

Writing a Synthesis Essay

In synthesis or compare/contrast writing, the goal is to compare two topics or works of literature and analyze the differences. There are several ways to organize your ideas:

“Block by Block” Method

If you are discussing two different texts, devote one body paragraph to each text/subject.

- **Introduction:**
 - introduce the topic, hook the reader
 - State the thesis. How are the two works similar or different in relation to the topic?
- **1st body paragraph – discussing text #1 (only)**
 - Begin with a clear topic sentence that links to your thesis
Ex. Golf may require skill, but is extremely boring to watch.
 - Then provide detailed support for your argument
- **2nd body paragraph – discussing text #2 (only)**
 - Begin with a clear topic sentence that links to your thesis
Ex. Unlike golf, hockey is an exciting sport for both players and the fans.
 - Then provide detailed support for your argument
 - You can also refer to back to text #1 briefly in contrast (ex. unlike character #1, character #2 seems to...)
- **Conclusion** - Restate your thesis/main idea, and then offer a final thought

Common mistakes with the block by block structure

It is very important to have a fully developed thesis in the introduction, and clear topic sentences and transitions at the beginning of each body paragraph. Otherwise, the composition will read too much like summary, or separate responses, rather than a unified synthesis. (This is what causes many students to receive “4/6” (C+) on the provincial exam despite effective vocabulary and thoughtful discussion.) The thesis, topic sentences, transitions, and signal words/phrases are the “glue” that hold the essay together

*This type of structure is easier to write, and is better suited to shorter compositions.

Alternate “Block by Block” Method

If the two subjects are similar enough, you could discuss similarities in the first body paragraph..

- **Introduction:**
 - introduce the topic, hook the reader, and state the thesis
- **1st body paragraph – discuss similarities of 1st and 2nd subject/text**
 - Ex. Both hockey and golf require a great amount of skill.
- **2nd body paragraph – discuss only 1st subject/text**
 - Ex. However, golf is incredibly boring for fans to watch.
- **3rd body paragraph – discuss only 2nd subject / text**
 - Ex. Hockey is a very exciting sport to watch.
- **Conclusion** - Restate your thesis/main idea, and then offer a final thought

“Point by Point” Method of Contrast

Think of different points of comparison. Then, write one body paragraph for each point of comparison, and in each paragraph, refer to *both* subjects/texts.

For example: In comparing hockey and golf...

- Athleticism (compare and contrast both sports)
- Fitness (compare and contrast both sports)
- Excitement (compare and contrast both sports)

- **Introduction:**

- introduce the topic, hook the reader
- State the thesis. How are the two works similar or different in relation to the topic? The answer to this is your thesis.

- **1st body paragraph – discuss point #1 in relation to both texts/subjects**

Begin with a clear topic sentence that links to your thesis

- Ex. Both hockey and golf require hand eye coordination, but hockey requires a wider range of skills.
- Then provide detailed support for your argument

- **2nd body paragraph – discuss point #2 in relation to both texts/subjects**

Begin with a clear topic sentence that links to your thesis

- Ex. Hockey requires greater endurance, strength, and fitness than golf.
- Then provide detailed support for your argument

- **3rd body paragraph – discuss point #3 in relation to both texts/subjects**

Begin with a clear topic sentence that links to your thesis

- Ex. Lastly, although golf may be enjoyable to play, hockey is much more exciting. Ex. Watching golf can cause some spectators to fall into comas, while the fast-paced game of hockey keeps fans on the edge of their seats.
- Then provide detailed support for your argument

- **Conclusion**

- Restate your thesis/main idea
- Then offer a final thought

Common mistakes with the point by point structure

When done properly, the point by point is very effective and demonstrates excellent structure and synthesis of two subjects. However, some find it harder to write this way.

Also, if the essay is a short composition, the reader can feel as if the writer is “jumping” back and forth between the two subjects too often. Make sure to provide enough detailed support before moving on.

Transitional Words For Compare/Contrast Essays

Compare

Also

As

As well as

Both

In the same manner

In the same way

At the same time

Like

Likewise

Most important

Similar

Similarly

The same as

Too

Still

By the same token

Contrast

Although

But

Differ

Despite

Even though

However

In contrast

Instead

Nevertheless

On the contrary

On the other hand

Unless

Unlike

Yet

While

Conversely

Rather

Regardless