

In a compare/contrast essay, you look for similarities and differences between two things (e.g. theories, events, characters, texts). In your introductory paragraph, you should:

- identify the two things you are comparing
- identify the criteria (i.e. points of comparison) that you will consider when examining these two things, and
- indicate whether you will be looking at similarities, differences, or both.

In addition, you may be expected to arrive at a conclusion or make a recommendation based on the results of your comparison (e.g. “Judging by criteria #1, #2, and #3, Thing A is more preferable/radical/effective than Thing B”).

There are several ways to organize your ideas in a compare/contrast essay. For instance, you can discuss the two things separately. If you do this, make sure you use the same criteria when discussing each thing.

Thing A	Criterion #1 Criterion #2 Criterion #3	e.g. On-campus Housing: Cost Convenience Privacy
Thing B	Criterion #1 Criterion #2 Criterion #3	e.g. Off-campus Housing: Cost Convenience Privacy

Alternatively, you could organize your paragraphs around your criteria. In this case, you’d discuss both things side-by-side for each criterion. This is the method used in the sample essay on the reverse.

Criterion #1	Thing A Thing B	e.g. Cost: On-campus Housing vs. Off-campus Housing
Criterion #2	Thing A Thing B	e.g. Convenience: On-campus Housing vs. Off-campus Housing
Criterion #3	Thing A Thing B	e.g. Privacy: On-campus Housing vs. Off-campus Housing

Throughout your essay, it is also helpful to use words that express similarity and difference. Here are some examples.

Similarity

similar, similarly, likewise, also, too, just as, both/and, just like, is similar to, are alike, is the same as

Difference

but, yet, however, although, whereas, while despite, in contrast, on the other hand, on the contrary, is dissimilar to, is different from, unlike

Sample Compare/Contrast Essay

Students have to make a lot of decisions during university, including which courses they are going to take, which subject they will major in, and which events and extracurricular activities they will participate in. If students attend a university away from their hometown, they also need to choose where to live. When making this decision, students need to consider the differences between living on and off campus. These two types of accommodation vary in cost, convenience, and level of privacy.

First, on-campus housing and off-campus housing differ in cost. For instance, rent on campus is offered at a set rate, which means that there is no room for negotiation in price. In contrast, students off campus can find accommodations in a range of prices, depending on whether they rent a single room or a whole apartment. Also, the price of food often differs. Students who live on campus usually do not have access to a kitchen, so they are often required to purchase food or meal plans on campus. Because this food is pre-prepared and sold in small portions, it often costs more than food that is bought in bulk and prepared by a student who lives off campus.

Secondly, the level of convenience varies between on-campus and off-campus housing. Living in residence is incredibly convenient. Because dorms are located on campus, students who live there are just a short walk from their classrooms. This means that if they forget something in their rooms or wake up late, they can still arrive to class on time. Furthermore, when students live in dorms, they don't have to worry about arranging for utilities: most universities makes sure that they are supplied with power and internet access. Finally, students who live in dorms only have to clean their immediate living space, since common areas are cleaned by custodial staff. On the other hand, living off-campus is much less convenient. Depending on how far away they live, students may have to spend a lot of time commuting to and from school. This may be particularly inconvenient if there is limited bus service in the area or if the student has to walk in bad weather. In addition, students who live off campus are often responsible for activating their own utilities and cleaning not just their bedrooms but also their bathrooms, kitchens, and living rooms.

Finally, on-campus and off-campus housing afford different levels of privacy. Students who live on campus often experience less privacy than students who live off campus. Most students who live in dorms have to share their small sleeping and study areas with a roommate. These students also have less personal space because they share common facilities like lounges, bathrooms, and eating areas. Students who live off campus, on the other hand, tend to have their own bedrooms. If they choose to rent self-contained units, they would also have their own kitchens and washrooms.

To conclude, living on campus is different from living off campus in several respects. While students who live on campus may have more conveniences and amenities, students who live off campus usually spend less and enjoy a greater degree of privacy. Students choosing between these two types of accommodations should determine which of these factors—cost, convenience, and privacy—are most important to them when deciding where to live.