Structuring a Comparison or Contrast Paper


Key concepts and steps:
1. The difference between an comparison and a contrast:
   - A **comparison** paper analyzes the similarities between two subjects
   - A **contrast** paper analyzes the differences between two subjects

2. Unified focus: Develop a clear unifying focus for your comparison or contrast. It is not enough to simply say your two subjects are “different.” Make your focus clear in the topic sentence of your paragraph.
   
   **Sample Topic Sentence for a “contrast” paper (unified focus = “user-friendly”):**
   
   Apple’s Mac computers are much more user-friendly than Microsoft’s PCs

   **Note that the above topic sentence does not simply say the subjects are “different”; it has a strong unifying focus: “user-friendly.”**

3. Use a matrix like the sample below to brainstorm points of comparison or contrast for the paragraph. In the sample, the points of contrast are “toolbar,” “compatibility,” and “booting time.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unifying idea: “user-friendly”</th>
<th>Subject A: Mac (Apple)</th>
<th>Subject B: PCs (Microsoft)</th>
<th>Sim.</th>
<th>Diff.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Point 1 – Toolbar and icons</strong></td>
<td>A Mac has an easy-to-see toolbar at bottom of screen</td>
<td>The PC toolbar is very small</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mac icons are clever, easy-to-interpret symbols</td>
<td>PC icons are not intuitive</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Point 2 – Compatibility with other equipment, software, and programs</strong></td>
<td>A Mac can sync with other Apple equipment, such as the iPhone and iPod</td>
<td>A PC cannot sync with Apple programs and products</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>By running a special program, a Mac can run Microsoft Word</td>
<td>A PC can run Microsoft Word</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Point 3 – Booting the computer</strong></td>
<td>Mac computers boot up instantly</td>
<td>A PC can take a while to boot</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Choose a method for organizing the details within the paragraph: “Block” or “Point-by-Point”:

**Two Methods:**

**Method 1: BLOCK**

- Present all of the details for Subject #1 (“Mac”) in the first half of the paragraph, including details for “toolbar,” “compatibility,” and “booting.”
- Present all of the details for Subject #2 (“PC”) in the second half of the paragraph, including details for “toolbar,” “compatibility,” and “booting.”

Sample BLOCK outline:

**Topic Sentence:** Apple’s Mac computers are much more **user-friendly** than Microsoft’s PCs.

**A. Mac computers**

1. **Toolbars and icons**
   - A Mac has an easy-to-see toolbar at bottom of screen
   - Symbols are easy to interpret

2. **Compatibility**
   - Because a Mac is an Apple product, it can sync with other Apple equipment and software, such as iPad, iPod, iTunes
   - By running a special program, a Mac can also run Microsoft Word

3. **Booting**
   - Mac computers boot up instantly
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B. PC computers
   1. Toolbar and icons
      a. The PC toolbar is very small
      b. PC icons are not as intuitive
   2. Compatibility
      a. A PC cannot sync with Apple programs
      b. A PC can sync with Apple products, but not Apple software
   3. Booting
      a. A PC can take a while to boot

Method 1: POINT-BY-POINT
   • Present the details for Point #1 first (“toolbar”), including details for both “Mac” and “PC.”
   • Present the details for Point #2 first (“compatibility”), including details for both “Mac” and “PC.”
   • Present the details for Point #3 first (“booting”), including details for both “Mac” and “PC.”

Sample POINT-BY-POINT outline:

Topic Sentence: Apple’s Mac computers are much more user-friendly than Microsoft’s PCs.

   1. Toolbars and icons
      A. Mac
         a. A Mac has an easy-to-see toolbar at bottom of screen
         b. Symbols are easy to interpret
      B. PC
         a. The PC toolbar is very small
         b. PC icons are not as intuitive

   2. Compatibility with other equipment, software, and programs
      A. Mac
         a. Because a Mac is an Apple product, it can sync with other Apple equipment and software, such as iPad, iPod, iTunes
         b. By running a special program, a Mac can also run Microsoft Word
      B. PC
         a. A PC cannot sync with Apple programs
         b. A PC can sync with Apple products, but not Apple software

   3. Booting the Computer
      A. Mac
         a. Mac computers boot up instantly
      B. PC
         a. A PC can take a while to boot