

COMPARISON & CONTRAST ESSAY

A comparison and contrast essay may be organized in one of two patterns: the block method or the point-by-point method. *Either pattern is acceptable, but mixing patterns is not.* Review the two patterns below carefully, noting the differences in structure that each presents.

PATTERN A: THE BLOCK METHOD

In Pattern A, the writer discusses one unit in its entirety before going on to the other. The points are addressed in the same order.

THESIS STATEMENT: The community college offers advantages in cost, convenience, and instruction that are often unknown at the four-year college.

Body Paragraph 1

- I. Community college
 - A. Cost
 - B. Convenience
 - C. Instruction

Body Paragraph 2

- II. Four-year college
 - A. Cost
 - B. Convenience
 - C. Instruction

The danger built into Pattern A is that the writer can end with two separate essays instead of one unified comparison and contrast essay. To insure unity, take note of the following guidelines:

1. Each subtopic in Part I must also be discussed in Part II.
2. Subtopics should be discussed in the same order in both parts.
3. Subtopics in Part II should generally include reminders of the point made about the same subtopic in Part I. **Notice how to make reminders to a previous point:**

PART I: First, community colleges like Georgia Perimeter College are fairly inexpensive.

PART II: However, unlike community colleges, the fees at such four-year colleges as Alabama are often very high.

PART I: Community colleges are also very convenient.

PART II: Contrasting dramatically to the convenience of a community college, a four-year college presents many inconveniences.

PART I: Instructors at community colleges teach their own class and tend to treat the student like a neighbor.

PART II: Unlike community colleges, the students at a four-year college may be taught by a teaching assistant who is not concerned with developing a rapport with students.

Below is a sample of the body paragraphs using the block method. Pay particular attention to the importance of transitions:

The community college is a good choice because it offers advantages in cost, convenience, and instruction that are often unknown at the four-year college. Community colleges are usually fairly inexpensive. The average semester cost is generally about \$890: tuition (\$650), books (\$200), and activity fee (\$40). These colleges are usually conveniently located in the student's own community. A student's classes are almost always in the same building, and the parking lot is rarely crowded and is usually within easy walking distance. Not only are most community classes relatively inexpensive and convenient, they also strive to employ fully qualified instructors. Many faculty members have Ph.D.'s and publish regularly in their field. Because instructors work at a "community" college, they also tend to be concerned enough with the student to treat him like a

neighbor. Classes are usually smaller than those of a four-year college, and instructors are likely to be more readily available for conferences.

The same cannot be said about the four-year college. The cost of attending a four-year college usually far exceeds the relatively inexpensive cost of a community college. The average semester expense is about \$2250: tuition (\$1800), books (\$375), and activity fee (\$75). Contrasting dramatically to the convenience of a community college, a four-year college often requires a student to wait for a bus to drive her across campus to her next class; not being able to find a parking spot within walking distance of a student's class is a common problem. Instead of being able to count on friendly instructors willing to schedule one-on-one conferences, students at a four-year college may find themselves in huge lecture halls with hundreds of classmates. These instructors cannot know their students individually or answer questions they may have. Also, students may find themselves in classes taught by "student" teaching assistants who are as concerned with earning their own degree as educating or developing rapport with students.

PATTERN B: THE POINT-BY-POINT METHOD

Pattern B can be thought of as a seesaw. It swings back and forth between its two subjects.

THESIS STATEMENT: The community college offers advantages in cost, convenience, and instruction that are often unknown at the four-year college.

Body Paragraph 1

I. Cost

- A. Community college
- B. Four-year college

Body Paragraph 2

II. Convenience

- A. Community college
- B. Four-year college

Body Paragraph 3

III. Instruction

- A. Community college
- B. Four-year college

Below is a sample of a point-by-point body paragraph:

For one thing, the community college is usually less expensive than the four-year college. Since most students enrolled in community colleges live at home, all they have to pay is tuition, which rarely exceeds \$690 a semester. Students at a four-year college, on the other hand, often live on campus and have to pay for tuition and room and board. The cost can be as much as \$1875 plus room and board per semester. Textbooks are also generally more reasonable at the community college. Since the classes offered are more basic and "to the point", instructors tend not to require any "extra" textbooks. However, the so-called more sophisticated courses taught at four-year colleges almost always require an extra paperback or two. A third way that community colleges are less expensive than four-year colleges involves the often exorbitant activity fees. Because there are fewer activities at community colleges, students rarely have to pay more than \$40 per semester, but at four-year colleges, complete with "big-time" football and basketball programs, students rarely pay less than \$75 per semester.

TO RECAP:

Pattern A tends to work better for short papers and those with few subtopics. Use the block method when you have three or more principal differences (same points in the same order; roughly the same length). Present all the information about A, and then present parallel information about B.

Pattern B tends to work better for long papers and those with many subtopics. Use the point-by-point method when you have only two principal differences (same order; roughly the same length). Skip back and forth between A and B. Present one point about A, and then go to the parallel point about B. Then move to the next point and do the same thing.