

## A Simple Compare and Contrast Essay Outline: The Similarities and Differences Between Automobiles and Bicycles

INTRO.  
PARA.

Topic: Compare and contrast automobiles with bicycles.

Thesis: The **differences** between automobiles and bicycles **are more significant than their similarities**. *[This thesis can, of course, be reversed.]*



BP1

Intro Sentence: **To be sure**, cars and bicycles do share some similarities in terms of function and ownership.

Example 1 - both move you from A to B

Example 2 - both are private modes of transportation; don't rely on public transit schedules or funding

Concluding Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_



BP2

Intro Sentence: **Nevertheless**, these two transportation technologies have more significant differences when we consider issues such as speed, weather, cost and health.

Example 1 – speed (+car)

Example 2 - weather dependencies (+car)

Example 3 – cost (+bicycle)

Example 4 – impact on health (+bicycle)

Concluding Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_



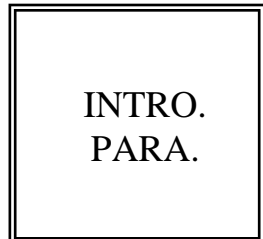
CONCL.  
PARA.

Restatement: \_\_\_\_\_

Summaries: \_\_\_\_\_

Generalization: \_\_\_\_\_

## A Complex (Topical) Compare and Contrast Essay Outline: The Similarities and Differences Between Automobiles and Bicycles

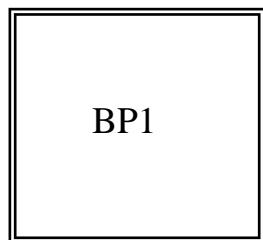


Topic: Compare and contrast automobiles with bicycles.

Thesis: The **differences** between automobiles and bicycles **are more significant than their similarities.**

...or...

Thesis: Generally speaking, the automobile is **a more effective form of transportation** that the bicycle.



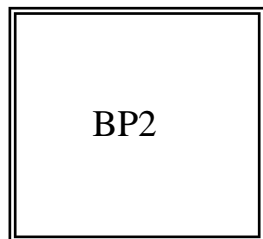
Intro Sentence: **It is true** that the bicycle is a more **environmentally sustainable** form of transportation.

Ex. 1 - the bicycle does not use fuel; the auto does

Ex. 2 - the bicycle does not emit exhaust

Ex. 3 - bicycles use fewer metals and other materials than the automobile

Concluding Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_



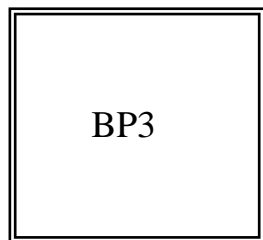
Intro Sentence: **Nevertheless**, the automobile can go **faster and farther** in a given period of time.

Ex. 1 - the bicycle can often match the automobile in urban settings

Ex. 2 - in suburban and rural settings, the automobile goes faster and farther

Ex. 3 - long distance travel

Concluding Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_

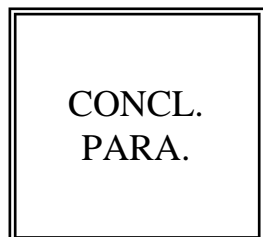


Intro Sentence: **Moreover**, the automobile can **carry more persons and cargo.**

Ex. 1 - the bicycle can carry one or two riders, sidebags, and perhaps a small trailer

Ex. 2 - even compact cars can carry four passengers and cargo, plus use a roof rack and/or trailer

Concluding Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_



Restatement of topic and thesis

Summary of main points

Generalization: Why *is* the automobile a more effective form of transportation?

**A Basic Comparison Essay Outline:  
Comparing What They Have *In Common***

INTRO.  
PARA.

Topic: **Assess\*** the **merits** of automobiles and bicycles as forms of transportation.

Thesis: Automobiles are a more effective means of transportation compared to bicycles. [*This thesis can, of course, be reversed.*]



BP1

Intro Sentence: **Admittedly**, in terms of cost, health and the environment, bicycles do offer some transportation advantages.\*\*

Example 1 – cost effective

Example 2 – promote a healthy lifestyle

Example 3 – environmentally sustainable

Concluding Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_



BP2

Intro Sentence: **Despite** the benefits of the bicycle, the automobile generally offers more transportation advantages.\*\*

Example 1 – speed and distance

Example 2 – weather dependencies

Example 3 – convenience

Example 4 – passengers and cargo capacity

Concluding Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_



CONCL.  
PARA.

