

Comparison

Any time you are taking a look at two or more things, in an effort to identify similarities and differences, you are engaged in comparison. If you stop to think about it, we do a lot of this! If you are planning to buy a car, you will likely do some comparing. Let's take a look at a typical process for shopping for a car.

First, you might stop to identify the style of vehicle you are looking for. A list of the possibilities might look something like this:

compact sedan, larger sedan, minivan, SUV, pickup

You might spend some time comparing the general features of each type of vehicle to see how they size up to your needs. Having decided that a smaller SUV best fits your needs, you identify the models that are available:

Toyota Rav4, Ford Escape, Chevy Tracker, Subaru Forrester, Hyundai Santa Fe, Kia Sportage

Next, you'll spend some time comparing the features and ratings of these vehicles. Your goal is to identify similarities and differences so that you can make the best possible selection.

That, in essence, is what you are doing when you write a comparison paper. Whatever the topic, your goal is to find similarities and differences, usually in an effort to reach some sort of conclusion.

Significance in the Workplace

It's a rare job where you don't have to do some comparing. Consider the following examples:

- Comparing computers and vendors to determine what computers a company will purchase for use by its employees
- Comparing resumes to determine which candidates to interview for a position
- Comparing windows to determine which windows to install in a new office building to be constructed
- Comparing contractors to see who will build that new office building

Comparing is a major part of what we do--on the job and in our day-to-day lives.

Purpose in Writing a Comparison Paper

It's safe to say that your purpose in writing a comparison paper always involves seeking out similarities and differences between two or more subjects or items. What may vary, however, is what your reader will do with that information.

- Are you merely seeking agreement with the conclusions of your comparison?
- Are you seeking action (e.g., a decision to purchase a particular product) from your reader?

The major difference between these two possibilities is that in the latter, you will want to clearly state what you want your reader to do (probably in the conclusion, maybe in the introduction):

Therefore, I urge you to purchase the XZ2008 laptop computer for all employees.

Organization of a Comparison Paper

Introduction

Use your introduction to gain the attention of your reader (if you are not writing for a "captive reader"—one who is anticipating your report because she or he needs the information you are providing), state your thesis, and preview the main points of your paper

Body

The body of your paper should consist of two or more main points. Often, these points are the characteristics that you are comparing. For example, a report comparing smaller SUV's might have the following main points:

cost, standard features, safety, reliability

Conclusion

The conclusion really depends on what you are trying to accomplish. You might begin by summarizing the key points from the body of your paper. Then, if you are making a recommendation, this is a good place to do it. Otherwise, use the key points to draw some sort of conclusion, bringing a sense of closure to your paper.

Examples of Comparison

The following examples of narratives are from *Wink*, an online journal that publishes work written by students at Western Technical College.

[[LINK TO EXAMPLES FROM WINK]]

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