

# Lesson 36: Similarities & Differences

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## Conversation #1 - Similarities

*Kate is doing some shopping, when she sees a person who she believes is her friend Carol.*

**Kate:** Hey, Carol!

**Rebecca:** Huh?

**Kate:** Oh! Sorry, I thought you were someone else. You look just like a friend of mine from church.

**Rebecca:** Really?

**Kate:** Yeah. Wow - you're almost identical to her. You both have short blonde hair... the same hairstyle... and very similar glasses, too.

**Rebecca:** Maybe I have a long-lost twin!

**Kate:** Who knows? Anyway - sorry to bother you.

**Rebecca:** No worries. I once had a really embarrassing case of mistaken identity - my husband Dave and I were at a party, and we were talking to people in different parts of the room. Dave had his back to me, and I came up behind him and gave him a hug... but when the guy turned around in surprise - it wasn't my husband!

**Kate:** Oops! That's awkward.

**Rebecca:** You're telling me! He had about the same build as Dave, and they both have grey hair... they were also dressed very similarly.

**Kate:** Right. I've actually been mistaken for Julia Roberts before - when I was in L.A., a couple people asked for my autograph!

**Rebecca:** Hmm, yeah, I can see the resemblance.

**Kate:** Mmm-hmm. Well, it was nice chatting with you - take care!

## Conversation Vocabulary and Phrases

In this dialogue, there are various ways of comparing two things (or people!) that are similar. To say that two things are exactly the same, you can use these phrases:

- **"They're exactly alike."**
- **"They're (exactly) the same."**
- **"They're (perfectly) identical."**
- **"A is just/exactly like B."**

To say that two things are similar (but not identical), you can use these phrases:

- **"They're about the same."**  
*This means "approximately the same." Ex) The soccer ball and the T-shirt cost about the same amount. The ball is \$22 and the T-shirt is \$20.*
- **"They're (very) similar."**
- **"A is like B."**  
*You can also substitute other verbs for "is": for example, "looks like," "sounds like," "tastes like," "smells like," and "feels like"*
- **"A is similar to B."**
- **"A resembles B."**
- **"They both... [+ verb]"**  
*Ex) These computers both have webcams.*  
*Ex) My parents both love sushi.*
- **"A is just as [adjective] as B."**  
*"Bob is **just as tall as** Jim." (= they have the same height)*  
*"These sunglasses are **just as expensive as** those." (= they have the same price)*

When two people are similar in appearance, we say that one person "looks like" the other:

- **"Rebecca looks like Carol."**
- **"I look a lot like my mother."**  
*Add "a lot" to emphasize the similarity*

When two people have similar interests, or are involved in similar activities, we say

**"they have a lot in common."** And if two people's behavior and temperaments are similar, we can say **"they have similar personalities."**

We also have some "linking words" to express similarity:

- **also** - used in the middle of a phrase  
*"Your brother lives in California? My brother **also** lives there!"*
- **too / as well** - used at the end of a phrase  
*"Your brother lives in California? My brother lives there **too / as well!**"*
- **likewise** - used at the beginning or in the middle of a phrase  
*"India's economy is expanding. **Likewise**, Brazil has experienced strong economic growth in the past few years."*  
*"India's economy is expanding. Brazil is **likewise** growing fast."*
- **in the same way** - usually used at the beginning of a phrase, often in more formal English  
*"Unemployment has decreased by 20%. **In the same way**, the crime rate has gone down significantly."*

As you can see, there are various ways to phrase a sentence in which you want to say that two things are the same or similar:

#### **The same:**

- "You and I have **the same** backpack!"
- "I **also** have that backpack."
- "I have that backpack, **too**."

#### **Similar:**

- "Your backpack **looks like** mine."
- "Our backpacks are **both** blue."
- "Your backpack **is similar to** mine."
- "Your backpack **resembles** mine."

## **Conversation #2 - Differences**

*Jen is a high school senior who is going to college next year. She's trying to decide which one to attend - the two schools are very different! Listen to her conversation with her cousin, Tom.*

**Jen:** I'm really torn between going to New York University and Waterford College!  
(*I'm really torn between = I'm having a LOT of difficulty deciding between two options*)

**Tom:** What are the differences between them?

**Jen:** Too many to count - they're nothing alike. For one thing, New York University is huge - it has tens of thousands of students - while Waterford is very small.

**Tom:** So do you prefer a big school or a small school?

**Jen:** I'm really not sure; I mean, both have their advantages. At a small school, I'd get to know the professors better, and maybe it would be easier to make friends. On the other hand, a big school would have more activities and a greater variety of classes.

**Tom:** Besides the size, how else do they differ?

**Jen:** Well, there's the location. NYU is in New York City, whereas Waterford is in a small town in the middle of the mountains. It's a completely different environment.

**Tom:** What about the courses? I mean, shouldn't you consider the academic program, as opposed to less important factors like location and size?

**Jen:** Yeah – you're right. I'm planning on studying psychology, and the essential courses are the same, but the order in which you take the classes is slightly different. And NYU has more electives, although Waterford offers more opportunities to do research. Also, Waterford offers academic scholarships, unlike NYU.

(*electives = courses that are additional/optional, not required*)

**Tom:** When do you need to decide by?

**Jen:** Not until April... I know that's months away, but I wanna make my choice as soon as possible! I get anxious when my plans aren't nailed down.

**Tom:** Really? I'm the opposite. I always leave decisions until the last minute... I like to keep my options open!

## Conversation Vocabulary and Phrases

Jen describes a number of differences between the two colleges. You can use various

adverbs to quantify the word “different” – from the biggest degree of difference to the smallest:

- **completely different**
- **very/really different**
- **slightly different / a little different / a bit different**

Jen also says that the two colleges “are nothing alike.” We can use this expression when the subject of the sentence is plural. Another way to phrase it is: “A is nothing like B”:

- “New York University and Waterford College **are nothing alike.**”
- “New York University **is nothing like** Waterford College.”

Here are a few more phrases used in the dialogue to express differences:

- **“On the other hand...”**  
*Use this after you have finished explaining one point, and when you are going to begin explaining a different/contrasting point.*
- **“the opposite”**  
*This means 100% different – for example, black is the opposite of white; big is the opposite of small, and Tom is “the opposite” of Jen, because Jen likes to make decisions quickly and Tom likes to make them slowly.*
- **“as opposed to”**  
*This is a common phrase used to put two ideas in opposition, emphasizing their difference:*  
*Ex) I like to eat healthy food, **as opposed to** fried food.*  
*Let’s watch a DVD at home **as opposed to** going to the movies.*

Finally, we have the linking words **unlike**, **whereas**, and **while**. These words are all used to make contrasts – show how two things are different. There are a few differences in the way each one is used in a sentence. **While** and **whereas** are usually used between two complete phrases. **Unlike** is typically used with only a subject.

- “I like tennis, **while** my brother prefers bowling.”
- “This bottle of wine costs \$50, **whereas** that one costs only \$20.”
- “His boss allows him to work from home, **unlike** mine.”

- “She’s very friendly, **unlike** her sister.”
- “**Unlike** most women, my wife actually hates shopping.”

You’ve finished Lesson 36! Today’s speaking task is to leave a message and tell me three ways that you and your best friend (or husband, wife, boyfriend, or girlfriend) are **similar** and three ways that you are **different**. Try to use the expressions from the lesson. Click here to leave your message: [www.speakpipe.com/espressoenglish](http://www.speakpipe.com/espressoenglish)