Restatement: \_\_\_\_\_

Summaries: \_\_\_\_\_

Generalization: Why is the car a more effective form of transportation?

\* Words similar to *assess* include *evaluate*, *analyze*, *examine*, *discuss* and *explain*.

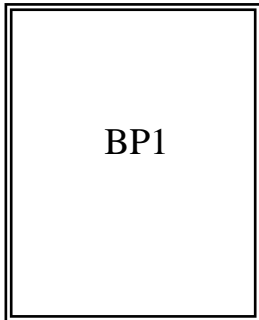
\*\* In *literary* comparisons, never re-tell the plot! Focus strictly on the comparison topic.

**A Basic Pro-Con Essay Outline:  
Comparing Both Sides of One Topic or Issue**



Topic: **Examine** the strengths and weaknesses of the automobile as a form of transportation.

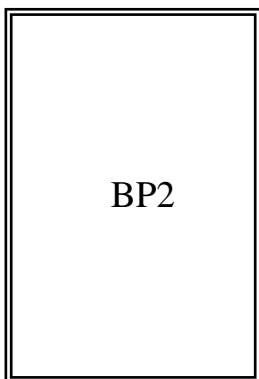
Thesis: Generally speaking, the automobile is an efficient and effective means of transportation. *[This thesis can, of course, be reversed.]*



Intro Sentence: **Of course**, in terms of cost, health and the environment, the automobile does offer certain disadvantages.\*

- Example 1 – vehicles can be very costly to buy and maintain
- Example 2 – automobiles tend to support a sedentary lifestyle
- Example 3 – vehicles are environmentally unsustainable

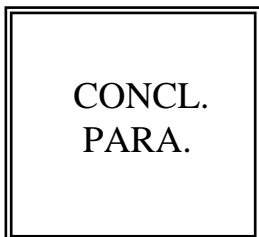
Concluding Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_



Intro Sentence: **Notwithstanding** these drawbacks, the automobile generally offers more advantages.\*

- Example 1 – speed and distance
- Example 2 – weather dependencies
- Example 3 – convenience
- Example 4 – passengers and cargo capacity

Concluding Sentence: \_\_\_\_\_



In the pro/con essay, the actual comparison is usually left to the conclusion. This is where evaluative language is expected. Since this part can be quite large, you might want to consider splitting it up into two or more paragraphs.

\* In your body paragraphs, avoid biased and evaluative language. The body paragraphs should be neutral. Also, avoid comparing your body topic to the other side; leave that for the conclusion!

## Teaching the Comparison Essay

As most English teachers soon realize, the comparison essay is a challenge. It's a challenge for both the teacher and the young writer. Students need to compare two sides of an issue or two literary pieces and weigh their relative merits. They need to approach this complex thinking assignment without sounding contradictory or wishy-washy. And they need to know they can examine two points of view and still favour one side. The teacher, on the other hand, must help his or her students through this veritable minefield in a clear and comprehensible manner, and avoid writing the essay for them in the face of frustration or resistance.

After many years of teaching the comparison essay, I've developed four schematic outlines for tackling the comparison essay. They all tackle the same topic (automobiles and bicycles) but they differ in terms of complexity and the type of prompt. In my experience, these schematic outlines have successfully helped my students write their outlines and essays, and offer a form of scaffolding that is clear and constructive.

Here are some other thoughts, in no particular order:

- The first two handouts are the ones I use the most. I use the first handout with my Grade 10 students, I offer both handouts as options in Grade 11, and I encourage my Grade 12 students to use the second handout.
- While comparing and contrasting one piece of written text with another piece of written text is the most common approach for a comparison essay, I often start by comparing a novel to its movie version. This really helps with younger and less confident writers.
- I try to do at least two of these essays in every course. The first is heavily scaffolded, the second is not.
- Often I will allow student to prepare two different comparison topics at the same time, usually in pairs or small groups. Students are allowed to bring in an outline with both topics prepared. Then, on the day they write, I flip a coin and that's the topic for their draft essay that's due at the end of the class.
- These handouts work best for short essays that are written in class. However, their logic is still useful when I finish the year with a longer research paper.
- It's important to review (and rehearse?) the role of introductory transition words, especially concessions and contrasts. These are crucial when writing about contrasting ideas. I offer a free transition handout on my TpT page.