**Comparison/Contrast**Prepared by Theresa Yonker

Comparison/contrast examines the similarities and differences between two subjects that are related in some way. A comparison/contrast may comprise an entire essay, or it may be an element that helps develop a longer essay.

We often use this device in discussion, whether or not we are aware of doing so. When as a teenager you argued with your parents about an appropriate curfew time and brought up your friend who could stay out later than you, you were making both a comparison and a contrast. Comparatively, you and your friend are both the same age; therefore, you argued, your curfew should be the same. However, your more harsh, earlier curfew time contrasted to your friend’s later, more lenient one.

**Strategies to consider**

1. Select the category of subject matter carefully. Make sure that your two items have enough in common to make them a logical choice, even when focusing mainly on contrast. Writing a paper about Madonna (a famous pop star) and Magic Johnson (a famous sports figure) will not work if you are merely putting them into the general category of “Famous People” who are currently in the media. However, if you wish to discuss them in terms of being role models for adolescents of today, the category becomes more specific, even if Madonna provides a very different role model from that of Magic Johnson.
2. Use major points of comparison/contrast. There are many ways to discuss people, places, or things, but they must be significant. Chose and limit your essay to those significant points. If you talk about Madonna’s and Magic’s appearance, for example, that point may seem trivial unless you discuss its significance—that both these media figures are role models in terms of physical fitness.
3. Organize your paper by one of the two methods of organization: block and alternating. Block is writing fully about Madonna first (let’s say in three separate paragraphs with three separate points), and then fully about Magic. Alternating is organizing your three points of comparison/contrast in separate paragraphs, discussing Madonna and magic in each paragraph. Consequently, one paragraph may discuss Madonna and Magic’s physical strength and attractiveness, another may discuss their media images, and another address their popularity among adolescents. In either method, be sure to fully address both items of discussion.

**Assignment**

Choose one of the following options:

1. Revise one of your essays adding comparison/contrast as an element that helps develop that essay.
2. Compare and contrast two famous figures, either current or historical, who particularly intrigue you. Think about their effect upon the public, what their image seems to stand for, and why you, specifically, find them interesting.
3. Compare and contrast two professionals who represent to you both the worst and the best about that profession. The choice of profession could be anything: two teachers, two politicians, two dentists, two coaches, etc.