

Comparative analysis work

A **rhetorical element** is a particular way of speaking, a particular way of making an argument – it's a method, or a strategy, or an approach someone might rely on to help him or her make a certain point. Michael Moore in "Idiot Nation" uses sarcastic comments and anecdotal research along with memoir to make his points; Malcom X uses memoir but also impassioned argument, along with many references to political leaders and historical events to describe his progression as a writer and a political activist; Jamaica Kincaid in "Girl" uses metaphor, repetition, colloquial language and a unique "voice" to describe the speaker's life; Jeanne Kilbourne, in "Two Ways a Woman Can Get Hurt," uses photographs of advertisements, along with quite a bit of academic research and complex analysis, to lay out her arguments.

These are all what we call "rhetorical approaches" - ways of speaking that help someone make his or her point.

Your task in your analytical essays has been to choose one or a few rhetorical strategies you see a writer using and evaluate their effectiveness, their ability to convey meaning well and convincingly, or not.

The task for a comparative essay is the same, except that you need to find a rhetorical strategy in one piece that you can justify comparing with a rhetorical strategy from another piece. You may choose any two of the *assigned* readings from the chapter to compare in your analysis (except the chapter introduction, of course). Perhaps the strategies that you compare are the same in both pieces, but more effective in one piece than the other. Or perhaps the strategies you compare in the two pieces are different, but they both end up achieving the same goals for the author and are equally effective as argumentative strategies to advance their thesis positions.

You could choose to compare a poem and an image, or two essays, or an essay and a story - it's up to you. You're looking for two pieces that deal with the same themes but in different ways, or two pieces that try to do or say the same thing in the same way but one does it better than the other, or two pieces that deal with different themes but use similar strategies to do it.

If you want, after choosing two pieces you like and feel able to compare, you could look at the discussion questions that follow each piece and use those to help you arrive at a suitable focus for your comparative analysis. Adapt the questions to your needs, in order to form a clear thesis argument about something you see happening *in the writing* in both pieces.

However you approach the thematic focus of your essay, remember that A **comparative discussion** means to discuss two or more pieces together, drawing connections between them. This does not mean you only discuss similarities, nor does it mean you discuss only differences. Discuss both, as needed. But you should also not just do a blanket survey summary of all the differences and all the similarities, either. What is absolutely key is a **unified thesis argument in which you make one central point about the effectiveness of something specific you see in both pieces** (although it may look different in each piece, or one piece uses that strategy well while the other piece uses it poorly).

You **MUST** have a **thesis argument** that explains to us exactly what argument you're making, exactly what you're trying to point out to us about the pieces you've chosen to compare, and why. The thesis seeks to point out differences, but more importantly it seeks to unify the argument by finding a fundamental similarity or connection between the two works. Again, don't do a survey of all the things that are the same, and all the things that are different. Instead, focus on one key similarity, or on one key difference, and discuss these more fluidly in your essay - discuss a single connection or set of related connections through the entire essay, while noting important differences as you go. I need to see a very clear argument up front about a key connection or difference between the two pieces you compare, and then support that single thesis argument all the way through your analysis.

In addition to the above explanation, please reread the **essay assignment description** for this comparative essay as well as the two sample student comparative essays in the **Samples Folder** to get a clearer idea of what I want. In particular, note the last few sentences of the introductory paragraph in each of the two sample student essays - those last few sentences are the thesis, and you will notice that each student is working hard to compare the two pieces they've chosen on the basis of comparable strategies they see in both pieces.