

COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

Comparison and contrast are natural methods of organization for many topics. *Comparison* stresses similarities between items. *Contrast* explains their differences. Sometimes you will develop an entire paragraph using just one method or just the other; sometimes you will want both to compare and to contrast to develop the controlling idea. In the following example, notice how the **transitional words and phrases** provide the reader with clear connections between ideas.

Except for the fact that dogs and cats are both four-legged, furry mammals, they are distinctly different types of pets. Dogs are very loyal and subservient to their masters. Cats, **on the other hand**, never totally commit their allegiance to anyone, **but instead** maintain their independence. All they need is a supply of food, fresh water, and a clean litter box. Dogs, **however**, wolf all their food immediately and have to be taken out every few hours. Woe to owners whose dogs get lonely while they are gone; upon returning they will find chewed shoes, hats, gloves, and furniture.

The first step in comparing and contrasting is to select subjects that will display a clear basis for comparison. In other words, you have to pick two subjects that have enough in common to merit placing them side-by-side. You'll have the best luck if you choose two of a kind, for instance, cats and dogs, as illustrated above, two mystery writers, or two schools of thought. You'll need to show your readers a valid reason for comparing the two, and the basis of comparison has to be carefully limited. For instance, comparing the histories of two countries is rather broad; comparing daycare in those two countries is more manageable.

The *comparison* and *contrast* method isn't difficult. First, plan your paper carefully, make an outline (in your head or on paper), and then follow the outline. There are two common ways to compare and contrast:

1. **Subject by subject.** Set down all your facts about Subject A, and then do the same for Subject B. Next, sum up their similarities and differences. In your conclusion, state what you think you have shown. The procedure works for a paper consisting of a couple of paragraphs. However, for a longer paper, this procedure has a built-in disadvantage—readers need to remember all the facts about Subject A while they read about Subject B!
2. **Point by point.** Compare and contrast as you go (as in the dog and cat example above). Consider one point at a time, taking up your two subjects alternately. In this way, you continually bring the subjects together, perhaps in every paragraph.