

Comparative **WRITING**

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INTRODUCTION

The ability to communicate your thoughts and opinions in writing is an important life skill. Even in today's technologically advanced society, written communication remains important at school, at work, and even at home. Expressing your thoughts and opinions effectively takes organization and planning. One of the most common forms of academic writing is the comparative essay. In this type of essay, the writer examines an issue or topic and draws conclusions. The format of a comparative essay varies from comparing and contrasting two related topics to discussing the advantages and disadvantages of a single issue. Comparative writing requires critical analytical thinking.

This book includes reproducible writing prompts that provide practice with brainstorming ideas, organizing thoughts, developing ideas, and including descriptive details. Forty different prompts on a variety of subjects call for students to write creatively, yet thoughtfully. Each prompt has three levels of support, which allows the teacher to choose the best option for each student's needs. Activities, rubrics, and sample essays are also included for teachers to use with their students.

Bonnye Wier Cavazos created this book to reach and engage writers who struggle with some of the skills necessary for good writing. The content is based on Cavazos' years of teaching language arts to at-risk middle school students and preparing them for standardized tests in writing, as well as her experience teaching GED classes to struggling adult learners.

ACTIVITY IDEAS

Activities are provided to teach the elements of effective comparative writing, including brainstorming, creating effective introductions, using transitions and supporting details, and writing conclusions. These ideas can be used throughout the year any time students write comparative essays.

ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING COMPARATIVE WRITING

HOW TO HELP STUDENTS BRAINSTORM A TOPIC

If students are asked to simply write a comparative essay and are given a concept, it might be difficult for them to come up with a topic to write about. Brainstorming to choose a topic is a skill that should be practiced. Encourage students that in a comparative essay both similarities and differences, or advantages and disadvantages, need to be discussed. They should keep this in mind when choosing a topic.

The following brainstorming activities can be completed and kept in a writing folder for students to refer to when they need to select a topic for a comparative essay.

Activity 1: THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE BEST

Have students raise a piece of paper and fold it into fourths. Each quadrant of the paper should be used for a brainstorming list. Have the class think of four broad topics for things they really like, and then write those topics in the squares. Examples include food, music, movies, books, board games, dancing, going to parties, exercising, etc. Below each of the broad topics, students should write at least five examples. For instance, if the topic is "food," students will write five types of food they like for "snacks." They will write the names of four songs they like. To check out a topic for a comparative essay, students can refer to this topic sheet and write an essay about two of the examples under the broad category. If a student had written "hamburger" and "pizza" under the topic of "food," they could write an essay comparing and contrasting those two foods.

Activity 2: WRITE AROUND THE ROOM

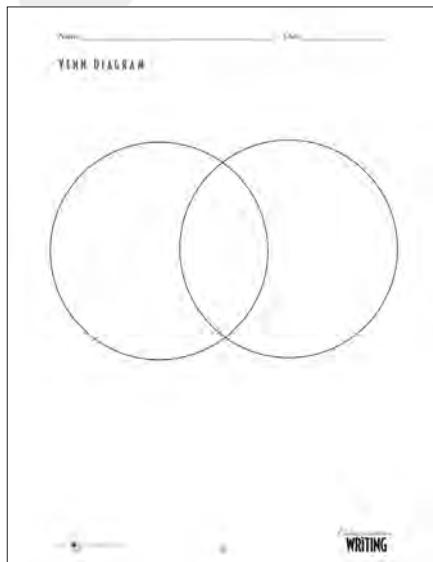
Give students a short amount of time, like three minutes, to quickly make a list of everything they see in the classroom. Tell the class whether they can write down the names of other students. After making this quick list, have students choose two things on it they could compare and contrast.

Activity 3: PLACES I HAVE BEEN, PEOPLE I HAVE KNOWN, THINGS I HAVE DONE

Have students fold a piece of paper into thirds, leaving three columns. Label the columns "Places I Have Been," "People I Have Known," "Things I Have Done," and write a few appropriate responses in each category. Like in Activity 1, students should select two things on the same category to compare and contrast.

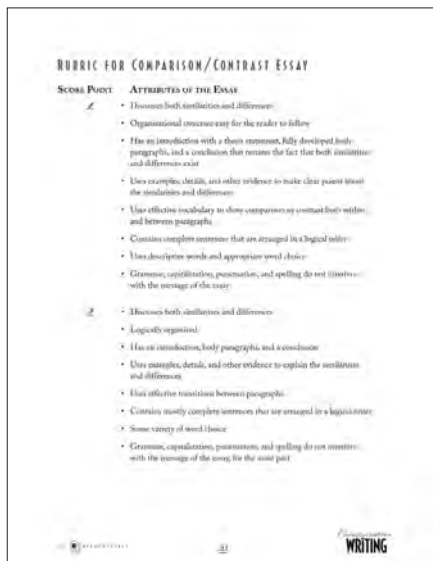
WRITING

INTRODUCTION



REPRODUCIBLE PAGES

Reproducible pages, such as a writing checklist, are included to be given to all students to refer to during the writing process. Graphic organizers and handouts to be used with instruction on writing comparatively are also included.



