12.11: Essay Type- Comparing and Contrasting Literature

Compare and Contrast Essay Basics

The Compare and Contrast Essay is a literary analysis essay, but, instead of examining one work, it examines two or more works. These works must be united by a common theme or thesis statement. For example, while a literary analysis essay might explore the significance of ghosts in William Shakespeare's Hamlet, a compare/contrast essay might explore the significance of the supernatural in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*.

Literary Analysis Thesis Statement:

While Horatio seems to think the ghost of Old Hamlet is a demon trying to lead Hamlet to death, and Gertrude and Claudius think it is a figment of Hamlet's insanity, Hamlet's status as an unreliable narrator and the ghost actually symbolizes the oppression of Catholics during Shakespeare's time period.

Compare and Contrast Thesis Statement:

The unreliable narrators paired with the ghosts in both *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* symbolize the oppression of Catholics in Shakespeare's time period.

Essay Genre Expectations

- **Tone**: formal, scholarly
  - Use first-person pronouns sparingly (you, me, we, our)
  - Avoid colloquialisms
Organization

While the literary analysis essay follows a fairly simple argumentative essay structure, the compare and contrast essay is slightly more complicated. It might be arranged by:

- Literary Work
- Alternating literary works
- Topic/subtopics

In general, ensure each paragraph works to support the thesis statement, and that both works receive equal attention.

One Option for Organization

1. Introduction
   1. Background of topic
   2. Background of works related to topic
   3. Thesis Statement
2. Body paragraph 1
   1. Topic sentence
   2. Summary of Text 1
   3. Summary of Text 2
   4. Explanation of unifying theme for both texts
3. Body paragraphs
   1. Topic sentence
   2. Introduction of evidence
   3. Evidence
   4. Explanation of evidence
   5. Analysis of evidence
4. Conclusion
   1. Restatement of thesis in new words
   2. Summary of essay arguments
   3. Take-away