

Block vs. Point-by-Point Organization in Comparison/Contrast Essays

Block Structure

In block structure you write about each topic in a separate block. Before beginning you must prepare a "T" chart listing both topics at the top and identifying the categories and points of comparison or contrast for each topic. Remember each point must have its logical counterpoint. Then you begin writing by listing the first category under A then the second category, then the third and the fourth. At this point you use a comparison or contrast transition, change paragraphs and begin with the second topic B. You discuss its corresponding 1st category first, then the corresponding second topic, the third, the fourth and so forth. In the first paragraph you have set the path you will follow and then lead the reader down the same path, organizationally, in the second paragraph. When done you have created a pattern as follows:

Topic Sentence A1..... A2
A3.....A4
Transition B1B2 B3 ...
..... B4

Read the attached sample and note how this pattern works. In the first paragraph the second sentence is the first category—how motorboaters get going. In the second paragraph the first sentence discusses the same topic – how to get going. Both paragraphs end with how to return to shore.

Point By Point Structure

In point by point structure you alternate back and forth between the two topics, connecting the two with transitions and using subordination of clauses to emphasize one topic over another. In this structure you discuss your first topic A and first category and then the second topic B and the corresponding first topic. Then you go back to A and discuss the second topic, and then the corresponding second topic for B and so forth until you are done. It looks like this:

Topic Sentence. A1 B1.....
. A2 B2A3
..... B3 A4
B4

Read the attached sample and note how it moves back and forth using transitions and dependent clauses. Be sure to always go ABABAB, never ABBAABAB etc.

Other points to consider

1. If your purpose is **to inform**, you can put your categories in whatever order you want. If your purpose is **to be persuasive**, you should use order of importance—2nd strongest first, weakest, strongest last.

2. You may use a combination of the above—both block and point by point. This works better for longer papers or if you are both comparing and contrasting. For example if doing the latter, you could have a block of comparison and a block of contrast, with paragraphs of point by point discussing each.