RUBRICS

Clear, concise rubrics that can be used with any comparative essay are provided. It is recommended that the rubrics be shared with students to help guide them before, during, and after the writing process. Students can use the rubrics to assess themselves and their peers. Teachers can use the rubrics to assess students and also as a reference during conferences about writing.



SAMPLE ESSAYS

Sample essays that are comparative in style and that model good use of introductions, transitions, supported opinions, and logical conclusions are provided to share with students. Teachers can make copies on overhead transparencies or make individual copies for students. The sample essays should serve as classroom discussion starters about what makes good comparative writing.

INTRODUCTION

WRITING PROMPTS

The forty different prompts included are clearly written and are designed to get students to write with purpose, following a solid organizational format. The prompts cover the two different types of comparative writing. The first twenty prompts call for students to compare and contrast two things. The remaining twenty prompts call for students to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of a single topic. Each prompt has three levels of support.

Name _____ Date _____

Comparative PROMPT 1.1

Have you heard of the story "The Town Mouse and The Country Mouse"? It is a tale that shows the differences, from a mouse's point of view, between life in the big city and life in the country. What do you think are the similarities and differences between living in the city and living in the country from a mouse's point of view? Write an essay that discusses these points. Think of an interesting way to begin your essay, choose three similarities and three differences to focus on, and write your essay below. Be sure to include specific examples and details.

Is life in the country really a "simple life"? Is life in the city stressful and sometimes even scary? There may be extreme definitions, but _____

One thing that I think about living in the country and living in the city is _____

Another thing that I think about living in the country is _____

Also, both life in the country and life in the city _____

On the other hand, life in the country is easy _____ whereas life in the city is _____

A second big difference is that _____

Finally, _____

If I had to choose where I would most like to live, I would say the _____ because _____

WRITING

Level One gives students a way to begin their paper, along with transition words to use between paragraphs, phrases to build support within paragraphs, and a way to end their paper.

Name _____ Date _____

Comparative PROMPT 1.2

Have you heard of the story "The Town Mouse and The Country Mouse"? It is a tale that shows the differences, from a mouse's point of view, between life in the big city and life in the country. What do you think are the similarities and differences between living in the city and living in the country from a mouse's point of view? Write an essay that discusses these points. Think of an interesting way to begin your essay, choose three similarities and three differences to focus on, and write your essay below. Be sure to include specific examples and details.

Some things that are similar about these two lifestyles are _____

On the other hand, _____

If I had to choose where I would most like to live, I would say the _____ because _____

WRITING

Level Two offers students transition words to use between paragraphs and a way to end their paper.

Name _____ Date _____

Comparative PROMPT 1.3

Have you heard of the story "The Town Mouse and The Country Mouse"? It is a tale that shows the differences, from a mouse's point of view, between life in the big city and life in the country. What do you think are the similarities and differences between living in the city and living in the country from a mouse's point of view? Write an essay that discusses these points. Think of an interesting way to begin your essay, choose three similarities and three differences to focus on, and write your essay below. Be sure to include specific examples and details.

WRITING

Level Three provides students with a few brief reminder tips for writing their paper and space to write.

RESEARCH AND STANDARDS

In recent years, more emphasis has been placed on proficiency testing for students in public schools. Testing has extended from subjects such as reading and math to other subjects, including writing. One effect of this emphasis on testing has been a renewed interest in teaching writing, especially instruction based on the state and national standards that have been developed over the past three decades (Strickland et al. 2001). The focus on testing can be seen in both general and special education classes around the nation. The most frequently required types of writing measured on standardized tests are personal comparative, letter, comparative or opinion essay, and imaginative comparative (Isaacson 2004).

When teaching writing to students with learning disabilities, instruction must include three components: adhering to a basic framework of planning, writing, and revision; explicitly teaching critical steps in the writing process; and providing feedback guided by the information explicitly taught (Gersten et al. 1999). The activities in this binder are designed to accomplish these tasks. Specific ideas for brainstorming are provided; a structure for writing is given; checklists are provided to help students with revising; and rubrics are provided to allow teachers to give feedback to students. The activities provided not only prepare students for success on standardized tests, but also for the life skill that adults need of writing effectively.

Writing is a difficult task even for the most proficient students. However, for those with learning problems it is even more challenging. Teachers must have high expectations, though, that every student will learn to write and write well. To achieve this goal, instruction must be tailored to fit the needs of the students (Graham and Harris 1994). Each prompt in this binder has three levels for teachers to choose from to give their students the appropriate level of support. This ensures every student has a chance to succeed.

