

Compare and Contrast

When you compare and contrast two or more things, you look for similarities and differences between them. This skill helps you understand the things that you are comparing and contrasting. It is also a skill that you can use in making choices.

1 Look for related topics and characteristics that describe them.

When you are looking for similarities and differences between two things, it can help to start by finding relationships between them. What do the two things have in common? If two things have nothing in common, such as a dog and a piece of pie, it will be difficult to find similarities or differences. On the other hand, you can compare and contrast two countries or political systems. Look through the information you have on the things or topics you want to compare and contrast and find the characteristics, or features, that describe those things or topics.

2 Look for words that signal comparison (“both,” “similar to,” “also”) or contrast (“unlike,” “different,” “instead”).

Look for words that show comparison, or similarity, and those that show contrast, or difference. Take notes on these similarities and differences. You can skim other details more quickly.

3 Identify similarities and differences in the topics, and draw conclusions about them.

Look through your notes and list the ways in which your topics are similar and different. Usually, topics have both similarities and differences. Try to find patterns in these similarities and differences. For example, all the similarities between two countries might be related to climate, and all the differences might be related to economics. Draw conclusions based on these patterns. In this example, you might conclude that a country’s economy does not depend on its climate. Understanding similarities and differences between two topics lets you draw conclusions that help you understand both topics as well as other topics like them.