

Essay 2 and Compare/Contrast

Especially in first-year writing classes, it's good to distinguish between analytical skills and genres of academic/college writing. I freely share my dislike of compare/contrast *essays* (much as I'm opposed to the idea of the *lens essay*), but my issue is with these *genres*, not the underlying skills of compare/contrast or applying readings as lenses (both skills are essential, and difficult to do really well, and are called for in all types of writing and, thus, shouldn't be reduced to a genre).

So, I hope I don't seem contradictory when I say Essay 2 is not, generically, a compare/contrast essay, but it does entail comparing, contrasting and *making sense* of the similarities and differences between the interpretive objects. The prompt calls for the interpretive problem to arise from "observations of unobvious differences or similarities" and to then "develop and advance an idea or argument that originates from the identified" interpretive problem. So the genre of compare/contrast is not being prescribed, though these close-reading skills are certainly necessary.

Below you'll find scans from *Writing Analytically* describing four strategies for making compare/contrast more analytical. Strategy four, "Focus on Difference within Similarity (or similarity despite difference)," has been successful for my students in the past, as has some combination of several strategies. I tend to guide students toward a combination of Strategy 2 and Strategy 4 – how can key differences within similarity (or similarity within difference) help illuminate the object towards which the essay is more weighted?