Gersten, R., S. Baker, and L. Edwards. 1999. Teaching expressive writing to students with learning disabilities. *ERIC/OSEP Digest*.

Graham, Steve, and Karen R. Harris. 1994. Implications of constructivism for teaching writing to students with special needs. *Journal of Special Education* 28: 275–89.

Isaacson, Stephen. 2004. Instruction that helps students meet state standards in writing. *Exceptionality* 12: 39–54.

Strickland, Dorothy, Angela Bodino, Kathy Buchan, Karen Jones, Audrey Nelson, and Michelle Rosen. 2001. Teaching writing in a time of reform. *The Elementary School Journal* 101: 385–395.

CORRELATIONS

Comparative Writing guides students to

- use graphic organizers to gather supporting details;
- write to a specific prompt;
- use research strategies to gather information;
- learn and use the steps of the writing process;
- learn the parts of a paragraph;
- learn the parts of speech and vocabulary used in comparative writing; and
- learn the parts of an essay.

ACTIVITIES FOR TEACHING COMPARATIVE WRITING

IDEAS TO HELP STUDENTS BRAINSTORM A TOPIC

If students are asked to simply write a comparative essay and not given a prompt, it might be difficult for them to come up with a topic to write about. Brainstorming to choose a topic is a skill that should be practiced. Remind students that in a comparative essay both similarities and differences, or advantages and disadvantages, need to be discussed. They should keep this in mind when choosing a topic.

The following brainstorming activities can be completed and kept in a writing folder for students to refer to when they need to select a topic for a comparative essay.

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Activity 2: WRITE AROUND THE ROOM

Give students a short amount of time, like three minutes, to quickly make a list of everything they see in the classroom. Tell the class whether they can write down the names of other students. After making this quick list, have students choose two things on it they could compare and contrast.

Activity 3: PLACES I HAVE BEEN, PEOPLE I HAVE KNOWN, THINGS I HAVE DONE

Have students fold a piece of paper into thirds, forming three columns. Label the columns “Places I Have Been, People I Have Known, Things I Have Done,” and write a few appropriate responses in each category. Like in Activity 1, students should now choose two things under the same category to compare and contrast.

USING GRAPHIC ORGANIZERS TO GATHER SUPPORTING DETAILS

Graphic organizers are beneficial tools for gathering information during the planning phase of writing. Three types graphic organizers used in comparative writing are the Venn Diagram, the Attribute Table, and the T-Chart. The following activities model how to use each one. It is important for students to practice using these various organizers to learn how to group supporting details. After completing these classroom activities, students can practice using graphic organizers for the prompts on pages 4–5.

Reproducible copies of the graphic organizers are included for use with any of the prompts in this binder, or with any other prompts you choose.

Activity 1: VENN DIAGRAM

With this type of organizer, traits that are specific to each item being compared are written in the individual circles. These are the traits to be contrasted. Similar traits are written in the portion of the circles that overlaps. To practice as a class, draw a large Venn Diagram on the board or an overhead transparency. Use two things students can see, hear, smell, touch, and/or smell. Some examples are two different shoes, two different candy bars, two different cell phones, two different shirts, two different books, etc. Label the individual circles of the Venn Diagram and, as a class, fill in the rest of the information. The goal for brainstorming should be to come up with five traits for each section of the diagram. This gives students a variety of ideas, so they can choose the three traits they like best to include in the draft of their essay. The challenge here is to correctly align the differences. For example, if you say one shoe is dressy, you might contrast that by saying the other shoe is casual.

Activity 2: ATTRIBUTE TABLE

With this type of organizer, students first need to brainstorm about the attribute, or characteristic, being compared. The category should be appropriate for the items. For example, if the two things being compared are dogs and cats, you would not compare what they taste like. To practice as a class, draw a large Attribute Table on the board or an overhead transparency. Use two items students can see. (See the examples listed in the Venn Diagram activity on page 2.) Make three columns, and write the names of the two things at the top of the center and the right columns. Brainstorm about the attributes of each thing first, and write them going down the left column. It might be difficult to come up with a list of ten attributes, but it will give students a great deal of information to choose from when writing their essay. For example, you could compare two different shoes based on color, size, cost, material made of, age, use, store purchased from, design, brand, and owner. Then, you would fill each thing's attribute under the appropriate column. One shoe might be black, and the other shoe might be white. After completing the Attribute Table, students should identify at least three similarities and three differences to write about in the draft of their essay.

Activity 3: T-CHART

This type of organizer is used when writing a comparative essay about advantages and disadvantages. To practice as a class, draw a large T-Chart on the board or an overhead transparency. On either side of the T, write the headings "Advantages" and "Disadvantages." Give students a sample prompt of your choice. Here's an example: The advantages and disadvantages of having satellite television.

Name _____ Date _____

VENN DIAGRAM

