphs

1. Compare and contrast two different places you've lived.
2. Compare and contrast the requirements of two jobs or careers.
3. Compare and contrast weddings, parties, or funerals in two different cultures.
4. Compare and contrast two albums, videos, or websites on similar subjects.
5. Compare and contrast your life now and your life five years ago.
6. Compare and contrast two singers, bands, or artists.
7. Compare and contrast shopping at two different discount stores (or another type).
8. Compare and contrast two popular television programs of the same type (newscasts, talk shows, situation comedies, and so on).
9. Compare and contrast two attitudes toward one subject (firearms, immigration, and so on).
10. Writer's choice: _____



EXPLORING ONLINE

<http://web.uvic.ca/wguide/Pages/ParDevCC.html>

Review of the comparison/contrast paragraph, with examples

<http://muskingum.edu/~cal/database/general/organization.html#Comparison>

Print these graphic outlines to help plan your paragraph.

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